

## North Carolina Videos: Artistic, Literary, Historical, and Geographical Views of the Old North State

Sherrie Antonowicz, Marty Wilson, and Catherine Moore, all members of the Audiovisual Committee of the North Carolina Library Association's Public Library Section, collaborated on the compilation of the following reviews and annotations of North Carolina videos.

Carter, Linda, producer. *Sister Becky's Baby*. Kinston, NC: Neuse Community Screen Players, 1995. Color. 30 minutes. \$49.95. Includes teacher's guide and public performance rights. Order from: Linda Carter Productions, Route 5, Box 59, Snow Hill, NC 28580. Telephone: (919) 747-2712.

Audiovisual materials about North Carolina are always in demand in schools and public libraries, but they can be hard to locate. That is why it is a pleasure to find a video not only about North Carolina, but produced here as well. Linda Carter and the Neuse Community Screen Players have given us a live-action video of one of Charles Chesnutt's short stories, "Sister Becky's Baby."

Charles Chesnutt, along with Paul Laurence Dunbar, was one of the first African-American authors to gain national recognition. He lived and worked in Fayetteville from 1866 to 1884. Many of his short stories are based on folktales told by North Carolina slaves and illustrate the resourcefulness slaves used when dealing with their masters.

In "Sister Becky's Baby," a slave is traded by her master for a racehorse. Unfortunately, the new owner does not want Becky's baby, and the mother is separated from her infant. It is up to the conjure woman at Becky's old home to get the two back together.

The Neuse Community Screen Players, a group modeled after community theater, but formed expressly to make films and videos, has done an excellent job in bringing the story to video. Tolya Adams, as Becky, and Alicia Alexander, as the Conjure Woman, are particularly good in their roles. This is not a Hollywood production — there are a few problems with sound, scene transition, and a couple of (mercifully short) wooden performances — but it is technically and artistically well above many nontheatrical videos.

Students will enjoy hearing the actors use local place names like Robeson County, Bladen County, and the Wilmington Road as they enjoy a good story well told. Programmers could pair this video with Direct Cinema's similar *Gullah Tales*, or use it with one of Tom Davenport's Appalachian "Jack Tales" videos to compare and contrast the white and the African American viewpoints in folktales.

Public librarians interested in materials expressing the African-American experience will want the video to circulate to patrons. All libraries building North Carolina video collections should definitely include *Sister Becky's Baby* in their acquisitions lists.

Linda Carter and the Screen Players are to be commended for their efforts, as are the North Carolina Arts Council, the Kinston Community Council for the Arts, and the Neuse Regional Library for their financial contributions. We need more North Carolina productions like this one.

— Sherrie Antonowicz  
Greensboro Public Library

Stoney, George C., Judy Helfand, and Susanne Rostock. *The Uprising of '34*. 87 min. \$490. Distributor: First Run Icarus Films, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014. Telephone: 1-800-1710. Discounts available for nonprofit organizations.

A "lost episode" in southern history comes to life in this documentary of the General Textile Strike of 1934. An optimistic labor movement was forcefully put down and the memory of those events suppressed by the workers who lived through them. Gaston County shares echoes of these remembrances as many of the modern interviews contained in this film are from local retired workers or mill owners.

In Gaston County over two thousand workers took part in the general walkout and over forty mills were closed. The Loray Mill Strike in Gastonia in 1929 (although not dealt with in this film) was actually a precursor to the widespread national strike, encompassing over four hundred thousand workers, which coincided with that fateful Labor Day of September 1934.

Historical events played a role in the beginnings of this grassroots movement. Optimism through New Deal legislation in the form of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 legitimized workers' rights to organize. Also textile mill owners had voluntarily adopted a Cotton Textile Code in July 1933 which established a minimum wage of twenty-five cents an hour with a forty-hour work week, plus protective laws against child labor. When promises by the mill owners to provide better working conditions were never fulfilled, disgruntled textile workers were willing to try the union as a means of alleviating their plight.

