The Story of Douglas Crossroads

Article by Molly Cutler and Jane Owen

Introduction

On a pleasant, sunny August afternoon, Mr. Armstrong, Molly Cutler and I drove to Douglas Crossroads to visit Mrs. Olive Douglas. She lives in a large, gracious white house surrounded by green fields, shade trees and outbuildings, which include red and green
tobacco barns.

Just noticing the well-built solidity of the Douglas home brings to mind another era. We spoke to Mrs. Douglas at length about that era and about the life she has lived at the Crossroads bearing her name.

The conversation was easy and comfortable, punctuated with lots of laughter. Mrs. Douglas is a humorous and happy individual who could probably fill volumes with her memories of a life very different from the life we live today.

Life: I've always been interested in Douglas Crossroads. How did Douglas Crossroads get its name? How long have you lived here?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, I've lived here since '23. I married and came here in '23, but I was raised about a mile down the road, and this used to be the Tetterton Crossroads. There was a family of Tettertons lived on the corner, but my husband's father bought all this land; and after he bought it all and we began building, it turned into the Douglas Crossroads [laughs]. All the Douglas children lived right here in a group.

Life: How many people were in the family then? Did your husband have brothers?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes. Grady and Edgar and Jack were the boys, and Gertrude and Emily and Bess were the girls. There were six of the Douglas children.
Life: Is that Mrs. Emily Padgett?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, Emily Padgett.

Life: She was a Douglas originally?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, she was the middle daughter.

Life: So the Douglasses own all the areas around where the roads cross?

Mrs. Douglas: No, they did. The old man Douglas did, but Emily has sold off one corner over there, and the other three, that one belonged to Jack and his boys.

Life: Is that where the store is?

Mrs. Douglas: No, Emily owns the one where the store is. Jack's wife and his daughters own the one with the big house on it; and my land, you can see it right there where the fence is, that was Edgar's.

Life: Did you all farm?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes! They all farmed!

Life: Tell us how farming was back there in the '20's.

Mrs. Douglas: [Laughing] Quite different!

Life: What, would you say, were the main differences from the way it is now?

Mrs. Douglas: The way they had to farm. In '23, when I moved up here, we didn't have but one mule; and we owned this land over here--all this over here. And we had one mule and one turning plow, and one that's called a cotton plow. That's about all we had.

Life: How many acres were you farming with one mule?

Mrs. Douglas: I think they say there's 85 that belonged to Edgar. Now, Edgar bought the place across the road there.

Life: Do you remember the mule? What she was like?

Mrs. Douglas: You bet I do! Her name was Mary! A big brown mule! We'd plow her all day and then hitch her to the buggy and go ride that night or go to town on Saturday afternoon [laughs]. It was a dirt road, then, and I could hear her coming down. I could hear that mule trotting. She would trot just like a horse.

Life: Did she have a good disposition?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, sir! Sure did [laughs]!

Life: Well, you hear about mules, but you don't even see any mules anymore. What was it like? How did you have to deal with a mule? Was she temperamental?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, Edgar had some of both kinds. We had Mary, and he had
two. Later on, he bought two that was Mutt and Jeff. And they were the same size, smaller than Mary, but one of them was just as good as she could be, and the other one would run away if you [trails off laughing].

Life: How would you get a mule to go in a straight line, plowing?

Mrs. Douglas: You had a bridle and lines on him.

Life: They wouldn't wander one way or the other?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh no! You put them down that row and they'd walk right on down. I guess they were broke when they were brought in here. Some of them were good, and some of them were bad.

Life: What were the main crops you all grew?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, corn and beans and tobacco--potatoes. And we always had a garden.

Life: I bet the tobacco was a whole lot more work back then, curing and all.

Mrs. Douglas: Well, you didn't get as much for it. But it didn't cost as much to get it in and cure it. In fact, when I started working tobacco, when I was 12 years old, it was 25 cents a day.

Life: Twenty-five cents a day!

Mrs. Douglas: That's right! When I was 12 years old. That was [working] for my daddy.

