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[Mrs. Nannie Carson]

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Mrs. Carrie Hepler (white)

Wilson's Road, Fairview, N.C.

Rural School teacher, Practical Nurse

WPA teacher

Anne Winn Stevens, writer

MRS. NANNIE CARSON Original Names Changed Names

Mrs. Carrie Hepler Mrs. Nannie Carson

Craigtown Hackletown

The Craigs The Hackles

Fairview, N.C. Oakville

Asheville, N.C. Beaumont

Nesbit School Norton School

A Mrs. Craig Rena Hackle

A little girl Mattie Hackle

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Lester Craig Larry Hackle

Another Mrs. Craig Ella Hackle

Sheriff Brown Sheriff Davis

The Oglesbys The Goldbys

Mrs. Oglesby Mrs Goldby

Fayde Nesbit Fred Norton

Henderson County, N.C. Harrison County

Winston-Salem, N.C. Raleigh

Dr. Lynch Dr. Lambert C9 1/22/41 - N.C. Box 1 Original Names Changed Names

Wilson Road Maxwell Road

Mrs. Wilson Mrs. Maxwell

Unknown Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Payne,

Mrs. Brown

MRS. NANNIE CARSON

“Sit right down here by this table,” said Nannie Carson, “and I'll be glad to tell you about my work in Hackletown.” She laid aside her modist, dark green coat, and straightened her small, brown hat with its pert, green feather. “I have to take a music lesson in half an hour, but I can tell you a lot, if I talk fast.” We pulled up our chairs to a long table in one of the Board of Education's outer offices. She took out of her brown leather bag a bunch of

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kodak pictures. "These will show you some of the people I work with and how they live," she explained.

"I reckon my supervisors told you about me," she said confidently. "They like to tell how for a year I walked 15 miles every Monday in order to teach some illiterates, who live 'way back in one of the coves. There's a whole community livin' on a ridge. They are very poor, and they've intermarried until they're all kin to each other. The main family is the Hackles and the name of their settlement is Hackletown. The mountains out Hackletown off from the good farmin' sections, and the highway and the roads goin' into it are so bad the school buses can't come within three miles of it. The people are real degraded. They don't live very far from Beaumont, and only about ten miles from my home, Oakville, but they are just plain wild.

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"When I applied for work among them two years ago, my supervisors in Beaumont were tickled to give it to me. They said, 'we've been tryin' to put a worker in that cove for years, but none of our teachers were willin' to tackle it.' They fairly jumped at the chance of gettin' me to teach there. 'For a person that chooses her own field,' they said, 'you certainly have picked out a hard one! The Hackles are hard to reach. They are very ignorant, and very suspicious of outsiders.'

"'But I'm a mountain woman, myself,' I told them, 'and I never was one to be stopped by hardships.'"

A mountain woman, yes, but of a very attractive type. Nannie is tall and slender, she has the bright complexion of one who lives much out of doors. She carries herself with poise and dignity. Her gray eyes are clear; her hair, a chestnut-brown is sedately arranged. She looks about 35, but tells me she is 41. Her teaching has chiseled a single vertical line between her eyebrows. She was dressed very neatly in a dull rose suit of her own knitting.

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“With the schools so far away, few of the Hackles go any further than the second grade,” she continued. “The school children have to cross a mountain and several streams to get to Norton school. In bad weather they don't even try. Many of the grown people can not read or write.

“My parents and neighbors all tried to discourage me. 'It's dangerous for a woman to go there alone', they said.

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'All those Hackles are bootleggers. They'll take you for a spy of the revenue officers. The men stay drunk every weekend from Friday to Monday.'”

Nannie took from the package on the table an unmounted kodak picture of a two-roomed log cabin, its wide cracks chinked with clay. Before it, straggled a family of seven: a lanky mountaineer, his bedraggled wife, and five anemic looking children.

“This is the first cabin I visited,” said Nannie. “The man's a bootlegger. The woman is now one of my pupils. She is 30 years old, but she's never learned to read or write. I had several prints made from this negative so I can give her one. She has never had her picture made nor her children's, before.

