

THE DISTRIBUTION AND CAUSES OF
RURAL HOUSE ABANDONMENT IN
PITT COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

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by

David Grover Schoettinger

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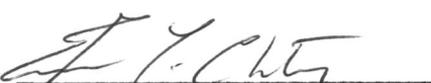
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by

David Grover Schoettinger

APPROVED BY:

SUPERVISOR OF THESIS


Ennis L. Chestang

CHAIRMAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY


Robert E. Cramer

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL


Joseph Boyette

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The purpose of this study is to provide an explanation for the large amount of house abandonment in the rural areas of Pitt County, North Carolina. During the summer of 1972 more than twelve per cent of the houses in the rural areas of that county were abandoned. Many of the other counties of eastern North Carolina possess similarly large numbers of abandoned houses.

The multitude of unoccupied dwellings are not caused by any single phenomenon, but are the result of several factors. Some of those factors are closely connected with the loss of rural population which has occurred in almost every county of eastern North Carolina over the last two decades and even longer in some areas. The loss of rural population in eastern North Carolina has basically been the result of the out-migration of thousands of agricultural laborers. In many cases it is the housing formerly occupied by those agricultural laborers which is now abandoned.

There are two principal reasons why the relationship between rural house abandonment and rural out-migration is less than perfectly direct. First, many of the out-migrants are young persons who leave the agricultural areas before establishing households of their own, and so do not leave any abandoned houses behind them when they go. Secondly, the high rate of internal migration

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within the rural areas of Pitt County often results in abandoned houses whose former occupants remain within the bounds of the county.

Nevertheless, two of the major causes of house abandonment in rural Pitt County are also causes of rural out-migration in that area. On the one hand there are the attractions of better-paying jobs in the factories of the North and other portions of North Carolina. Many of the migrants from rural Pitt County are following the lure of higher wages and improved working conditions. On the other hand farm workers are being squeezed out of their jobs by increased mechanization of agricultural procedures. Farmers are finding that production is both easier and more economical when human labor is replaced by machinery.

However rural house abandonment cannot be simply dismissed as a result of the rural out-migration and its underlying causes. The improvement of general housing conditions in the rural portions of Pitt County are also responsible for much of the house abandonment. As better housing becomes available to the residents of rural Pitt County, the older and more dilapidated of the structures are left unoccupied.

The attraction of higher wages in places outside rural Pitt County, the increased mechanization of agriculture, and the general improvement in the quality of rural housing are the three major factors behind the presence of abandoned housing in rural Pitt County.) However, the causes of that phenomenon are not necessarily the causes of the distribution of that phenomenon.

The distribution can be explained largely in terms of those people who are most likely to be affected by those factors which have been found to be the major causes of the phenomenon itself. In Pitt County, North Carolina those people are the rural blacks, most of whom are or were farm workers. The areas of the county with the greatest percentages of black population and black population decline are also the areas with the greatest percentages of rural house abandonment.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

House abandonment is one of the most obvious phenomena that can be observed in the rural areas of eastern North Carolina. One can rarely proceed a half dozen miles along even the most major thoroughfares without noticing at least one abandoned house, usually in an advanced state of decay. In some areas of several square miles over fifty per cent of the structures that were built for residential purposes are now abandoned. According to the 1970 Census of Housing for North Carolina, just under seven per cent of the all-year rural housing units in forty-one counties of eastern North Carolina are vacant¹ (Table I). The percentages of many of the individual counties are substantially higher than this regional figure. Certainly, abandoned housing warrants the attention of geographers on the basis of the frequency of its occurrence in this area, if for no other reason.

House abandonment is more than empty houses. There are undoubtedly many different reasons why houses stand empty, but the primary question here is what does an abundance of abandoned housing within a particular region mean? It could mean that the region has become so poor and undesirable that out-migration has left the houses vacant for lack of population to fill them. On the

¹ U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Housing, 1970, Detailed Housing Characteristics, Final Report HC (1)-B 35 North Carolina (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 157-78. This does not include temporarily vacant housing, such as that which is for sale or rent.

Table I - Abandoned Rural Housing in Eastern North Carolina

<u>County</u>	<u>All-year Rural Housing</u>	<u>Vacant* Rural Housing</u>	<u>% of Housing Vacant*</u>
Beaufort	9491	1055	11.1
Bertie	6524	594	9.1
Bladen	8121	472	5.8
Brunswick	11429	3680	32.2
Camden	1725	68	3.9
Carteret	8109	646	8.0
Chowan	1831	79	4.3
Columbus	13347	845	6.3
Craven	8807	335	3.8
Cumberland	15148	445	2.9
Currituck	2621	401	15.3
Dare	3258	561	17.2
Duplin	10499	788	7.5
Edgecombe	7829	684	8.7
Gates	2615	170	6.5
Greene	4479	401	9.0
Halifax	9527	490	5.1
Harnett	11949	423	3.5
Hertford	4298	243	5.7
Hoke	3283	152	4.6
Hyde	1915	273	14.3
Johnston	15972	877	5.5
Jones	3012	205	6.8
Lenoir	8395	333	4.0
Martin	5464	252	4.6
Nash	11712	377	3.2
New Hanover	8551	391	4.6
Northampton	6856	383	5.6
Onslow	14172	631	4.5
Pamlico	3192	183	5.7
Pasquotank	3623	239	6.6
Pender	6626	1074	16.2
Ferquimans	2818	262	9.3
Pitt	11257	678	6.0
Robeson	16473	745	4.5
Sampson	11685	622	5.3
Scotland	5216	159	3.0
Tyrrell	1319	152	11.5
Washington	2701	200	7.4
Wayne	13244	420	3.2
Wilson	8282	300	3.6
Total	307375	21278	6.9

*Does not include housing which is only temporarily vacant, such as that which is for sale or for rent.

Taken from Table 60, Detailed Housing Characteristics, North Carolina, 1970.

other hand, it could mean that the region is so prosperous that everyone has been able to afford a new home, leaving their old ones to depreciate. Whatever the exact cause, it is evident that some type of migration is at work in the creation of abandoned housing. One authority has analyzed migration and described it as "a response of human organisms to economic, social, and demographic forces in the environment."² It is towards the discovery of the nature of these forces and how their action results in house abandonment that this thesis is directed.

Statement of Purpose

Abandoned housing is a phenomenon which is distributed unevenly through space. To define and map the distribution of such phenomena has traditionally been the task of the geographer. However, this is but the first step to a full understanding of the subject under consideration. A complete analysis of the phenomenon should include the reasons which cause the distribution to be as it is.

It is the purpose of this particular study to analyze the reasons behind the distribution of abandoned houses in Pitt County, North Carolina. A person with a full knowledge of the factors which contribute to house abandonment in the county, who becomes aware of changes occurring in these factors, could reasonably expect complementary changes in the amount and rate of house abandonment, or vice versa. Also, an understanding of the factors which affect house abandonment in Pitt County should be useful in the study of house

²Donald J. Bogue, Principles of Demography (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969), p. 753.

abandonment in other areas.

