

Chapter 8

An Agrarian Society



Chapter Preview

Terms: agrarian, yeoman, subsistence farming, spinning wheel, loom, blacksmith, cooper, neighborhood, barter, clubbing, muster day, court week, justice of the peace, camp meeting, plantation, staple crop, artisan, emancipation, slave code, quarters, free black

People: “Elder” Ralph Freeman, John Chavis, John C. Stanly, Thomas Day

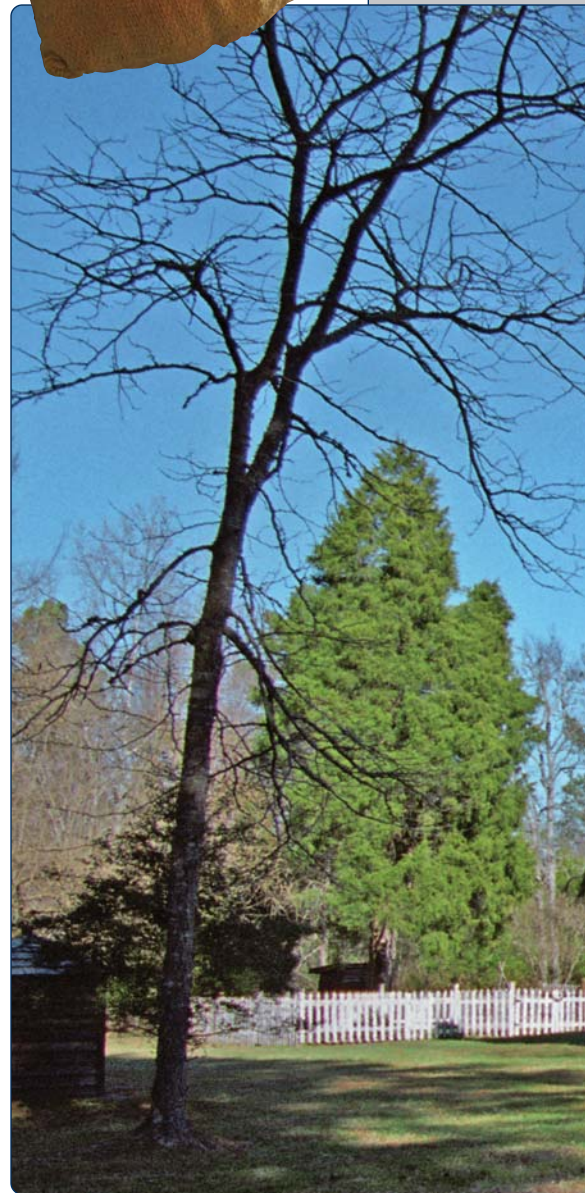
Places: Rock Spring, Somerset, Fairtosh

George M. Yoder lived a long time. A member of the German settlement on the South Fork of the Catawba River, Yoder was born when James Monroe was president in the 1820s. He was an elderly man when World War I was fought.

George Yoder never had much money, but he acquired a wealth of knowledge about his family, his farm, his neighbors, and his environment. He listened to stories told by relatives and friends and soon acquired a whole history of his neighborhood in his head. He never stopped learning. He wrote letters to friends and newspapers every week for thirty years. He exercised both his body and his mind. He claimed through much of his life that he was

Above: Replica of a slave child’s doll from Somerset Place State Historic Site. Slave dolls were made with no legs, symbolic of the inability of slaves to leave their masters. **Left:** Bennehan House, located at Stagville State Historic Site, was the home of Duncan and Rebecca Cameron. They lived here until they built Fairtosh Plantation.

Opposite page, above: This is the dining room at Bennehan House.



so healthy because he did not smoke or drink, worked hard but not all the time, and kept in motion.

Yoder seemed always in motion. When he was not plowing or harvesting his own fields, he was helping a neighbor chop wood, or writing a letter for a widow, or going to town to trade, talk, and visit. He lived in the same log house for much of his life. He only left the state twice, once to visit relatives in Missouri and once to fight in the Civil War.

In many ways, almost every North Carolinian of the early 1800s imitated George Yoder. Most were not as active as he, but they practiced the same habits and shared the same values. Yoder was an **agrarian**—a person who farmed to make a living, who also believed that farming made life worth living. As the least urban state in the Union, all of North Carolina was in some form or another agrarian. Even slaves, although denied the freedoms whites had, lived in the agrarian manner.





SIGNS OF THE TIMES

FASHION

As North Carolina grew more prosperous, more of its wealthier citizens gave up “homespun” and began to wear fancier clothing made in northern cities. By the 1850s, ladies in Raleigh and Charlotte were wearing hoop skirts. Gentlemen wore top hats, silk vests, and cutaway coats.

FADS

The wealthier residents of the Coastal Plain were the first North Carolinians to go to the coast for pleasure. A number of residents in the Albemarle Sound region summered in cottages at Nags Head. Some families still own those Nags Head houses 150 years later.

ARCHITECTURE

Frederick Law Olmsted, the nation’s first “landscape architect,” toured the state several times during the 1850s. Olmsted returned to the state during the 1890s to help design both the Biltmore Estate and the village of Pinehurst.