“The day I first visited this cabin, I was real nervous. The woman, Rena Hackle, was out in her yard. When she saw me comin', she ran in the house and shut the door. When I knocked, she opened the door just a crack, and stuck her head out. Her hair was frowsy and her mouth and teeth blackened with snuff. She did not ask me in, but I just eased by her into the room. The air was fowl inside. It nearly choked me. I was afraid to stay, but I sat down on the edge of the nearest chair, and just tried bein' frien'ly. I didn't get very far with any of the Hackles that first visit. But every week I would come back and keep on bein' frien'ly. Sometimes though, I was mightly discouraged, and ready to quit.

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"I'm a practical nurse as well as a teacher. I spent two years in Raleigh with my married sister, after I had graduated from high school, and did a good deal of nursin' there under a doctor's directions. When I saw how bad Rena's children needed medical attention, I showed her how to clean their sores, and treat their burns. By and by, I got her to wash and mend their clothes, and to clean up her house and let some air in it.

"One of the Children, Mattie, six years old, was real pretty and smart. She was frien'ly too. When I came, she would run out to meet me laughin' and jumpin' about. But one day when I came as usual, she didn't take any notice. She was layin' on the bed. 'She's been porely for sev'ral days,' said Rena, 'but she ain't sick much.' I went to the side of the bed. Mattie stared at me without reco'nizin' me. She was gaspin' and shiverin,' and her hands and feet were purple. Because I had done a lot of nursin,' I saw at once what ailed her. The child was dyin' of pneumonia. When I told the family how ill Mattie was, they were very much upset. They sent in a hurry for Larry Hackle, her gran'father, the only one in the family who had a car, and they wrapped her up, and took her in Larry's car. They had to go across the mountain to get to a doctor. But it was too late. She died the next day.

"Rena didn't have anythin' decent to bury the child in so I bought a white, muslin dress with a little scrap of lace on it, and sent it to her for Mattie. Ever since then, she and all her kin have looked to me as their friend." Nannie pointed to a child in the kodak picture. "That's Mattie," she said, "this is the only likeness they will ever have of her."

"In the next cabin, Ella Hackle is expectin' another baby. Her husband's on WPA, and they already have a house full of children. The youngest is barely a year old. She didn't have any baby clothes ready, nor any material to make any; so I begged some for her from my friends. Ella has a good voice. So I'm teachin' her songs, and she's teachin' them to the other women and the children. She's learnin' to read, too, and to keep house better.

"The leader of the Hackles is Larry. He's the head of the fam'ly. He owns an old fashion water wheel and lathe, and a chair factory down by the stream. But he doesn't make

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chairs any more. Nobody buys them now, and his hands are stiff with rheumatism so as he couldn't make chairs if they'd still sell. He is 72 years old. Here's a kodak of his mill. Picturesque ain't it? Larry suspicioned me at first, but he's real frien'ly now. On cold days, he goes from one house to another to see that a fire is ready for me. 'It's about all I'm good for.' he says. He isn't one to praise people much. All he says is 'I ain't never heerd nobuddy say nothin' agin' you or agin' yore work.'

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Larry's wife is deaf and feeble, and can only sit by the fire all day and look after little Mary, her idiot gran'child. There are cracks in the walls and floor of their cabin through which a cat could crawl. Neither Larry's wife nor Josie, his daughter-in-law who lives with them, has ever sewed a stitch, but Larry boasts of the "purty dresses' he 'uster sew' with his own hands before they got crippled with rheumatism. I'm teachin' Josie to sew, just to make simple garments. I started her to makin' an apron. I gave her the material and cut her a pattern. She's very near-sighted, I'm hopin' I can get some one to fit her to spectacles.

"Though I was warned against the Hackles, I've never found them anything but courteous and kind. They've always treated me with respect.

"One day when I went on my rounds as usual, I passed a group of men shootin' at a mark.

"'Mis' Carson,' they said, 'come and shoot with us.' One man handed me a double barreled gun. I hesitated, I hadn't shot at a mark in five years. The men thought I was scared to try. I saw one wink at the others. I felt I had to try to keep their respect, so I took the gun. I didn't hit the bull's eye, but I come as near it as any of them did.

"'You can shoot to kill a man, cayn't you Mis' Carson?' said one of the men. 'Yes, I can,' I replied, 'but I'd much rather help him!'

"Since then the men have treated me with even more respect.

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“Besides teachin' the middle-aged people,” continuing Nannie, I teach a number of young men who dropped out of school in the second grade. Most of them work on the WPA. They want to learn to 'figger,' as they are generally out workin' on a project when I call at their homes, I leave them assignments in notebooks, sums in addition, or simple problems in multiplication, or tables to learn. When I go back nex' time, I correct the notebooks and leave fresh assignments for them. I furnish them the notebooks, just cheap ones that I buy at the five-and-ten cent stores.