The Study Area

Abandoned housing is by no means limited to the eastern portion of North Carolina, but in order to study a phenomenon of the magnitude of rural house abandonment, one must limit a study area to an area which contains both relatively acceptable samples of the phenomenon and is accessible for field investigation. Therefore, Pitt County has been chosen to serve as the focal area for this paper because of its fulfillment of both of those conditions (Fig. 1). The extent to which Pitt County is a normal North Carolina county, as far as abandoned housing is concerned, is illustrated in Table I. Six per cent of the all-year rural housing in Pitt County is abandoned, while the figure for the forty-one counties of eastern North Carolina as a whole stands at 6.9%.³ In addition, Pitt County has one vacant rural house for each 54.7 rural residents, while for the entire forty-one county region there are 45.2 rural residents for each vacant rural house. In numerous other categories ranging from value of farm machinery per acre of harvested cropland to percentage change in non-white population, Pitt County ranks very near the average for the forty-one county region. Although Pitt may not be the statistical epitome of all that an eastern North Carolina county should be, it contains no glaring anomalies, nothing which significantly sets it apart from its neighboring counties, at least in those considerations

³U.S. Bureau of the Census, pp. 157-78.

which might have a substantial effect upon abandoned housing. In other words, Pitt County is very normal as eastern North Carolina counties go, and it is this quality which makes it an admirable laboratory in which to conduct inquiries into the nature of rural house abandonment.

In addition to, and possibly an explanation for, this normality is the fact that Pitt County contains more than one of the combinations of rural conditions which can be found in various places in eastern North Carolina. There are significantly large areas in both the southeastern and northwestern parts of the county that are almost entirely uninhabited. Besides these very sparsely settled areas, Pitt County also includes more densely inhabited rural areas, a large proportion (70%) of the population of which is rural non-farm. Such areas include villages, as for example, Falkland, Stokes, and Black Jack, of a size and type which are found throughout eastern North Carolina. Because of its larger urban areas, especially Greenville, expanding into surrounding countryside, Pitt County rural areas have also been the scene of the development of small segments of suburban-type settlement patterns. With the exception of sea coast, Pitt County presents examples in varying amounts of nearly every type of rural condition that can be found in significant quantities in other portions of eastern North Carolina.

Notwithstanding the evidence to the effect of Pitt County normality with respect to the rest of eastern North Carolina in the matter of house abandonment, the greatest consideration in the choice of this county as the study area for this paper was its

immediate accessibility. The advantages of being close at hand clearly outweigh any small deficiencies which the area might have as to its typifying the eastern part of the state. The large amounts of field work required for research in a paper of this type make it necessary to select a study area as nearby as possible. It is the contention of this writer that an intensive study of abandoned housing in a relatively small area will yield more satisfactory results than would the scattering of efforts over a broader field, such as the Bright Leaf Tobacco Belt or eastern North Carolina in general.

It seems appropriate to here define certain other terms which will be used throughout the paper. The term "abandoned housing" indicates structures which once served as permanent residences for human beings but which at present are no longer being used for that purpose. This means that although a residence may have been converted to other uses, it is still counted as an abandoned house for the purposes of this study.

When applied to data derived from Bureau of the Census sources, "rural" will carry the census definition of pertaining to places outside the limits of urban places of 2,500 population or more. However, when used in describing the study area of rural Pitt County, its meaning will include only those areas of the county not within the corporate limits of incorporated towns of 1,000 population or more. It is at or near this level of population that the incorporated places of Pitt County take on an undoubtedly urban orientation while the three incorporated places of less population are decidedly less differentiated from the general rural surroundings. All of the county's unincorporated areas are considered rural.

Methods of Research

In order to gain an intimate knowledge of the study area, a map of the rural residential structures of Pitt County was prepared at a scale of approximately 1:22,000. On this map all residential structures, both abandoned and occupied, were located for the entire county with the exception of those areas within the corporate limits of urban places of more than one thousand population.

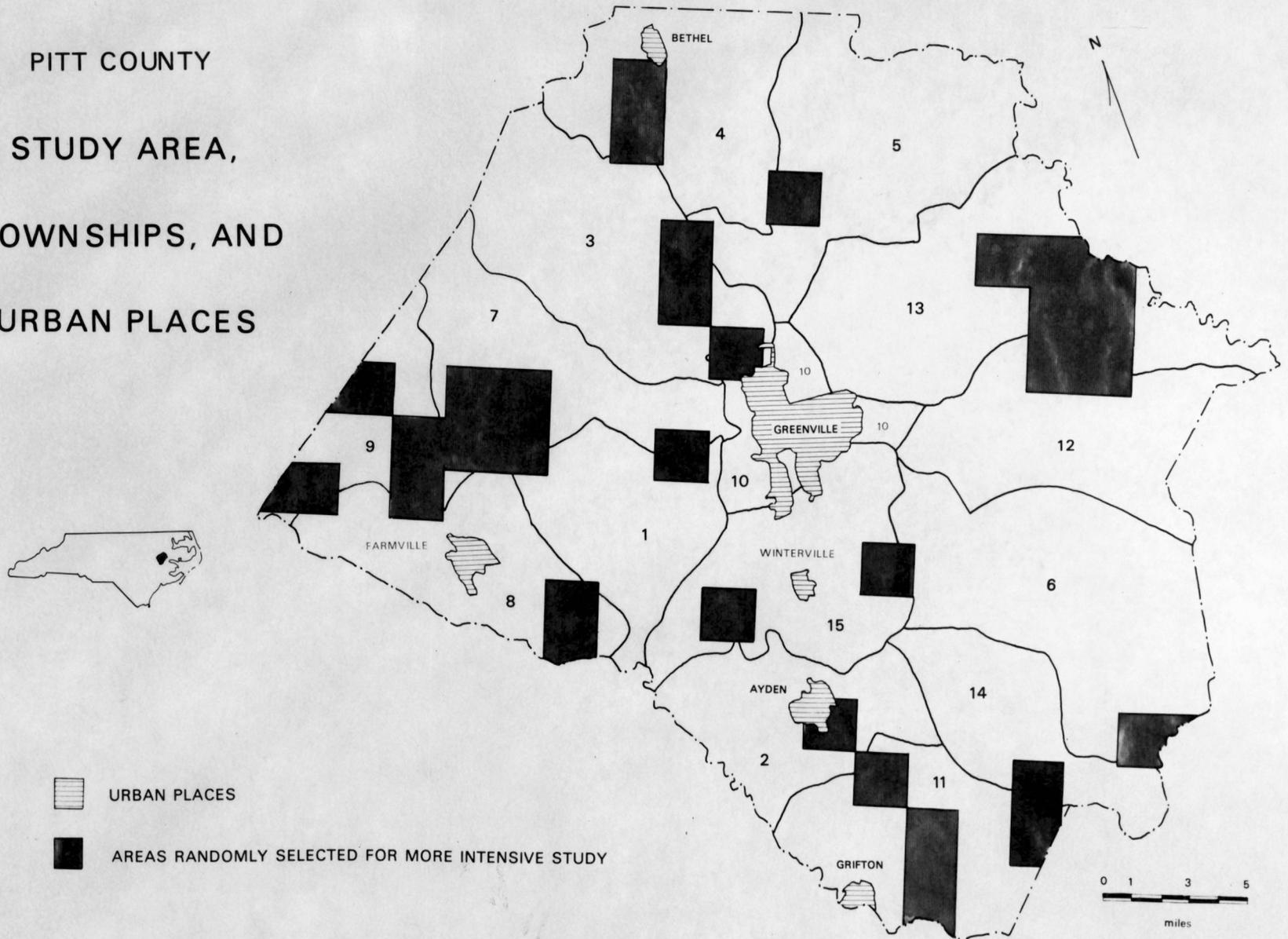
To gain an even greater familiarity with the study area, an intensive study was made during the mapping of Carolina Township. In that area an attempt was made to learn from surrounding residents information concerning each abandoned house. That information included the last date at which the house was occupied, the new residence of the last occupants, and the reasons why the move was made. The background information obtained in that phase of the study proved to be valuable as a reference point from which library research and census data could be evaluated and interpreted in its relation to the local situation. With the completion of the mapping of the entire county a 1.8 mile grid was superimposed on Pitt County and areas of high, medium, and low incidence of house abandonment were randomly selected for further study. A greater effort was made during that second segment of the study, however, to locate the owners of vacant houses and to seek out those with knowledge of general areas rather than individual houses. Also there was an attempt to gain information concerning recent agricultural innovations and trends in Pitt County and possible relationships between them and house abandonment from persons knowledgeable in local agricultural affairs.