Life: Did you think that was a lot of money?

Mrs. Douglas: You could buy a whole lot with it! You could buy a whole lot with that quarter; you could buy a whole lot more with it than you could with ten dollars, now.

Life: That's hard to believe, but I'm sure that's right. Do you remember when you all first got a tractor?

Mrs. Douglas: I don't remember when it was. I remember, but I can't tell you what year it was.

Life: That was a great improvement, wasn't it?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes, it was.

Life: You said you got married in 1925?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes.

Life: Where did you meet your husband?

Mrs. Douglas: We went to school together. He was raised down about two miles from where I was. We'd known each other all our lives.

Life: Did you go to Bath? Or where did you go to school?

Mrs. Douglas: No, I went to Woodard's Pond. They didn't consolidate the school until my children came along. My children went to school first right
Life: So you had several small schools between here and Bath?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes. My first year of teaching was in this little school right here. They had two teachers.

Life: Were you married then?

Mrs. Douglas: No, no.

Life: What grades did you teach?

Mrs. Douglas: First, second, and third.

Life: How many grades were in the school?

Mrs. Douglas: Seven.

Life: Were the students pretty good, do you think, compared to what we've got today?

Mrs. Douglas: I loved them! Yes, I loved them. They were great. They're, most of them, gone now, but every once in a while, I'll meet one of them, and they'll say, "I went to school with you [laughs]."

Life: Is that right? Well, you were pretty young as a teacher.

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, I was.

Life: What subjects did you teach them in the first, second, third grades?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, I took them about two together. You didn't have anything to teach with, like blackboards or anything like that. And they all had their little books, you know, and most of the time I'd have to lecture a little bit. And then I'd take them, about two together [and] tell the other ones to look on, and I'd sit down there with them. It was not taught like schools are now, but I'd take these little children and sit down there with them two at a time and we'd go over it and find the letters and that kind of stuff. And then I'd take the next grade. I'd get around to them all between recess and lunch, make my rounds.

Life: Was the main subject matter reading and arithmetic?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes. Well, see, the first ones, it was just learning their letters and numbers and things like that. And then when you got up to the second grade, why, they could begin to put their words and things together. And by the time you got to the third grade, they could read right good.

Life: Did you enjoy teaching more or working on the farm?

Mrs. Douglas: I enjoyed living on the farm. I was raised on a farm, and I've enjoyed staying on the farm. But I enjoyed my teaching; I taught for some while.
Life: What sort of fellow was your husband?

Mrs. Douglas: Great [happy laughter]!

Life: Well, that's good! [More laughter.]

Mrs. Douglas: He was great! Yes, sir, he had a lot of friends, and he was a good man. You can ask anybody around here, and they'll tell you that.

Life: What were his interests?

Mrs. Douglas: Farming.

Life: Did he do much hunting?

Mrs. Douglas: Not much. Once in a while he'd kill him a mess of squirrels [laughs].

Life: A lot of people today, particularly younger people, don't realize how things have changed, like electricity and automobiles and things like that. When you first started farming, how did you preserve your food? Did you have ice or electricity at that time?

Mrs. Douglas: We could buy a piece of ice for our tea at lunch, but so far as preserving the food, you didn't preserve that. I was telling my daughter this morning [that] we had a cow. We were just about self-supporting, I mean, practically. We raised our own meat and all that stuff. You'd go out there and milk the cow in the morning and bring it in, and we'd have fresh milk all day. And the next morning it was clabbered; what was left was clabbered.

Life: Since you had a cow, you had fresh milk?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, we had fresh milk every morning.

Life: Wasn't there something you could do with milk once it was clabbered?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, yes you can. During the war, I made cheese out of it. I think I've still got my recipe.

Life: I've always wondered how cheese was made.

Mrs. Douglas: I think I've still got it. And, of course, we made our own butter. We didn't even know what bought butter tasted like.

