

Living in Mill Village

Some of people from Pond Beat and Mullins Flat would not have wanted to live in the mill village. They liked their land and their gardens. One woman (White) said her family would have not allowed her to go out with a man from the mill village. However, Helen Rector presented a different view. As stated above, Helen's parents worked in the mill and lived in mill housing until a strike occurred; then they moved to the rental house on Parcel A-33. Helen described living in the mill village and then the rental house. Some of her comments gave insight as to what her mother thought at the time.

Location of the Village. When asked what area encompassed the Merrimac Mill village, giving directions by contemporary street names, Helen said,

Mill village started when you cross Drake [going north on Triana Blvd.] and went up [north] as far as the southwest corner of Triana Blvd. and 9th Street. [The mill beyond 9th street was called the Lowe Mill.] The old store, J.C. Brown's General Store, is closed, but the building is still there. You could get whatever you wanted at the store. No, I mean whatever you *needed*. Back then you got what you had to have, not what you wanted. North of the store was the nicer houses where the mill bosses lived.

There was a shoe repair shop and a drug store behind the store. Talking about the drug store reminds me of when I got hurt and my daddy had to walk to that store to get medicine for me.

[What happened to you?] One day I burned my face and the doctor couldn't get out there because there was an ice storm. My daddy walked to the drug store to get some medicine. The druggist gave him Ungentine.

Back then if women needed help in the house because someone was ill, they would call a Black woman to come in. A Black woman came to my mother and said, "I'd like to pray for your daughter." Of course my mother told her to go ahead.

The Black woman said, "I have some homemade cream, and if you use it, your daughter won't be scarred." I don't know what was in it, but it must have had a lot of wax in it, because in the winter it was cold. There had just been an ice storm, and my mother had to soften it up on the wood stove.

My mother put that cream on me and I never scarred, and I was burned real bad.

[How did you get burned?] I'd been playing with the girl next door at her house all day and didn't have any lunch. I went home, and didn't know my sister had been cooking bacon and eggs. The wood stove was roaring.