To provide a wider focus on the subject, a review of the literature was undertaken to gain background on such associated matters as agricultural technology, rural out-migration, and agricultural labor costs. Each of the social and economic forces that was found to contribute significantly to house abandonment in Pitt County will be examined later in this thesis as to the means by which it operates in the study area.

Contribution to the Discipline

Where does the study of abandoned housing lie within the realm of geography as a whole? Aside from the obvious factor of being an unevenly distributed phenomenon upon the cultural landscape, abandoned housing is an important facet of settlement geography. Since every time a house is abandoned a small change in the settlement pattern of the area occurs, large numbers of abandoned houses can result in very sweeping changes in the settlement pattern of that area. The socio-economic forces which result in house abandonment are important factors in the alteration of settlement patterns. It is those forces, of which abandoned houses are only an outward manifestation, with which the geographer must concern himself in an attempt to explain the distribution of a phenomenon such as rural house abandonment. Information concerning these forces as they relate to house abandonment is a contribution which this study seeks to make to the accumulated knowledge of geography.

PITT COUNTY
STUDY AREA,
TOWNSHIPS, AND
URBAN PLACES



Chapter II

HOUSE ABANDONMENT IN EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA AND SOME POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

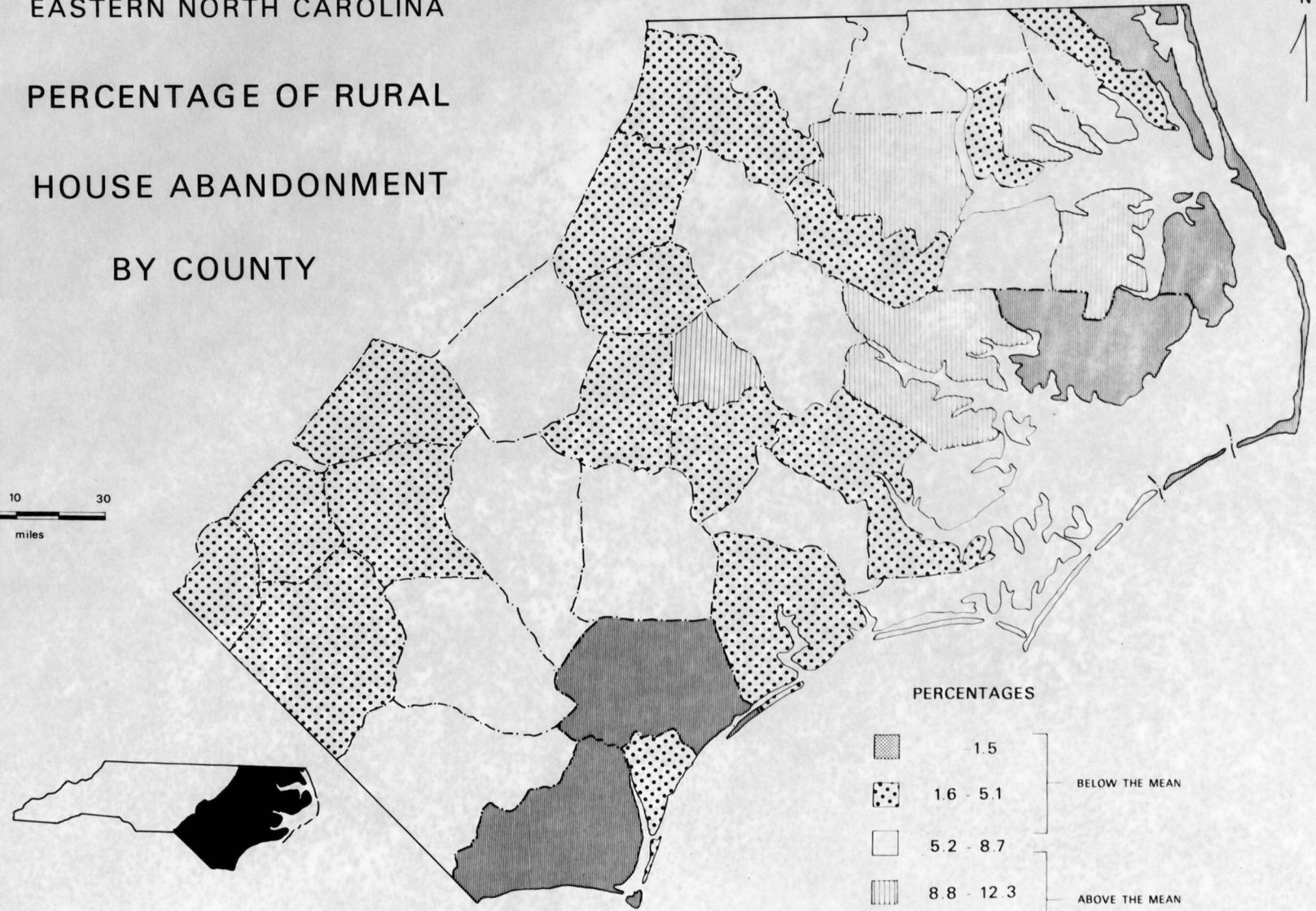
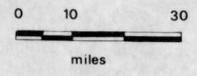
The first thing an area which includes a large percentage of abandoned housing might suggest to an impartial observer is that there has been a decline in the population of that particular area. That there has been a shift in population of some sort is undoubtedly true, but whether abandoned housing necessarily means a loss of population is one of the questions which this study proposes to answer.

