

Old time country music lives on in Pittsboro

Chatham's Historical Heritage

by Fred J. Vatter



Back in the early 1990's I met Milo Holt who was showing some old films of everyday life in Siler City. When I remarked that the rapid increase in population was changing the way of life in Chatham County, Milo suggested that I take my wife on a date to Charlie's Barn on Buckner-Clark Road where local musicians performed every Friday night from 7-9 p.m. "It's where neighbors get together to enjoy old time music and friendship after a week of hard work", he told me.

A couple of weeks later we attended our first gathering at Charlie's, which was held in his renovated tool barn. The walls were paneled and a scenic mural painted by a local artist decorated the back of a stage. The room was filled with rows of seats of every type imaginable—wooden and metal folding chairs, some old movie theatre seats, couches and benches.

Charlie Bouldin stood on the right, playing his guitar and his brother, Arthur, stood on the left caressing his big bass fiddle. Between them sat a bevy of men playing an assortment of instruments — fiddles, guitars, a banjo and Milo Holt playing his harmonica.

The capacity audience was comprised mainly of folk with silver or white hair and, in some cases, no hair. Captivated by the music, a few people got up to dance or clog in the aisles. Charlie invited folks in the audience to come up and sing and I particularly remember Penny Garner and Lynelle Davis. During a couple of breaks in the music, Milo told a few tall tales and jokes. Charlie's smiling wife, Miss Lillie, sold soft drinks, coffee, snacks, fresh eggs at a dollar a dozen and honey. Admission to the performance was free, but containers near the door indicated that any donations to help pay for heat and lighting would be appreciated.



The smiles and friendly welcome from the musicians and audience gave us a warm, fuzzy feeling as we left for home.

These Friday night get-togethers were inspired by Charlie Bouldin's visit to the First Farm Aid Concert which was held in Illinois during 1985. He had been singled out as a typical hard-pressed farmer by WRAL-TV and was sent to the concert which was intended to make the public and politicians aware of the economic squeeze affecting those farmers. While at the concert, Bouldin met Willie Nelson and upon his return home was inspired to gather a few friends so they could make enjoyable music together. These get-togethers gradually grew by word of mouth and his little music barn had to be expanded a couple of times. Most first-time visitors came as curious strangers and left as friends.

In the year 2000, Charlie Bouldin fell ill and died on July 15. The



AT LEFT: Charlie Bouldin played guitar. ABOVE: Charlie's brother, Arthur, playing the bass fiddle, Lynelle Davis (we think!) singing and others play with Charlie, who's on the right
PHOTOS BY DUANE HALL

performances continued during his hospital stay and on one occasion I recall vocalist Lynelle Davis dialing Charlie's bedside telephone and holding her own phone in the midst of the band so he could hear the music. After he died many of his faithful followers attended his funeral at Emmaus Baptist Church.

After one Friday's pause, the weekly events resumed with brother Arthur Bouldin taking over the reins and Milo Holt continuing to generate smiles with his lovable antics. Daughter Glenda tended to the cows and Miss Lillie still sold baked refreshments, eggs and honey.

Now 10 years later there are no more dairy cows on the farm, some lots have been sold, but Charlie's Friends continue to play every Friday night.

On a recent Friday, Mrs. Vatter and I visited Charlie's Barn and were warmly greeted by Mrs. Meacham whose husband Bruce is now the Emcee for the band. He also sings and plays the harmonica. The only musician we recognized from the old days was Ulys Cook of Siler City who plays the mandolin and sings. The other musicians included David McNeill on the bass guitar; Edward Hammer who plays bass and fiddle; Jim Sargent on

the steel guitar; Roy Hardee on guitar; Butch Rider, Vocalist; Adrean Smith on electric guitar and vocalist; Perry Coble on the harmonica; Steve Riggs who plays the guitar and sings. On several numbers, Steve's grandson, Jackson Riggs, who appeared to be about 6 years old, not only sang, but did an outstanding job on the harmonica. He also led the audience in singing happy birthday to his Grandpa. At least four couples got up to dance whenever they heard a favorite tune.