Life: How did you make the butter?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, you set it [the milk] down till the cream come to the top. It would get kind of hard, but, anyway, you would just take that cream off—usually with a knife—put it in a jar or bowl. Sometimes you stirred it, and sometimes you'd just put it in a jar and shake it until it'd turn to butter. The milk would come out.

Life: I bet that was good!

Mrs. Douglas: You bet! [Laughing] It made the best cake!

Life: What were you cooking on back
then?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, we started out with a four-burner wood stove--old wood stove with just four burners and an oven, sitting up on legs. Then, later on, we graduated to a range, a Home Comfort range. We cooked on that for ... oh, many years, I don't know how many. Then we got an oil stove.

Life: How did you regulate the heat on the wood stove?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, you didn't [laughing]! You just put the wood in there and let it heat!

Life: Were any of the burners closer to the wood, so they'd be hotter?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, there's two right over the wood, but the wood was under these two burners and the heat went up at the back. So, you see, it carried the heat.

Life: Was the stove also for heating your house?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, that was all we had in the kitchen. We had wood heaters in the rooms. Of course, we didn't try to heat it all over. We heated one room to sit and sleep in, and when you had to go in the kitchen, you just had to go light it and wait until it got warm in there.

Life: Did you have a well?

Mrs. Douglas: A pump, an old hand pump.

Life: Where we were talking] was a porch, then, see, a screened-in porch with an old hand pump and a sink.

Life: When did you get electricity?

Mrs. Douglas: I don't know. Well, when somebody put this line down right here, we got it right after. No, we got it before because he put down his own light poles. They didn't come by here, but he put his own light poles down and got it.

Life: Were you living quite a while without electricity?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes! I think that the girls were--it seems to me the girls were in college when we got electricity.

Life: Was it a real problem to try to heat the house with the stoves?

Mrs. Douglas: No. To start with, we had what mom used to call old "tinny heaters" that you fed from the top. At first, we had those, and then later on we climbed up to oil heaters and there'd be an oil heater right here and one in the living room. It weren't hard to heat a room to have a place to stay. Of course, we had plenty of wood.

Life: Do you remember when you all first got an automobile?

Mrs. Douglas: I'm 89 years old, and I don't remember back that far [laughing]! I can't remember dates!

Life: Do you remember how it was when you got it? I mean, was it really ex-
Mrs. Douglas: Well, the first one we got was a little old Ford roadster.

Life: Did you learn how to drive pretty soon?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, I knew how to drive. I was driving before I was married—driving for other people.

Life: Did you have to get out and crank these cars to get them started?

Mrs. Douglas: Not the one we got, we didn't.

Life: They were kind of dangerous, weren't they? I mean, didn't people get broken arms sometimes?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, they kicked back on them once in a while [laughing]! I've had people tell me that the tractors and cars were worse than the mules to try to get them to behave! [Laughing] Pretty bad!

Life: So you didn't continue with the teaching after you got married?

Mrs. Douglas: No.

Life: You've been doing farming ever since you got married?

Mrs. Douglas: I've been cooking and washing and washing dishes and putting in tobacco out there—I was working in tobacco until I was... I don't know, a long time.

Life: How about telling us your earliest memories of what it was like to work in tobacco, compared to what it's like now.

Mrs. Douglas: Well, my daddy had five acres and one barn. And he just had a bunch of women out there, and I don't know who done the farming. I don't remember about that, but they'd go out there and take it up and put it in another truck and bring it to us. And we'd put it on a stick and sit up there all night and fire it.

Life: You had to build a fire?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes. You fired it with wood, then.

Life: And you had to stand there with it?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes. You had to stay there with it all night. That was our first barn; it was fired with wood.

Life: How long did it take a barn to fill out firing it with wood?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, they'd put it in one day, and then they'd fire it till it cured, until the stems were dead. They usually had two days to get it back and dry and get it in order. That means that gets it soft so they could take it out of the barns so they could put it in the next week. It took a week from the time they put it in, cure it, and get it soft enough so you could take it out and
put in another, just a week.