Population Change

In many parts of rural eastern North Carolina abandoned housing and population decline appear to be related as common concrete symptoms of a more abstract illness which afflicts the rural society. Even if their relationship to one another is not that which is described in the preceding sentence, it would be difficult to argue that their existence side by side in numerous areas is entirely coincidental.

With a view toward clearly explaining the relationship between abandoned housing and population loss, the examination of the rural population figures for the forty-one counties of eastern North Carolina is a useful first step. (Tables I & II and Figures 2 & 3). A majority of the counties included in the tables declined in rural population between 1960 and 1970. In many, if not most, cases the percentage of rural population decline was greater than the percentage of abandoned housing. Assuming a very direct relationship between population loss and house abandonment, the phenomenon of the former exceeding the

EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA
 PERCENTAGE OF RURAL
 HOUSE ABANDONMENT
 BY COUNTY



PERCENTAGES

	1.5	} BELOW THE MEAN
	1.6 - 5.1	
	5.2 - 8.7	} ABOVE THE MEAN
	8.8 - 12.3	
	12.4+	

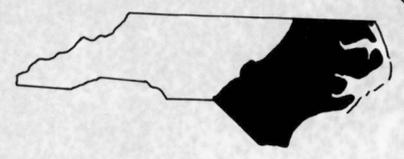


Table II
Rural Population Change 1960-1970 in Eastern North Carolina

<u>County</u>	<u>1960 Rural Population</u>	<u>1970 Rural Population</u>	<u>% Change in Rural Population</u>
Beaufort	26075	27019	3.6
Bertie	24350	20528	-15.7
Bladen	28881	26473	-8.3
Brunswick	20278	24223	19.5
Camden	5598	5453	-2.6
Carteret	18933	23002	21.5
Chowan	7271	5998	-17.5
Columbus	44290	42742	-3.5
Craven	43056	28005	-35.0
Cumberland	78235	50672	-35.2
Currituck	6601	6976	5.7
Dare	5935	6995	17.9
Duplin	40270	32367	-19.6
Edgecombe	30990	27664	-10.7
Gates	9254	8524	-7.9
Greene	16741	14967	-10.6
Halifax	39684	34235	-13.7
Harnett	37487	38513	2.7
Hertford	15492	14916	-3.7
Hoke	13298	13256	-.3
Hyde	5765	5571	-3.4
Johnston	50415	47601	-5.6
Jones	11005	9779	-11.1
Lenoir	30457	30337	-.4
Martin	20215	18160	-10.2
Nash	43680	40090	-8.2
New Hanover	22209	25351	14.1
Northampton	26811	24009	-10.5
Onslow	68553	43857	-36.0
Pamlico	9850	9467	-3.9
Pasquotank	11568	12755	10.3
Pender	18508	18149	-1.9
Perquimans	9178	8351	-9.0
Pitt	39977	36963	-7.5
Robeson	71030	61671	-13.2
Sampson	40552	37797	-6.8
Scotland	16941	18070	6.7
Tyrrell	4520	3806	-15.8
Washington	8822	9264	5.0
Wayne	48542	45554	-6.2
Wilson	<u>28963</u>	<u>28139</u>	<u>-2.9</u>
Total	1100280	987273	-10.3

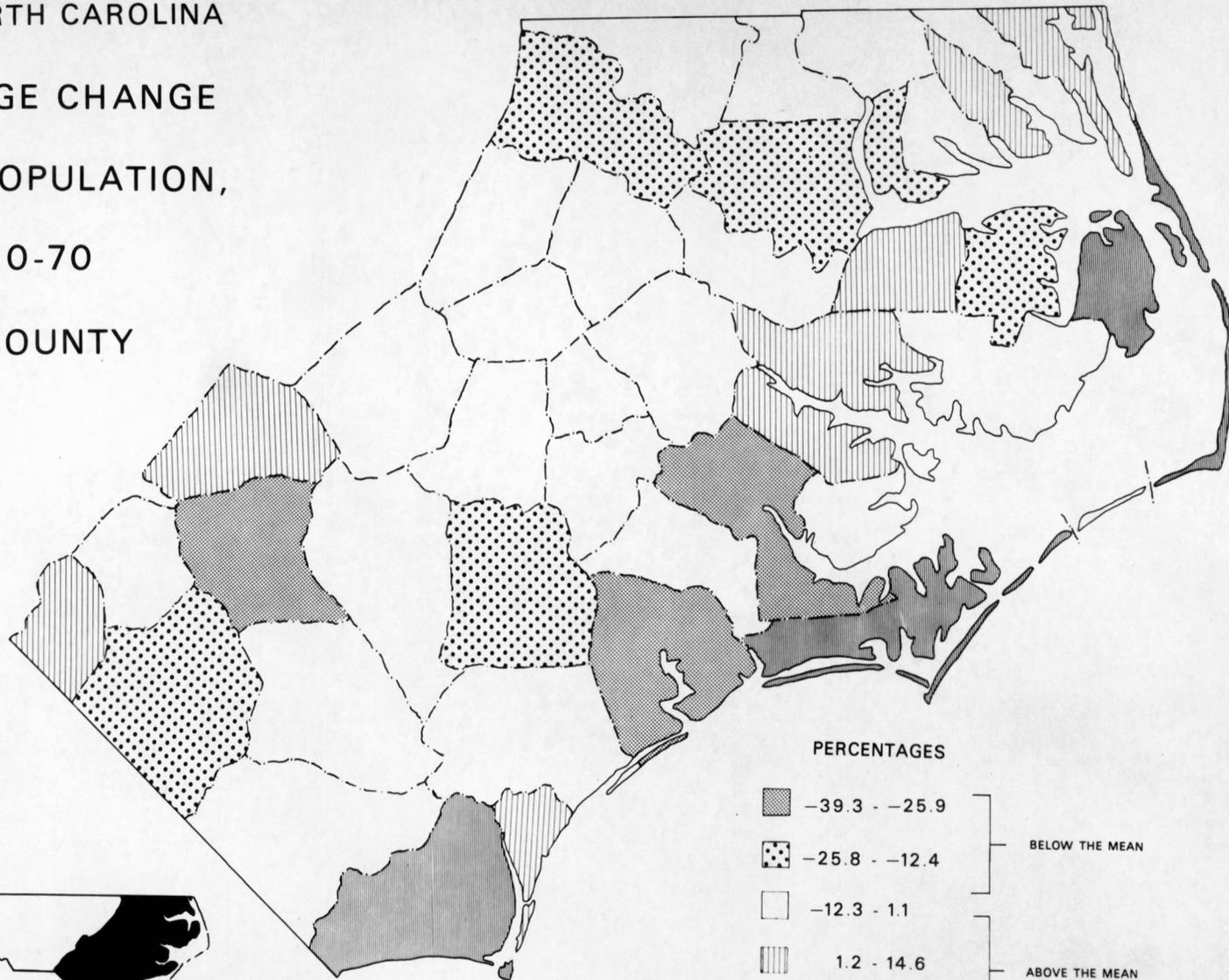
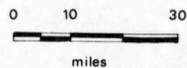
Taken from U.S. Census of Population:1970, Number of Inhabitants
 North Carolina, Table 9, pp. 18-9.

latter could possibly be explained by stating that it is the larger families which are abandoning their rural homes or that many of the abandoned houses are torn down soon after they become vacant. A better explanation, however, would probably be that in many of the counties the figures for rural population loss are considerably inflated by stationary migration to the cities and towns. That is, large annexations by various urban centers and reclassification of unincorporated areas have changed thousands of people from rural residents to city dwellers without their having to leave the comforts of their own homes. The effect of the annexations and reclassifications on the percentage of rural population lost between 1960 and 1970 is particularly evident in counties such as Onslow, Cumberland, and Craven where rural population declined over one-third during the sixties.