The strike lasted just three weeks and was put down forcibly by National Guard Troops. Confrontations culminated in the death of seven workers in Honea Path, South Carolina. After this tragic event, which stunned textile workers and drew ten thousand to the funerals of slain strikers, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt intervened with a call for the strike to stop and for workers to be allowed to return to their jobs. Supposedly workers were to be re-employed but events turned against them. Almost everyone connected to the union was blacklisted. All workers no longer employed by the mills were thrown out of the mill village housing. This hard put-down of union-organized recruitment had a long-reaching effect, particularly in the South, with very little progress in the unionization of textile mill workers until the 1960s.

This film took six years to make. It was produced in part by George C. Stoney, a professor of film and television at New York University and a Winston-Salem native, who provided all of the original photography. Using archival footage and the strong voice of oral history, the film draws on the personal memories of individuals interested in these historical events, including many participants. Indeed, this is not a reenactment, but almost a reliving and uncovering of a topic which for decades was considered "taboo."

The tone of the film portrays the individual worker as the hero, but also strikes a delicate balance between the negatives and positives of "mill village life." For example, while those workers provided mill village housing were expected to adopt a lifestyle in which drinking was prohibited, the rent on the "shotgun houses" provided was as low as twenty-five to fifty cents per room per month.

The original music written for this production adds a unique plaintive timbre. The interspersing of archival footage (some of which was provided by the Gaston County Public Library) of mill workers' lives with the interviews enhances the development of the story line. It is readily apparent that the production team members were very committed to their subject and wanted to portray not only the bravery of those involved in these historical events, but also show the dynamics or cause and effect of historical events in the lives of everyday people.

According to early communications with the project team, which date back to early 1993, the original length of the film was to have been approximately one hour. Further editing with a paring of about ten to twelve minutes from the current eighty-seven minute total length would possibly enhance this production; however, who among us would have the heart to remove a further word from the lips of any of the "lintheads," who come across with well-spoken dignity as proud representatives of the southern American spirit at its best.

For a further look at the history of textiles in Gaston County, see the WTVI, Channel 42 production, "Spinning Through Time: Gaston County and the Textile Industry," produced in 1996.

— Marty Wilson, Gaston-Lincoln Regional Library

## OTHER NORTH CAROLINA VIDEOS OF INTEREST:

Whiteside, Tom. *The Cameraman Has Visited Our Town*. 1989.

20 min. \$40.00, includes s/h and 6% NC sales tax. Distributor: Tom Whiteside, 1410 Acadia St., Durham, NC 27701.

An introduction to the films of H. Lee Waters of Lexington, North Carolina, taken between 1936 and 1942, of local people in the Piedmont area of North Carolina and shown in local theaters as short subjects before the feature movie. Just a sample of the North Carolina communities filmed by Waters include Salisbury, Thomasville, Kernersville, Burlington, and Graham.

*North Carolina Bed and Breakfasts and Country Inns*. 1995.

48 min. \$19.95 + 6% NC sales tax. Distributor: Video Marketing Group, Inc., Raleigh, NC. Telephone: (919) 781-0500.

More than fifty unusual and unique places to stay are featured along with lush photography of nearby attractions from all parts of the state.

*River Run: Down the Cape Fear to the Sea*.

UNC-Wilmington and UNC-TV, 1994. 55 min. \$23.94 + \$4.00 s/h. Distributor: UNC-TV Foundation. Telephone: (919) 549-7123.

This historical documentary follows the Cape Fear River from its origin to the Atlantic Ocean, and focuses on contemporary environmental concerns affecting its future.

*Roanoke: The Unsolved Mystery of the Lost Colony*.

PBS Video, 1988. 3 videotapes. 180 min. \$175.00 + \$7.00 s/h. Distributor: PBS Video. Telephone: 1-800-424-7963.

A three-part dramatic series, these videos recount the events of the Roanoke Voyages, the first prolonged encounters between the English and the Native American Indians on Roanoke Island in Dare County, North Carolina.

— Catherine Moore  
High Point Public Library