Life: Was it all mostly a family affair, or were there people all around that did it?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, everybody you could pick up in the neighborhood. Usually there was a plenty of children. I remember when we were putting in our first ones, there was a family—a lady who lived across the road, down across the other road. And—she had three children big enough to work—and she'd come and I'd tie on one side of the truck and she on the other. And she and her three children, and we'd pick up somebody else. The two of them, two handers, could hand enough for us to tie and we tried to get an extra one to take the sticks off because they was kind of hard for little children to lift.

Life: Was it pretty heavy?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes.

Life: Was there anything special that you remember you all doing after the last barn came out?

Mrs. Douglas: [Laughing] Not first of all, but later on they had the fish fry.

Life: I [Molly] remember granddaddy Cutler used to say that when you had the last barn of tobacco coming out, you'd have the whole family over to take it down. Did you all have a party after it all?

Life: After you got married, what did you enjoy cooking the most?

Mrs. Douglas: Anything that was in the garden. We had a garden; in fact, Edgar had the garden already started when we were married the 26th of April. And it was up and growing. They were building the house; they built the house starting in January, and during that time he got the garden started. We ate mostly out of the garden. We had our own meat; we raised our own cows. There wasn't much we had to buy.

Life: What all did you have in the garden?

Mrs. Douglas: Tomatoes and corn and beans and turnips and rutabagas and collards.

Life: Any watermelons?

Mrs. Douglas: No, we raised some in the field once in a while, a row or two.

Life: What about the meat? What kind of meats did you have?

Mrs. Douglas: Hog meat: ham, shoulder, pork, sausage.
Life: Did you make sausage?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, sir!

Life: Did you slaughter your own hogs?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes!

Life: What did you have to buy? Salt, maybe?

Mrs. Douglas: Salt, pepper, sugar, and flour. We didn't have to buy meal 'cause we gathered our own corn and took it in [with] that old mule and cart and carried it to have it ground. It was nice to have our own meal.

Life: Were you able to go into town much? I know it must be a long way with a mule and cart.

Mrs. Douglas: Well, now, when I was growing up with pappa, we went once a year.

Life: To Washington?

Mrs. Douglas: To Washington. It was an all-day trip.

Life: Is that right?

Mrs. Douglas: It took all day. You took that old mule or horse or whatever you had and went to Washington. Usually it was when he sold that bale of cotton; he took that money and went up there and got our winter clothes, usually in the fall.

Life: What was the store where you would get your clothes in Washington?

Mrs. Douglas: It seems to me like there was a store on the corner where Wachovia Bank is. And they called it Spenser's; seems like it was Spenser's. I don't remember. Seems like it was Spenser Brothers, and we done a lot of trading there. Or poppa did.

Life: But you'd just go in once a year?

Mrs. Douglas: That's about it.

Life: And that's after he'd sold the cotten?

Mrs. Douglas: After he sold the cotten. And he didn't have much to sell except the cotten; that was about it.

Life: When you'd go in, you'd buy clothes. What else did you buy?

Mrs. Douglas: Maybe shoes, but that's it. But you'd buy most stuff around here [Douglas Crossroads] in these stores. You see, right up here at the Midtown there was a big store, Mixon, D. L. Mixon. His son Jim and his wife run it, and down here at Woodard's Pond, there was one Edgar's mother had out there on the highway. And right across the woods, there on that other road, Mr. Julius Cutler had one. You could get a pair of shoes or take that quarter you got working in tobacco and buy you enough cotton material at five cents a yard to make you a dress and bring it home, and momma might sew it up for you.
Life: Only five cents a yard! Times change. Was it all hand sewn?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, no! We had a sewing machine, a treadle one.

Life: A treadle doesn't need anything but your foot, does it?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, that's all.

Life: After you got married, did you go to Washington more often?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, we did. As I said before, at the first we had no way to go. And Edgar would have worked that mule until about four or five o'clock in the afternoon and come home and come to the house and get a shower. Well, I mean, you didn't get a shower; you got a bath and got on clean clothes and we'd drive to town. They had a place there on Market Street where you could leave your horse, a stable.