A sort of inverse explanation can be used for those counties in which the percentage of house abandonment was greater than the percentage of rural population loss or in which there was a rural population gain. It is likely that there has been an overflow of urban population into rural areas without subsequent annexations in those counties. Therefore, the segment of the urban population which is outside the corporate limits is counted as rural population and thus leads to a situation in which several counties with a substantial proportion of abandoned housing also show gains in rural population.

Neither explanation, however, has anything to say about counties in which there is no urban population. Among those counties there are some with large population losses and others with relatively large population gains; furthermore, the respective percentages of house

EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA
 PERCENTAGE CHANGE
 IN RURAL POPULATION,
 1960-70
 BY COUNTY



PERCENTAGES

	-39.3 - -25.9	BELOW THE MEAN
	-25.8 - -12.4	
	-12.3 - 1.1	ABOVE THE MEAN
	1.2 - 14.6	
	14.7 - 28.1	

abandonment in each appears to be largely unrelated to population variations. In other words, the distribution of abandoned housing cannot be explained simply by population loss. Even if the relationship between house abandonment and population loss were more direct, population change, like house abandonment, is merely an outward manifestation of some less apparent force or group of forces which are affecting the areas. To arrive at a meaningful explanation for the distribution of a phenomenon such as house abandonment, one must attempt to go beyond symptoms and come to terms with the disease itself. In order to do just that, it is necessary to turn next to determining who the participants in this social phenomenon are.

The Migrants

As has been noted above, whatever else an abandoned house may signify, it certainly signifies a change in human residence patterns. Leaving a house is definitely a form of out-migration, however, it is one for which few statistics are kept unless the person or persons leaving are headed for a destination in another county. Therefore, in this section reliance must be placed on the data on migration at a county level for a clue to the type of persons who are likely to be the last occupants of an abandoned house.

For demographic purposes there are two ways in which a house may be abandoned: death and migration. Just as those who have to be carried out are generally old, those who leave under their own power are usually young. Over sixty per cent of all rural out-migrants between 1950 and 1960 were under twenty years of age or reached that age

sometime during that decade.¹ The reasons for such a youth movement are fairly obvious and well-known. The young have not yet established the deep-seated roots of their elders. If life looks more promising elsewhere, there is less to keep the young person where he is. While youth may be no more subject to the "grass is always greener" syndrome than their parents, they seem more willing to yield to its call. *But also less likely to have est. a household*

Not only are rural out-migrants likely to be young, but also, in eastern North Carolina especially, they are apt to be non-white. While at least ten eastern counties gained rural population from 1960 to 1970, only two gained in rural non-white population during that period. Indeed, there were only two other counties in that group which lost less than five per cent of their rural non-white population during that decade (Table III). As late as 1950 eastern North Carolina was one of the few areas in the South where non-white population was still on the upswing.² Since then, however, almost every eastern county has experienced a drop in its non-white population. Not only are non-whites leaving rural areas faster than whites, the ones which remain tend to move around a great deal within the county units. Nationwide non-white mobility rates are higher than for whites, and most of the non-white

¹Calvin L. Beale, "Rural Depopulation in the United States: Some Demographic Consequences of Agricultural Adjustments" in Population and Society, Charles B. Nam, ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 420.

²John Fraser Hart, "The Change in the Distribution of the American Negro", The Annals of the American Association of Geographers, L, No. 3 (September, 1960), p. 254.

Table III
Rural Non-White Population Change 1960-1970 in Eastern North Carolina

<u>County</u>	<u>Rural Non-White Population 1960</u>	<u>Rural Non-White Population 1970</u>	<u>% Change in Rural NW Pop. 1960-1970</u>
Beaufort	9278	8240	-13.3
Bertie	14499	11615	-19.9
Bladen	12224	10450	-14.5
Brunswick	7172	7443	3.8
Camden	2354	2027	-9.6
Carteret	1732	1559	-9.9
Chowan	3748	2440	-34.9
Columbus	15897	13928	-12.4
Craven	10482	8618	-17.8
Cumberland	18134	13444	-25.9
Currituck	2097	1847	-11.9
Dare	404	508	25.7
Duplin	15113	11354	-24.9
Edgecombe	18438	14384	-22.0
Gates	5040	4556	-9.6
Greene	8428	7037	-16.5
Halifax	28463	22333	-21.5
Harnett	10361	9355	-9.7
Hertford	10538	9531	-9.6
Hoke	9011	8645	-4.1
Hyde	2443	2303	-5.7
Johnston	10383	8933	-14.0
Jones	5181	4410	-14.9
Lenoir	12037	9345	-22.4
Martin	10087	8066	-20.0
Nash	20016	16267	-18.7
New Hanover	3357	2495	-25.7
Northampton	17089	14191	-17.0
Onslow	9657	7627	-21.0
Pamlico	3606	3147	-12.7
Pasquotank	4942	4775	-3.4
Pender	8894	7963	-10.5
Perquimans	4303	3469	-19.4
Pitt	19648	15192	-22.7
Robeson	47176	40216	-14.8
Sampson	14973	13555	-9.5
Scotland	7823	6751	-13.7
Tyrrell	1974	1653	-6.1
Washington	4168	3862	-7.3
Wayne	16095	12496	-22.4
Wilson	11911	11034	-7.4
Total	439176	367064	-16.4

Taken from U.S. Census of Population:1970, Number of Inhabitants
 North Carolina and County Population Trends North Carolina 1790-1960.

mobility comes in the form of local movement.³ In light of this, therefore, it is not inconceivable that the last occupants of many abandoned houses still live within a few miles of their former domicile. This is a subject to which it will be necessary to return in more detail in a later chapter. Having determined that rural out-migrants are predominantly young and black, a return to the question of what factors have influenced them to leave is in order.

Push Factors Versus Pull Factors

Migration motivations are usually grouped into two large categories, the push factors and the pull factors. The following is a list of the types of things which fall into each of those categories.

Push Factors

1. Decline in a resource or a price paid for it.
2. Loss of employment.
3. Oppressive or repressive discriminatory treatment.
4. Alienation caused by failure to subscribe to prevailing beliefs, customs, or modes of behavior.
5. Retreat because of lack of opportunity.
6. Retreat from natural disaster.

Pull Factors

1. Superior opportunities for employment.
2. Opportunity for larger income.
3. Opportunity to obtain specialized education or training.
4. Preferable environment and living conditions.
5. Dependency.
6. Lure of new or different activities, environment, or people.⁴

The motivations listed above are of course very general and it is probable that one could find persons leaving the rural areas of

³Bogue, p. 763.

