

Patsy Burns

Henry River Mill Village
Textile Worker



Photos by Jesse Barber

Interview

When were you born?

1926. In Caldwell County. Yeah, It would be Granite Falls.

Did your parents live in a mill house?

No, my daddy and momma lived in an up under Dry Pond Road, if you know where it's at. It's way out in the country. Daddy worked in the furniture shop in Lenoir. I forget which furniture shop he worked in, but he worked at Dodger Mill too, one time. The older mill. Shuford Mills is uptown. And he worked up there 3-4 years. My mama didn't work, and she uh—Daddy worked at a furniture shop in Lenoir at that time.

You grew up in the country then?

Yeah, raised on a big farm. I loved the food we raised on the farm.

Tell us about working at Shuford Mills.

I first started working when I was 16 and I run lapping machines first thing and then I learned how to run droids.

What is that?

Droid. It's in the mill. It's the machines, and I run the lapping machines first and then uh run droid and you don't know what it is, do you?

And then uh I went to droid to the slubbers, and then I learnt to doff cards. That was my job. Just doffing. Just doffing card. That was a good job. I liked that, and um then they wanted me to learn to spin and then I learnt to spin. Then, I worked from there on out for thirty years.

Do you remember your last day?

I don't even remember when I stopped working, but when I stopped working at Shuford Mills, I went to Valdese Manufactory and got a job over there, running combers. Did you ever know what combers are? In a cotton mill? It's the only time I ever knew what combers was too, but it was a good job. I went over there. It was air-

conditioned over there, and I made more money. That was the reason I went over there. I loved Shuford's, but I went over for more money. And I worked over there for 18 years.

After your—

After I quit work. Thirty years of other work. Then I was—seem like I was about 75 whenever I quit work. About 75 whenever I quit work, and then I got me a job working at the fish count, down there in Hickory. And we worked down there, I forget how long, I work down there. Then, I thought I wanted to quit and I quit. And then, I got a job working at Hardee's.

You can't stop.

No, I just love to work, and I'd still go back to the cotton mills if they'd let me or the—anywhere that I can get a job, I just like working.

You're a hard worker.

Yeah. I'd rather work than just sit at home. Now, I stay at home by myself. I'd like to be working, but one of my daughters moved in with me. She's staying with me.

Tell me more about your family

My husband has been dead since '83. Yeah, he worked at Shuford Mills. I mean not at Shuford's. Um, let's see, where did he work at... And then, he quit working and went to—yeah, he did work at Shuford Mills too, and he worked at the olden plant. He'd run cards, and he and three brothers...he and his three brothers worked at Alder mill.

How old were you when you met your husband?

About 18. Walking down memory lane...Oh lord mercy, I can't even remember...um my first date was at home while my daddy was working. Mamma knew it. My mamma was there. We were sitting in the living room the whole time, and when daddy worked at Alder Mill then till 11 o' clock every night, and Mamma was there. Whenever 10 o' clock would come, Mamma would say "It's ten o'clock. Your daddy would be here in a little bit. I'd tell him "You better go," so he goes out the door and home. When daddy comes home, me and mamma would be in bed asleep. Daddy wouldn't let me do nothing. I couldn't talk to nobody. Well, we didn't have a phone back then, or I could have slipped in and talked. He was from Burke County, and I'm from Caldwell, and my sister slipped off and married his brother. They moved into a house, just walking distance from my house. His brother would come over to his house and stay with him, left home to stay with his brother, lived right above me haha, but we didn't get to uh—well, he had a heart attack and died when he was 80. He wasn't 80, good God, uh he was uh that was in '83 and died, but we had a good life together. Oh, we drove, ran, we'd like to go places, and we like to go boat riding and get out and just ride around and go visiting.

About Shuford Mills

In 1880, Shuford, Gwyn & Co purchased 1200 acres of land, around what is now Granite Falls, and built a spinning mill. By 1955, Shuford Mills operated the largest cordage mill in the world.

Shuford Mills began with business partners A. A. Shuford, N. H. Gwynn, and P. G. Moore. They hired James Munroe "Mun" Allred to design the mill and become its first superintendent. He moved into the Baird House, and soon the home became known as "the Allred House." Eventually, the Shuford Family acquired ownership. A. A. Shuford's grandsons - Harley, Bill, and Alex Shuford - kept the business going during the depression and even purchased a weave mill in Valdese that was going bankrupt in 1935. That weave mill became Valdese Weavers, a leading weaver and designer of decorative jacquard fabrics. In 2016, Valdese Weavers left the Shuford Family to become 100% employee owned. Harley Shuford started Century Furniture, a manufacturer of high end furniture, in 1947. Owned today by some of his descendants, the company remains an industry leader. Shuford Mills spread from the Falls to downtown Granite Falls and into Dudley Shoals, Hudson, Hickory, Longview,

Hildebran, Stony Point in North Carolina and to Lavonia in Georgia - a total of 12 mills. The growth eventually ended, and foreign competition in the 1990s led to the demise of Shuford Mills. The plants in Longview and Dudley Shoals were sold to private investors and became known as Shuford Yarns. Outdura, the weave mill in Hudson, was sold to Sattler Corporation, which is based in Austria. At this point, Shuford Mills was the industrial leader, However, the family realized that twine, string, clothes line, and rope for window sash would have a limited market in the future so they launched Shurtape, a major manufacturer of duct tape, painter's tape, and masking tape. Shurtape Technologies has become an international manufacturer and world leader in its industry. Although the mills are gone from Granite Falls, the businesses begun by the Shuford Family still offer employment to local residents willing to commute to Hudson, Valdese, Dudley Shoals, and Hickory. The William B. Shuford Recreation Center stands as a tribute to the generosity of a special family. Homes built by Shuford Mills still provide affordable housing for residents of Granite Falls, and the "Allred House" has become the Granite Falls History and Transportation Museum.