Life: You went to school yourself at Woodard's Pond. What do you remember about your days as a student?

Mrs. Douglas: The main thing I remember about is having to walk from home through Tankard's Lane, we called it then, through that farm down there; and when it was rainy and muddy [laughing], it was kind of rough. Getting there and back was the main thing.

Life: Do you remember how far you had to walk?

Mrs. Douglas: It's nearly two miles, a mile and a half or two miles.

Life: When did they start with the school buses? Was that a lot later?

Mrs. Douglas: After they consolidated the schools. You see, all these little schools were all over, and they consolidated the school. Now, I can't remember dates; it's too far [back]. But after they done that, then they put the school buses in here and picked the kids up to carry them to school.

Life: That was after you were married?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes! That was! My younguns went to school out here when they first started school.

Life: I guess that was on up in the '30's.

Mrs. Douglas: In fact, I was on the committee at the school, what did they call it, Parents... Life: PTA?

Mrs. Douglas: That won't what they called it then, but that's what it was. I was out there and worked some kinda hard to get them consolidated. We really worked hard, Edgar's mother and some of the other women around.

Life: And then they all went to Bath?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, they all went to Bath.
Life: The ones west of here went into Washington?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes. I don't know exactly where it divides, right up there at Beaufort Tech, I think. In fact, that road that turns off and goes on that side of the road, I'm talking about--half the children go to Bath and half of them go to Washington.

Life: Everybody from right around here goes to Bath?

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes! Everybody on this road goes to Bath!

Life: Didn't you all used to call that area right around the college Nasty Town?

Mrs. Douglas: That was a little bit thisaway [east], but that's right [laughing]!

Life: What was Nasty Town?

Mrs. Douglas: [Still laughing] Oh, you don't want me to tell about that! Don't want to tell that!

Life: Your children, were they into athletics or sports in school?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes, all three of them.

Life: What did they play?

Mrs. Douglas: They all three played. The girls played basketball, and the boy played anything he could play until they finished school and went to college. The two girls got their degrees in health and physical education. Then they got out and taught it, and Frances is still teaching at East Carolina.

Life: Where did they go to college?

Mrs. Douglas: At East Carolina. Both the girls graduated from there.

Life: That was a teacher's college then?

Mrs. Douglas: It was ECTC when I was there. But it was East Carolina College until a few years ago when it became the university. You probably remember when they worked on getting it.

Life: You went to East Carolina yourself?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes. I didn't graduate there, but I went there for my teacher's training.

Life: What was East Carolina like when you were there?

Mrs. Douglas: It was just like now only not as big. They just had two dormitories, and all the classes were in that main building on the highway.

Life: There was just one main classroom building?

Mrs. Douglas: Just one.

Life: Were the boys and girls in class
together?

Mrs. Douglas: Not when I was there. [Laughing] There were no boys there!

Life: None at all?

Mrs. Douglas: No, sir!

Life: Where did the boys go?

Mrs. Douglas: State in Raleigh.

Life: I didn't know East Carolina was originally all girls. Is that right?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes. About that time in history you didn't find no men teaching school. All the teachers were women.

Life: This was well before you got married. So this was back before the first World War.

Mrs. Douglas: Oh, yes!

Life: Were your teachers at East Carolina men or women?

Mrs. Douglas: Both.

Life: But it was an all-girl school.

Mrs. Douglas: An all-girl school. I went two semesters, I believe. I don't know. I went one summer all summer, I know. I got part of my training for my teacher's certificate up here in the park at—what did they call it?

Life: The Washington Collegiate Institute?

Mrs. Douglas: Right.

Life: We did a story on that in our last issue.

Mrs. Douglas: You did! Well, I got part of my training there, teacher's training. And my husband went there, not for very long, but he went some.

Life: How did you like Washington Collegiate Institute?

Mrs. Douglas: Great, I had a lot of friends that were there, that went there, and we all got along great.

Life: I was very surprised to know that they had such a good private school, church school. It went out of existence in the '30's, I think. The economy got so bad, the depression. That subject comes up in classes, and I'm not old enough to remember it. But the depression, was it as bad as you hear about, the hard times of the '30's?