⁴Ibid., pp. 753-4.

eastern North Carolina for reasons that would fit under each of the twelve headings. However, when one gets into the specific area of rural out-migration, some scholars have come up with less general causes of the phenomenon.

"The factors permitting such a reduction in farm people are numerous and reasonably well known. Mechanization, improved seeds, better breeds and animal nutrition, good management, and advances in fertilizer, pest control and weed control have all combined to raise productivity and reduce manpower. In addition, the generally high operating level of the non-farm economy, the ease of physical access to the cities, and the dominant stylistic position of metropolitan life have attracted people away from farming areas."⁵

The above quote lists both push and pull factors as contributing to rural population decline, but does not attempt to compare them in relative importance. When the situation in the South in general and eastern North Carolina in particular is focused upon, the question of the relative significance of push and pull factors in rural out-migration takes on somewhat the complexion of the chicken-or-the-egg conundrum. Has agricultural mechanization driven away the labor force? Or has the labor supply been lured away by higher wages in industry, and mechanization adopted by the farmers as a form of compensation?

Mechanization

First, the case for the push factors is to be examined. In the recent past, the staples of Southern agriculture such as tobacco, peanuts, and cotton required large amounts of hand labor for their successful production. For example, peanuts at one time had to be dug, stacked, and threshed by hand. However, machinery can now do

⁵Beale, p. 417.

all of these tasks.⁶ Similar mechanical advances have eliminated much of the human element from cotton and threaten to do the same with tobacco.⁷ The technology to fully mechanize tobacco is available, all that remains is for the growers to come up with the necessary desire and capital to put this technology into practice. The small size of tobacco allotments, investment in present tobacco barns, and traditional marketing procedures hinder the adoption of full mechanization. Nevertheless, it is estimated that at least ten percent of the 1975 tobacco crop will be harvested by machines.⁸ And so the argument of those who favor the push factors goes that the rural population of major tobacco-producing regions such as eastern North Carolina has stayed relatively high because of the need for hand labor. But, with the advent of mechanization in these areas, they predict that the rural population is in for the distinct decline that has already begun in many places.⁹ That agricultural mechanization and rural population decline are both on-going processes in eastern North Carolina at this time is undeniable; the controversy is over who is chasing who. The push factor advocates propose that mechanization is

⁶James R. Anderson, "Specialized Agriculture in the South", Southeastern Geographer, X, No. 2 (November, 1970), p. 24.

⁷Beale, p. 422.

⁸"Handwriting's on the Wall: Tobacco Will Be Mechanized, But When?", The Farm Index, IX, No. 6 (June, 1970), p. 5.

⁹Wilbur Zelinsky, "Changes in the Geographic Patterns of Rural Population in the United States 1790-1960", The Geographical Review, LII, No. 4 (October, 1962), p. 522.

running labor out of the fields. Their opposites on the pull factor side counter with the assertion that farm labor has deserted the fields, leaving the farmers to bring in machines as rapidly as possible in order to fill the labor vacuum. As one of the latter puts it, "the 'pull' of urbanization and industrialization has been a greater influence than the 'push' of mechanization. Farm operators have had to mechanize to compensate for the loss of rural workers."¹⁰ Farm owners seem to agree with this view and have been complaining for years that they will have to switch from tobacco to other crops or rent their land to others if their labor supply keeps deserting them.¹¹

If one were to ask a pull factor advocate what mystical lure the forces of urbanization and industrialization hold for the farm worker, chances are that his answer would be simple, direct, and one word, "money". This was the primary finding of a study financed by the federal government which dates back to the World War I period, concerning the exodus of black, rural, Southerners from their homes to the factories of the North.¹² Since this period, the wage differential between Northern industrial labor and Southern agricultural labor has

¹⁰Merle C. Prunty, "Some Contemporary Myths and Challenges in Southern Rural Land Utilization", Southeastern Geographer, X, No. 2 (November, 1970), p. 3.

¹¹For examples of Pitt County farmers who have found their labor supply slipping through their fingers in recent years see Dennis Dudley, The Role of Flue-Cured Tobacco in the Rural Geography of Pitt County, North Carolina, East Carolina University Geography Research Paper No. 8, 1968, pp. 61 and 69.

¹²W.T.B. Williams, "The Negro Exodus in the South", in Negro Migration in 1916-17 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970), p. 7.

been great enough to keep a steady flow of labor moving northward. Although the price of agricultural labor in eastern North Carolina is rapidly rising, this is more of an action of the law of supply and demand than a determined attempt on the part of farm operators to retain what is left of their labor supply. The wage for farm labor in eight selected areas of North Carolina climbed from 75¢ an hour in 1966 to \$1.18 an hour in 1969,¹³ but this was still well below the federal minimum wage from which most types of agricultural labor were exempt.

Other Factors

Aside from the money factor, which is by no means a trivial consideration, adherents of the pull factors can point only to such vague things as broadened opportunities for cultural development and the excitement of big city living as magnets for the rural masses. However, the push people have other cards in their hand along with the ace of mechanization. Closely related to mechanization, for example, is the matter of changes in and improvement of crops. In Hyde County and other counties in that area of eastern North Carolina, recent decades have seen corn and soybeans come into almost complete predominance as the favorite crop of farm operators. In some areas the increases in those crops have been at the expense of tobacco and peanuts, but in most areas those gains have been more in addition to rather than in lieu of the traditional crops. ✓ Corn and soybeans do not require a great deal of labor, especially when compared to a crop such as tobacco

¹³Mildred G. Wilson, "The Agricultural Minimum Wage in 1969", Farm Labor Developments, (June/July, 1970), p. 7.

or peanuts. In addition to not being able to support farm labor, corn and soybeans have also become known for their slim profit margins which discourage father-son and brother-brother partnerships and therefore contribute even more to the exodus from rural areas such as Hyde County.¹⁴ While the above source cites crop changes as push factor, another source quotes a Pitt County farmer who switched much of his acreage to soybeans because he could not find the necessary labor for other crops.¹⁵ As with mechanization there are two ways of viewing the relationship between crop changes and rural population loss. It can be seen either as driving workers off the fields, or as a compensatory act on the part of farmers who are trying to make due with the little labor which is left.

Sometime around the middle of the twentieth century American agriculture seems to have discovered a principle which American industry had embraced in the latter part of the nineteenth century, namely that bigness is goodness. The economies of scale have lead to a consolidation of American farmland unprecedented in the prior history of the country. In 1940 the Southeast had 2,358,000 farms, but by 1960 the number had dropped to 1,050,000.¹⁶ And this process is still continuing. It has been estimated that in 1959 there were approximately 500,000 farmers in the United States who sold less than \$2500 in farm products each year, had little or no non-farm income, and were over 55 years of

¹⁴Kenneth C. Wilkinson, The Changing Agriculture of Hyde County, North Carolina, East Carolina University Geography Research Paper No. 6, 1967, p. 87.

¹⁵Dudley, p. 63.