Arthur Bouldin and Milo Holt no longer perform because of health problems, but Miss Lillie still sits in her usual spot in the back of the room, selling soft drinks and goodies.

The enjoyable evening was a return to old times when, after a hard week's work, neighbors got together to relax with music, song, homemade refreshments, and conversation. Friday night at Charlie's is a fitting tribute to the memory of Charlie Bouldin, whose compassion for people, hard work ethic, love of family, friends, music and wholesome entertainment signified a way of life fast disappearing.

Fred J. Vatter is Past President of Chatham County Historical Association and a Board Member.

HOME

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When asked their needs, former migrants are keen to point the lack of government support for the farm sector (decimated after NAFTA), they speak of jobs creation and of a hiring system that judges a candidate on merit rather than friendships in old boy networks. Satisfying work, of course, is crucial to a returnee's morale.

Mortadelo, for example, spent three months in Florida and had trouble adapting on his return although, as a practicing Baptist, he avoided the pitfalls of substance abuse. In Calakmul he found work as a mechanic for the county, supporting his family of three on \$350/month. He earned this job volunteering in the Mayor's election campaign. He knows little about auto repair and hoped for a better position. Disenchanted, he regularly reminded his boss how he felt. "The jobs and the money in Mexico are for the privileged," he comments. One day, his harried boss proposed, "I need people to go to Canada." Now, he will travel to Canada on a legal exchange.

The application took six months and required Mortadelo pass a medical

exam and a personal interview. In the United States, Mortadelo couldn't bear separation from his family. The Canadian program resolves this and other problems of illegal immigration. The program provides health care and travel expenses. It requires Mortadelo return to Mexico after six months. If he works well, he can apply again for the program in the future.

Mortadelo's stint in the United States convinced him that, in other countries, people who work hard get ahead, and specially that our government's is concerned for everyone's well-being. While we hope this is the case, we know the situation is more complicated than this. For Mortadelo, his return to Mexico was bittersweet. Glad to be reunited with his family, he still wanted to prove his value as a worker. Now, he's willing to leave a full-time job for the chance to do so.

Luis and Nora are Chatham residents. Luis is a translator with interests in theater and writing. Nora teaches the anthropology of Mexico at NCSU. Email: wordxchange@yahoo.com

JORDAN LAKE

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Stericycle. "Children are at special risk of exposure to air pollutants that cause cancer, learning disabilities, cardiovascular disease, behavioral problems, reproductive disorders, and a host of other illnesses. There are alternatives to incineration that pose much less risk to public health and the environment. Stericycle has one of these facilities, an autoclave in Concord, NC, which is currently operating at 33 percent capacity. Stericycle says they spent some money in the last few years upgrading their facilities, but for a company that made more than \$1 billion in revenues in 2009. I'd like to steal a line from Shania Twain and just say 'that don't impress me much.'"

The Chatham County resolution, which requests the State to adopt the new EPA rules by October 2012, was also adopted and endorsed by Orange County, Mecklenburg County, Carrboro Township, Haw River Township, Senator Tony Foriest, Representative Alice Bordsen, Representative Dan Ingle, Representative Pricey Harrison, Alamance County Commissioner Eddie Boswell, Union County Board of Commissioners, Town of Green

Level, City of Mebane, Town of Hillsborough, Town of Carrboro, Town of Chapel Hill, and Town of Stallings.

In the 1990s, there were more than 5,000 medical waste incinerators. Now, due to pressure from citizens, stricter rules, and local groups like BREDL, there are less than 60 medical waste incinerators in operation in the U.S. North Carolina has three of them: Stericycle's two incinerators in Graham, and one located in Matthews, Mecklenburg County, known as the BMWNC.

Stericycle did not respond to calls and letters requesting further information.

If you would like more information on how to join a local chapter of BREDL to support efforts to reduce the impacts of medical waste incineration on our communities and environment, please visit the BREDL website at: <http://bredl-medwaste.org/> or call Sue Dayton (336) 525-2003 or sd Dayton@swcp.com.

Heather Leigh Wallace is the author of *Images of America: Jordan Lake*, published by Arcadia Publishing.