Mrs. Douglas: It was bad!

Life: How did it affect you and your family directly. Did you have enough to eat?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, as I've said, we always had a plenty of something to eat. We all had meat. We killed enough hogs in the fall of the year to last and give us all the ham, pork and stuff like that that we needed. And we had a cow; we raised her feed and all that stuff. We didn't buy much. And when the depres-
sion came in, where it hit us was clothes and things like that [which] you just couldn't get. You had to wear what you had.

Life: I guess the money was really short.

Mrs. Douglas: Yes.

Life: Were there a lot of people who lost their farms around here at that time?

Mrs. Douglas: I don't think so. I think they hung in there. It was just hard living, but they were used to that, at that time.

Life: The prices went way down, is that right? But nobody had any money, I guess. That's the irony of it: the low prices but nobody could buy anything.

When you first got married and early in your family life, what would you do mainly for entertainment? Did you play piano or organ?

Mrs. Douglas: We didn't have time to play much. We worked hard, and we usually went to church every Sunday. Of course, there were a few church socials. But most of the time we tried to save up and take a trip after the fall. Take a week and drive down to the beach and spend the night or go somewhere like that. Just take a little tour. There was no show down there then; it was just a thrill for the children to climb the sand dunes and play. That was a big thing for them.

Life: I guess the people had jobs on the farm that really took up all their time?

Mrs. Douglas: It really did. And when you got out in the field, there was the hogs to feed and the cows to feed and mules to feed, chickens to tend to. And, by the way, we raised chickens, too. We had them to kill too. If we wanted a chicken for Sunday dinner, we'd go out there Saturday evening and chop his head off and dress him. [Laughing] That's the way we got our chicken; we didn't go to the grocery store and get one then.

Life: Did you raise them just for your use or did you sell them?

Mrs. Douglas: We raised the chickens for our use. Back there first along, we saved our eggs and set our hens and raised them all here; and then later on as times changed and got better, I built me a little house out there for them to use to hatch in. There wasn't a hatchery back then.

Life: How would you say life is different in the last 10--15 years from what it was right around when you got married?

Mrs. Douglas: [Laughs] Don't ask me to explain that!

Life: I guess people have more leisure time now, don't they?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, there's a lot more
to go to now than there was—for entertainment.

Life: Do you think life is better now or was it better back when you were young?

Mrs. Douglas: Well, I wouldn't go back to what people call the good life. I'd rather live now.

Life: We were very impressed with Mrs. Douglas's old but sturdy home. She told us how her husband Edgar was involved in its construction.

Mrs. Douglas: Edgar cut the logs down here on the other farm and pulled them to town with a pair of mules and had them sawed and dressed and dried and had the lumber stacked up here, ready to go. And they started the house in January of '23.

Life: So he had the house contracted to be built?

Mrs. Douglas: Yes. Mr. Rowe lived on Charlotte Street, and it was finished when we were married in April.

Life: This is a solid house, isn't it?

Mrs. Douglas: That's right. Most of it is what people call heart lumber, heart of pine; my daddy used to call it fat lighter. I was asking so and so was it safe. I didn't want to have a fire. He said, "No, no. Miss Olive, if you was to have a fire in this house," he said, "there ain't enough firemen in Beaufort
County to stop it!" He said it would go up just like kerosene with all this fat lighter!

Conclusion

Mrs. Olive Douglas, the matriarch of Douglas Crossroads, has seen many changes during her 89 years. She has seen the more spectacular technological changes, such as electricity and the automobile. And she has seen the resulting changes in family lifestyle, where one's entire life no longer is consumed by the massive work demands of
But although things seem to change, there's really nothing new under the sun. Mrs. Douglas, we perceived, still affirms the old-time values--her husband--"He was great!"--and her family. We thank this gracious lady for sharing with us her memories of over 60 years of living at Douglas Crossroads.

Mrs. Douglas with Molly (l.) and Susan