¹⁶Prunty, p. 3.

age. While these farmers were unlikely to migrate off the land, it appeared likely that their farms would find their way into larger holdings upon the death of the owners.¹⁷ It might also be added that it is very possible that the houses of these farmers may not receive new occupants after the consolidation.

Farm consolidation in eastern North Carolina has been especially rapid. From 1959 to 1969 the average farm size in that area increased over fifty per cent, from 96.6 acres to 145.8 acres. In four of the forty-one counties average farm size more than doubled within the same period. The gain in average farm size was not due to an increase in total acreage, but to a severe decrease in the number of farms. Between 1959 and 1969 the number of farms decreased by almost forty per cent, from 61,117 to 37,183 (Table IV). This phenomenon was not localized in one section of eastern North Carolina, but was spread throughout the entire region. In no county did the number of farms fall by less than one-fourth. The trend towards farm consolidation shows that the migration from rural areas of eastern North Carolina is not limited to the hired hands, but reaches the farmers themselves, or at least potential farmers in the form of sons and daughters who prefer to seek their fortunes in non-agricultural occupations rather than follow in their parents' footsteps. But once again it can be argued either that consolidation, fostered by the economies of scale, is driving the less competitive operators from their fields or that consolidation is only a reaction to the diminishing number of farm operators.

¹⁷Beale, p. 422.

Table IV
Farm Consolidation in Eastern North Carolina

<u>County</u>	<u>% Change in Average Farm Size 1959-69</u>	<u>% Change in Number of Farms 1959-69</u>
Beaufort	28.2	-37.8
Bertie	41.2	-39.6
Bladen	15.2	-31.1
Brunswick	25.6	-40.0
Camden	57.7	-30.1
Carteret	5.3	-37.4
Chowan	30.2	-33.2
Columbus	20.4	-34.1
Craven	25.3	-36.8
Cumberland	46.2	-46.5
Currituck	41.3	-44.1
Dare	147.2	-76.2
Duplin	22.2	-28.8
Edgecombe	98.8	-58.6
Gates	30.2	-32.7
Greene	64.3	-40.3
Halifax	114.2	-61.2
Harnett	43.7	-37.4
Hertford	56.9	-41.0
Hoke	116.2	-60.2
Hyde	50.3	-33.5
Johnston	22.3	-31.2
Jones	40.1	-35.7
Lenoir	34.4	-39.9
Martin	50.1	-44.5
Nash	65.0	-46.8
New Hanover	72.9	-41.6
Northampton	71.9	-47.1
Onslow	9.2	-25.4
Famlico	19.8	-38.6
Pasquotank	44.8	-34.5
Pender	32.6	-38.8
Perquimans	29.6	-28.3
Pitt	47.3	-44.6
Robeson	65.3	-46.1
Sampson	31.6	-33.3
Scotland	246.6	-68.0
Tyrrell	56.8	-43.0
Washington	18.4	-28.9
Wayne	27.2	-34.1
Wilson	<u>37.0</u>	<u>-39.9</u>
Total	50.9	-39.2

Taken from Census of Agriculture, 1969, Part 26, North Carolina.

Not only is farmland being consolidated in the United States, but it is also being abandoned in many places. Between 1910 and 1959 most areas east of the Mississippi declined in area of cleared farmland.¹⁸ This fact could certainly be used to explain a loss of rural population in these areas, however, it must be pointed out that in the article cited above, eastern North Carolina stood out as one of the few regions along the Atlantic Seaboard where the acreage in cleared farmland declined only slightly or was actually on the increase. Since 1959 almost all eastern North Carolina counties have lost areas of harvested cropland, but this loss has been by no means as great as the loss in farm population which these same counties have been experiencing (Table V). As that table shows, the number of acres of harvested cropland per farm resident is increasing, and in most areas increasing quite rapidly. Although land abandonment could explain some of the rural population loss, it could by no means explain all of it. And again, the question arises of which came first, the abandonment of the land forcing the workers off the land or the disappearance of labor forcing the abandonment of the land.

Urban Expansion

There is, however, one factor which may explain a good deal of rural population decline, but which is also less susceptible to involvement in the push-pull controversy than the factors previously

¹⁸John Fraser Hart, "Loss and Abandonment of Cleared Farm Land in the Eastern United States", The Annals of the American Association of Geographers, LVIII, No. 3 (September, 1968), pp. 417-40.

Table V
Harvested Cropland Per Rural Farm Population in Eastern North Carolina

<u>County</u>	<u>Acres of Harvested Cropland 1959/Rural Farm Pop. 1960</u>	<u>Acres of Harvested Cropland 1969/Rural Farm Pop. 1970</u>	<u>% Change in H.C./R.F.P. 1959-1969</u>
Beaufort	11.6	15.7	35.3
Bertie	6.5	11.4	75.4
Bladen	5.0	7.0	40.0
Brunswick	4.7	5.1	8.5
Camden	21.2	80.0	277.4
Carteret	7.2	6.5	-9.7
Chowan	8.6	23.9	177.9
Columbus	4.5	5.5	22.2
Craven	6.5	6.0	-7.7
Cumberland	6.6	9.3	40.9
Currituck	26.5	69.6	162.6
Duplin	5.9	8.3	40.6
Edgecombe	7.1	9.0	26.8
Gates	10.5	16.1	53.3
Greene	6.2	8.9	43.5
Halifax	6.4	11.0	71.9
Harnett	5.4	6.6	22.2
Hertford	6.5	11.4	75.4
Hoke	7.2	9.1	26.4
Hyde	21.0	43.7	108.1
Johnston	5.8	7.5	29.3
Jones	6.8	14.8	117.6
Lenoir	7.0	10.0	42.9
Martin	5.7	11.4	100.0
Nash	4.5	5.0	11.1
New Hanover	14.6	2.8	-80.8
Northampton	8.6	30.1	250.0
Onslow	5.8	5.7	-1.7
Pamlico	14.6	9.4	-35.6
Pasquotank	22.8	23.4	2.6
Pender	6.1	8.2	34.4
Perquimans	16.7	17.7	6.0
Pitt	7.0	10.2	45.7
Robeson	5.0	8.9	78.0
Sampson	6.4	7.9	23.4
Scotland	8.6	12.1	40.7
Tyrrell	10.8	16.3	50.9
Washington	13.1	19.3	47.3
Wayne	7.6	8.9	17.1
Wilson	5.6	7.8	39.3
Total	6.7	9.6	43.3

Taken from Census of Agriculture, 1969, Part 26, North Carolina and
 Census of Population:1970, Number of Inhabitants North Carolina.

