

Lifestyle

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Statuesque statue, 3C



Carrie Simmons Ballard holds audiences spellbound when she talks.



Carrie Simmons Ballard (arm raised) told stories about the 'old days' at Poplar Grove Plantation.

Staff Photos by Charlie Archambault

'I sure did my share in the peanut fields'

By **Patty Morgan**
Staff Writer

Carrie Simmons Ballard thinks children who grow up learning to work don't mind working hard as adults.

She should know. As a child, she put in many hours picking peanuts on "The Big Lot" — now known as Poplar Grove Plantation — where her great-grandmother was the main house servant for the Foy family. Her grandmother and mother also worked for the family.

"They grew some cotton too, but the main farm product was pea-

nuts," she said. "I never did much cotton picking, but I sure did my share in the peanut fields."

Mrs. Ballard told tales of life on the plantation to a group of 10- to 12-year-olds this past week when the New Hanover County Museum's black history explorer group visited the grounds and interviewed Mrs. Ballard for their oral history session.

She told them about the worst punishment she ever received.

"My grandmother whipped me for something I didn't do," she said.

"My older brother did it but swore he didn't, so she whipped all three of

us to be sure she got it right."

That same brother manned the gate outside the plantation the third Sunday of every August, when folks would come from miles around for a "camp meeting," a revival held in bush tents a few miles from the plantation.

"People coming from Wilmington had to pass through that gate to get to the meeting and my brother would stand there and open and close the gate for cars," she said.

"People would give him a nickel and he thought he had some money."

Mrs. Ballard, who was born on the plantation April 4, 1905, point-

ed out various sites on the plantation she remembered from her childhood.

"Over there was the hog-killing area," she said, indicating a large, now vacant, lot to the left of the plantation home. "In the winter when it was very cold, they'd kill the hogs and hang them up. They'd make sausage and liver pudding. Nothing you can get today tastes like that did on the plantation in those days."

That's not all that's different. In those days, she said, "when you got some buttermilk, you saw some butter on it."

Every Saturday, she remembered, a "little short man named Mr. Capps would come and bring beef. They'd put it in the smokehouse with all the hams and meat hanging up. The smokehouse was wonderful. If we ran out of meat, we could go into the smokehouse and get some. The Foy's were very good to the people who lived here."

To flesh out the rest of their diet, the servants bought groceries "by the year from a little grocer down the road. I don't know how he managed to let everybody buy on credit for a whole year. But the crops would come in and you'd pay the

grocery and then start all over."

And yes, she assured the group, there really was a time of no electricity or refrigeration, when water came from a pump in the back yard.

"My grandmother would make lye soap — so strong, like the detergents now," Mrs. Ballard said.

"The thing that stands out most in my mind was how hard we worked for so little, she said. "It seemed like we had to work so hard for just some food and barely something to wear."

"But it's helped make me the woman I am today — I'm not afraid of working."