“The people in Hackletown plant nothin' but corn, so I'm tryin' to get the women interested in makin' vegetable gardens. The ground around their cabins is bare and trampled clay, or is grown up in weeds. I'm givin' all the women packages of seeds, and I'm plannin' to teach them how to can their surplus if they have any. I asked Sheriff Davis to save me all the fruit jars he takes up on his raids on 'stills, 'why Mis' Carson,' says he, pretendin' to be shocked, 'whatever do you want with 'em?' But when I told him what I was plannin' to do, he was glad to cooperate with me.”

This, by the way, was in December.

“Before I took up the work in Hackletown the people had very little respect for religion. Many of them had never heard of the Bible. When I read a chapter to Rena's family, and tried to offer a short prayer, her fifteen year old 8 daughter giggled and laughed aloud. But I kept on suggestin' to the women that they ought to send the children to Sunday school. There are 40 children in Hackletown. After an evangelist preacher was there last summer, the people decided to build a church, as the nearest is three miles away.

“The men raised \$30, and bought some rough planks, I contributed \$2, myself and I give them \$1 a month. The men built the church themselves. It's a crude shack, with wide cracks in the walls and floor, and has plank benches with no backs to them. But somebody furnished a stove and now forty children and some of the women go there every Sunday afternoon. A few of the men go, too. In the week I teach the women Bible stories and

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hymns, so they can teach the children on Sunday. Sometimes, now, members from the Norton Baptist church, several miles away, come and help them teach, and help out with the singin'.

“The most important thing in the work I do,” declared Nannie, “seems to me to raise the standard of livin' and to break up the isolation in which the women live. I encourage them to visit the Norton school, and see their children at work, and to go to the school entertainments, and learn how important it is to keep the children in school. They are learnin' to keep their houses better 'n they did. At least they put them in order on the days they expect me, and they put on clean clothes for my visits.

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“I am trying to teach them, too, to balance their diets. No, I never had much trouble walkin' back and forth. Sometimes though, when it was mild in Oakville, I'd be trampin' through snow when I reached Hackletown. I had to be prepared for any kind of weather. I always took the trails and short cuts. If I had gone by the road, I'd have gone miles further. I didn't get lost but once. That was one afternoon when I was on my way home. Luckily my neice was with me. We missed the right trail, somehow. A storm came up and we were soon soaked to the skin. We stumbled over fallen trees, got tangled up in briars, bogged up and fell in muddy fields. About ten o'clock at night, we came out on the highway. We still had four miles to go, but we didn't mind that, now that we rec'onized where we were. My parents were right worried, thinkin' something dreadful had happened to us. It was nearly midnight when we reached home.

“There are other fam'lies I visit, too, like the Goldsbys at the foot of Little Nebo. They are clean and self-respectin'. They keep house better'n I do. All they need is a little frien'liness and encouragement. They are higher up the scale than the Hackles.

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“Old gran'ther Goldsby can't read. He's too old to learn, or to do work of any kind. So I read to him, and tell him the news, and try to amuse him, so he'll have somethin' pleasant to study on.

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“Maude Goldsby, whose husband works on WPA, has six children. He don't get but \$33 a month. Their oldest child, 12 years old, has bad heart trouble. The four children who go to school don't have the proper clothin'. I'm collectin' garments for them. Maude's goin' to have another baby soon. I'm goin' to help her get clothes for it, too.

“No, I don't walk the 15 miles any more, I did this once a week for a year; but it took too much of my time from teachin' Now I hire Fred Norton, a farmer's son to drive me. He has a rickety, open tourin' car. I pay him \$2.50 a trip. He takes me on my rounds every Tuesday. We leave my house at nine o'clock in the mornin' or earlier. We get home by dark. We take a picnic lunch along - (meat sandwiches, fruit, and sometimes milk) and stop somewhere along the road to eat it. Some days I visit as many as 20 fam'lies, and give a lesson in each house.

“On Wednesday and Thursday, I do the same kind of work, only nearer home. I climb up trails to mountain cabins where there aren't any roads, and walk about seven miles each day.