MUSIC

One of the most popular American songs written during the early 1800s was “The Old Folks At Home,” by Stephen Foster. It starts with the line, “Way down upon the Sewanee River.” Foster originally wrote the line, “Way down upon the Peedee River.” The North Carolina stream lost out because it did not sound as smooth.

SPORTS

In the mid-1800s, North Carolinians played “fives,” a simpler version of tennis. Participants used solid wooden rackets that looked more like paddles. “Bandy” was a game like golf where curved sticks were used to knock tiny balls—covered in leather and filled with goose feathers—into holes scattered about a field.

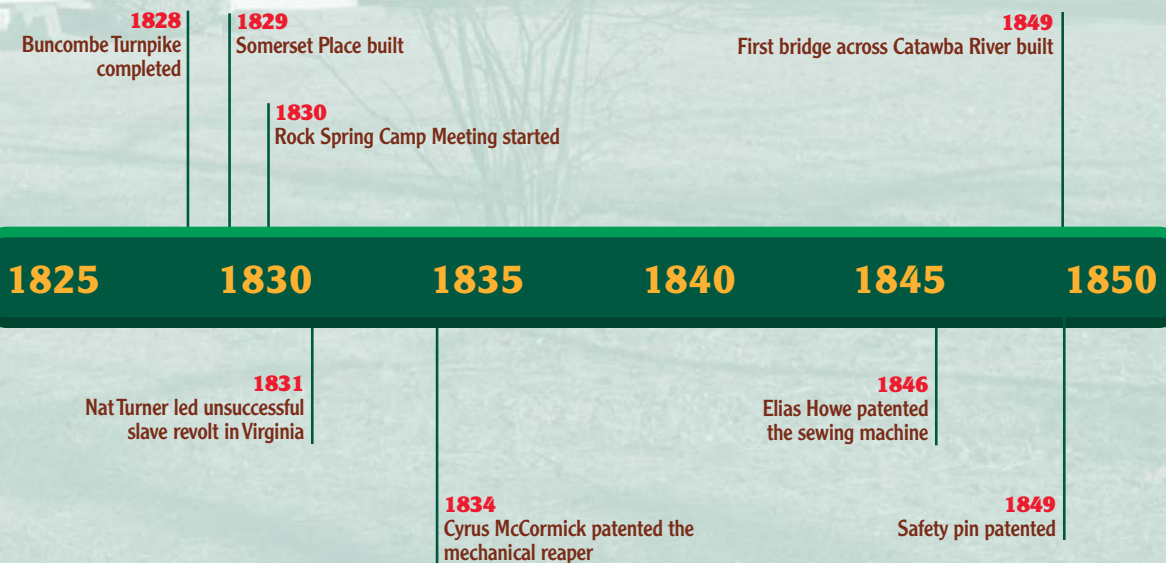
LITERATURE

Right before the Civil War, a new writer emerged, Mark Twain. Samuel Clemens took that name from a reference to the way riverboat pilots measured the depth of the water. Clemens was not the first to use the name, however. Isaiah Sellers, a native of Iredell County, used the name while writing for a New Orleans newspaper.

FOOD

The arrival of the railroad brought a greater variety of food to state residents who could afford to shop in stores. Lemons and oranges became popular, and, at some point in the 1800s, the tomato became popular in the state. Residents of the coast used tomatoes, potatoes, and whatever fish was available to make a stew called “muddle.” It survives into the twenty-first century.

Figure 14 Timeline: 1825–1850



TARGET READING SKILL

Using Context Clues

Defining the Skill

In order to understand a reading passage, you should know the meanings of all the words. Occasionally, you might find a word whose meaning is unfamiliar. What do you do when that happens? Some students ignore the word and continue reading; other students look up the definition in a dictionary.

While looking up definitions of unfamiliar words is a good idea, it is time consuming and, sometimes, impossible. Using context clues within a reading is a better and more efficient way to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. A *context clue* is a word (or words) that come before or after the unfamiliar word. Context clues include

- examples that may be preceded by cue words, e.g., *such as, like, or including*. Examples may be set apart by colons, dashes, or parentheses.
- synonyms and definitions. Sometimes an author will include a synonym (a word with the same meaning) for the unfamiliar word. At other times, the unfamiliar word will actually be defined.
- antonyms, which are words that are the opposite of the unfamiliar word.

Practicing the Skill

Read the following sentences found in Chapter 8 and identify what clues (examples, synonyms, antonyms, definitions) help you to define the words in bold.

1. Sometimes, when a service could not be paid for immediately, one neighbor gave a **“note”** to another neighbor. With these “I owe you’s,” the holder could expect payment at a future time.
2. Most of the state’s citizens were **yeomen**, farmers who tilled the land they or some family member owned. Yeoman farmers organized their lives around three things: their families, the seasons, and their neighborhoods.
3. That one field could **yield** (produce) more than one thousand bushels of hulled, dried corn.
4. The status of a slave was based upon these two conditions, and without a visible act of **emancipation** (where a slave was legally freed by a master), a slave was a slave for life.
5. North Carolinians spent a lot of their energy planting **grains**—mostly corn, wheat, and oats—for they had to feed their families first before doing anything else.



The Bennett Place near Durham is an example of a yeoman farmer's house