“On Mondays, I go by bus to Beaumont and attend culture classes there. We study textiles and how to dress neatly and suitably on small incomes. Last quarter we studied community hygiene. These courses, two hours a week, will help me raise the grade of my teacher's certificate. I take a music lesson every Monday to help me play accompaniments and teach community singin' better. And I'm takin' a correspondence course in 11 Education with a state teachers' college. That and the Culture courses will add to my college Credit.

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“No, I never went to college, regular, that is, my parents are poor mountain farmers. They had a big family to support, seven children. Only four lived to be grown, though. One died of typhoid. So my father never accumulated anything. It was all he could afford to send us to the public schools. I started in teachin' when I finished the tenth grade. We were livin' then on a farm in Harrison County. The superintendent came to me and begged/ me to take a one-room county school. There were about seven grades in it, I was scared to take it, but he said I could teach all right. There were 45 pupils in that school. I enjoyed teachin' there, though. The children liked me, and I was real fond of them. Every Christmas I had an entertainment for them and a Christmas tree. I had to give every child fruit and candy and a Christmas present. They expected it. It cost right much buyin' presents for all of them.

“I taught there two years. The superintendent wanted me to keep on teachin' there, but I realized I didn't know enough to teach properly; so I resigned and went to Raleigh and lived with my married sister there, and took a business course for a year.

“Then I found I couldn't get far unless I graduated from high school, so I came home and finished high school at Oakville. After that, I went back to my sister's in Raleigh 12 and did practical nursin' for two years under a doctor's direction. I nursed workin' people. Sometimes they paid me as much as \$10 a week; sometimes, \$5 a week. Often I nursed for nothing if the people were too poor to pay. I liked nursin', because I always like to help persons.

“Then I went back to teachin' in the public schools. I taught eight years in rural schools. I'd teach all winter and save my money so I could go to summer school at the Beaumont Normal and Teachers' College. In that way, I accumulated about two years' college work. It seems to me I've been goin' to summer school all my life, but it was really only about eight summers. I've taught every grade from first to seventh.

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“Meanwhile, I married a carpenter, and lived near Raleigh. I kept house. After my husband was hurt in a fall from a house, I went back to teachin'. I taught, nursed him, and kept house, too. The last four years of his life he was perfectly helpless. We had no children.

“After he died; I came home to my parents near Oakville. They were livin' alone and needed me. They are old and feeble. My mother is 74 and suffers from chronic bronchitis and rheumatism. My father is 78. He has a bad heart, rheumatism, and high blood pressure. I support myself and my parents. There were no vacancies in the Oakville schools when I came back here to live. Besides the requirements for teachers' certificates had been raised . So I took up work on 13 the WPA. It's quite a problem to support my parents and myself on my \$66 a month. Besides the \$10 a month I pay Fred Norton to take me to Hackletown every week, I pay my parents' doctor's bills and for their medicines. They are sick a good deal. Then there's my bus fare to Beaumont every Monday, and I supply my pupils with notebooks, and sometimes with sewin' materials.

“My oldest brother lives near, but he has his own fam'ly to support. He's manager for a big farm belongin' to Dr. Lambert of Beaumont. No, you can't get any story from him. He's always busy, and he ain't one to talk much, unless Dr. Lambert said for him to.

“I have Friday and Saturday off from teachin', and of course Sunday. Now that my parents are feeble I run the farm. We have only 12 acres. Part of that is in an apple orchard, but the orchard is all run down. I raise a vegetable garden for home use, and can the surplus in the evenin's by the light of a kerosene lamp. I raise hay for the cow, too. I get a man to do the necessary plowin' for \$1.50 a day. I do all the rest of the work. Last year I cut the hay and stored it myself. I milk the cow, and I raise chickens, and keep a pig.

“Well, I must go. It's about time for my music lesson.”

“But it's nearly one o'clock,” I said, “and you've had no lunch. Come to lunch with me!”

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"I'd love to, but I've just time to get to the studio. Come to see me at Oakville. I'll be glad to have you go on my 14 rounds with me."

Later I accepted Nannie's invitation. She lives a half a mile from the highway on Maxwell's Road, which winds through Dr. Lambert's cornfields. On the road I met a thin, frail old man, clad in faded blue jeans. His step was quick, however, and his complexion ruddy. He did not look his 78 years. I'd have taken him for 65. When I stopped to ask him the way to Nannies, he pointed to a small weather-bleached cottage, whose tiny porch was shaded by silver poplars. "I'm Nannie's dad," he said courteously. "She's expectin' you. You're right welcome."

The house to which he pointed is one-story, four-roomed, and has never been painted. The poplars, however, and the gnarled apple trees in the background, give the place a picturesque appearance. A Scotch Collie standing on the rotting front steps welcomed me effusively. From the porch, the wide view of cornfields and encircling blue mountains was very beautiful.

Nannie welcomed me at the door. "Come right in," she said heartily, "and have a seat by the fire. Fred will be along directly with his car. I'll take you to see the Hackles. You'd better wrap up good. It will be cold in the open car," she wound a brown, knitted scarf around her own throat and pulled on heavy gloves, "meet my mother," she said, introducing me to Mrs. Maxwell, who bounded up 15 in shawls and blankets sat by the old fashioned coal heater. "She's just recoverin' from flu." Mrs. Maxwell seemed to be 90 instead of 74. Her skin was as brown and wrinkled as a withered apple, but her hair drawn straight back from her round seamed face was still a rusty black.

"Here's our lunches," said Nannie bringing in from the kitchen three well filled paper bags.

"Excuse me for not risin'," Mrs. Maxwell was saying in a quivering voice, "I'm mighty stiff and porely from rheumatiz. I'm proud to meet you."

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The house has few comforts, only bare necessities: a faded rug, kerosene lamps, no plumbing. The combination kitchen and dining room was very dark, both from smoke, and because of its small window. The only luxury was a piano in the living room; the only music, that found in hymn books. The walls were bare except for a few neatly framed photographs of college scenes, and a huge, skyed, crayon portrait of Nannie's grandfather.

Fred soon rattled up in his decrepit, touring car. He was neatly clad in khaki and high boots, his felt hat placed rakishly on one side. A young, high school graduate, and the son of a prosperous farmer, he apologized for the condition of the touring car. "We have a new auto," he said proudly, "but we like to keep it good for trips to Beaumont." We were soon rattling over the mountain roads. Nannie had said, "We'd better all three of us sit on the front seat 16 we'll keep warmer that way." After we had climbed into the car and wrapped ourselves up in lap robes, she chattered on enthusiastically about her work.

"Next week," she said, "I'm plannin' a party at my house for such of the Hackles as can come. I get mighty little leisure time, even on the days I don't teach. The neighbors all know I've studied nursin' and they're always callin' on me when there's sickness in their fam'ly. None of them can afford to pay a nurse, and they'd as soon have me as a doctor. So I help 'em out, though sometimes they do take advantage of me.

"One of my neighbors, Mrs. Harris, is a paralytic. She's always callin' for me. She lives with her unmarried son. She gets spells of bein' afraid she's dyin'. There's nobody to do for her - she's bed ridden, but I go and cheer her up, and bathe her and clean up her house. Another neighbor, Mrs. Payne, has asthma and chronic bronchitis. Last week she was right sick with flu, she just escaped pneumonia. I sat up with her for two nights. She always sends for me when she needs doctorin'. Then Mrs. Brown's children all come down at the same time with measles, and I had to help her out, so I'm kep' right busy. I don't get any rest on Sunday, either. That's one of my busiest days, what with goin' to church, helpin' with the music, and teachin' a Sunday school class.

“Sometimes,” she said, changing the subject, “the widowers and old bachelors I meet on my trips, say, 'Mis' Carson ain't you never thot of marryin' agin? You'd mek some man a plumb, good wife.' But I tell 'em, if I ever marry agin, I'll marry only a rich man, one with a good job and one who can give me a fine car. I've had to support one husband. I know what it means. I'm not plannin' on supportin' another. Of course I only say that to protect myself from their attentions, and to let them know how I stand.

“I enjoy the work I'm doin', because it gives me a chance to raise the standard of livin' among the women. I get nearer to the mothers than I would if I was teachin' in the public schools, and I can influence them more. They tell me their troubles and ask my advice, and I sympathize with then and advise them as best I can. One woman who was tryin' to keep a clean house, broke down and cried when she told me how her drunken husband made fun of her for cleanin' the house, and led his horse right in the front door.

“My one ambition,” she said in answer to my query, “is to save money enough to buy a coupe, so I can go further back into the coves, and get to cabins where Fred's big, old touring car can't take me. But now we're comin' into Hackletown. There's Rena Hackle's two-roomed log cabin, the one I showed you in the kodak picture.”