Dare County data not available for acres of harvested cropland.

discussed. This is the matter of urban expansion into surrounding rural areas. Urban expansion not only takes agricultural land out of production by turning it into residential or commercial areas, but also changes rural inhabitants into urbanites, not by the people coming to the city, but by the city coming to the people. In an analysis of rural land use changes in the South, Prunty puts urbanization at the head of the list of those forces which are responsible for these changes. According to him urbanization "has resulted not only in the numerical and areal expansion of metropolitan areas, but also in the growth of many small and medium-sized cities."¹⁹ A study of the effects of the expansion of one of these smaller cities, Jackson, Tennessee, claims that some of the surrounding county's best agricultural land has been appropriated for urban uses.²⁰

Turning to eastern North Carolina we find that the relationship between the presence of an urban area within a county and a large decline in the rural population becomes apparent only when urban expansion is institutionalized in the form of annexations of such areas into the corporate limits of the town or city. If an urban center expands beyond its corporate limits and these expansions are not annexed, they will show up in the census figures as rural population. If these areas are then annexed during the next intercensal period, the following census will show a large decline in the rural population

¹⁹Prunty, p. 1.

²⁰Elizabeth M. Fravega, "Farm Land Abandonment - Problems or Polemic?", Southeastern Geographer, X, No. 2 (November, 1970), p. 60.

of that county, even though much of that lost population may not have been rural to start with, but extra-corporate urban.²¹ What may be urban expansion at a more or less even pace is likely to appear in census figures as a phenomenon of great fluctuations on the order of a "two steps forward, one step back" movement. Although census materials have their limitations, they can still be useful in pointing out the relationship between urban expansion and rural population decline, even though this relationship may be either understated or exaggerated. In assessing the situation it is undoubtedly true that the expansion of urban places has been the cause of some rural population decline in various areas of eastern North Carolina.

Metropolitan Attraction

Urban areas affect rural areas not only by expansion, but also by the attraction which they hold for the rural population. The basic principle behind the pull factors is that the higher wages and more exciting life style of the cities will exert a magnetic force upon rural dwellers.

In order to see if some sort of spatial differentiation in regard to this metropolitan attractive force could be discerned, eastern North Carolina was divided into concentric zones, roughly twenty-five miles wide, centered upon Raleigh and Norfolk. Those counties which were nearer Norfolk than Raleigh fell into one of three Norfolk zones based on its distance from that city with the nearest of the zones designated

²¹Further discussion of the effect of annexations upon changes in rural population figures is found on p. 12 above.

Table VI
Urban Attraction of Raleigh and Norfolk

	<u>% Rural House Abandonment</u>	<u>% Rural Pop. Change 1960-70</u>
Norfolk		
Zone I	8.5	0.0
Zone II	7.0	-10.0
Zone III	10.9	-3.7
Raleigh		
Zone I	3.9	-4.4
Zone II	5.6	-15.7
Zone III	6.5	-18.0
Zone IV	12.9	8.0
Combined Norfolk and Raleigh		
Zone I	4.7	-3.7
Zone II	5.9	-14.5
Zone III	7.0	-16.5
Zone IV	12.9	8.0

Data compiled from Tables I & II above.

Zone I. The remaining counties were divided into four Raleigh zones on the same basis. The percentage of house abandonment and rural population change were then calculated for each zone (Table VI). The results of this operation for rural population change were disappointing in that no clear pattern emerged. At least part of the reason for this was the presence in some zones of counties which had disproportionately large amounts of rural population loss caused by the annexations of substantial areas by their urban places.

On the other hand, the house abandonment figures, especially

when the Norfolk and Raleigh zones are combined, show a pattern of increasing abandonment the farther one moves away from the large urban centers. This would lead to the belief that the nearer one lives to a large metropolitan area, the less inclination he is likely to feel to move, and conversely, it would be those persons who live farthest from the big city who are most likely to relocate.

The gain of population in Zone IV may be accounted for by the presence of a large number of seaside resort areas in that zone. These areas are gaining population but each settlement tends to remain relatively small and is not counted as an urban place. The influx of people into such coastal communities in the counties of Zone IV may account for the disguising of migration from other parts of those same counties which is indicated by the house abandonment percentages.

One other conclusion which might be drawn from this data is that if metropolitan areas are exerting an influence on the rural out-migrants of eastern North Carolina, the Norfolk and Raleigh urban areas do not appear to be the chief focal points of that influence. The smaller urban places of eastern North Carolina and the large metropolitan centers outside of the Southeast would also have to be considered in a reckoning of the attraction of metropolitan places for the rural population of eastern North Carolina.

Limitations of an Overview

In this chapter an attempt has been made to find some possible explanations for rural house abandonment in eastern North Carolina. It has been surmised that house abandonment is related to rural

population decline in some way, but the exact nature of that relationship is not entirely clear. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that even if the causes of rural population loss are not identical with the causes of rural house abandonment, any light which this chapter may have shed on the former will be of assistance in an attempt to discover the latter. It has been noted that a number of factors have been advanced as the causes of rural out-migration and that plausible cases can be made for almost all. From that one can conclude that there is more than one factor at work here and that those factors are complementary and interwoven to an extent which makes them difficult to unravel at the regional level. There are no individual factors which stand out at that level as adequate explainers of the distribution of either rural house abandonment or rural population decline.

Therefore, in order to obtain a clearer picture of the house abandonment situation and the factors that account for its distribution, a single county of eastern North Carolina will be studied in depth. Pitt County has been chosen to serve in this capacity and the remainder of this study will be devoted to describing and explaining the rural house abandonment situation as it occurs there. Hopefully, the discoveries made at this level of the study can, with minor alterations, be applied to the broader aspects of rural house abandonment which have been outlined in the present chapter.

Chapter III

THE DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL ABANDONED HOUSING IN PITT COUNTY

One thing which must be brought out in a discussion of rural abandoned housing in Pitt County is that the distribution is in a constant state of flux. A number of factors result in that phenomenon being one of constant change. For one thing, the process of house abandonment is definitely an on-going one. Houses are continually joining the ranks of the newly vacated. Whatever the causes of house abandonment in Pitt County may be, there is little evidence that they have ceased asserting themselves or that they will do so in the near future.

The Instability of the Rural Abandoned Housing Situation

The number of abandoned houses present in Pitt County today is by no means the total number which have been abandoned. After standing empty for extended periods of time, many houses are destroyed. Owners still pay taxes on such houses whether anyone is living in them or not, so that if the owners do not expect to rent them out or use them for any other purpose, they are apt to have them demolished. Local volunteer fire departments are often willing to dispose of these unwanted edifices by burning them down as a means of practice for their members. Other houses are picked apart slowly in hopes that some usable building materials can be recovered (Fig. 4). Total removal of these houses from the landscape makes it difficult to estimate the total number of dwellings which were occupied in given areas at a particular point in time. In addition, every time an abandoned house is destroyed, another slight change in their distribution occurs.



Figure 4

Abandoned house in the process of being dismantled gradually in an attempt to salvage any materials of value (Winterville Township).

A factor of much smaller scale than the destruction of vacated housing is the re-occupation of seemingly permanently abandoned housing (Fig. 5). This usually requires a certain amount of repair work dependent upon the length of time that the house has been vacant and upon who the new occupants are to be. If they are to be hired hands or migrant laborers, it is probable that the owner will do no more than minimum health standards require. However, in some cases the re-occupation involves a change of ownership in which the new owner intends to occupy the house himself. If so, the refurbishment of the house is likely to be the object of many weeks of work and quite a large monetary



Figure 5

Abandoned house in the process of being restored to a livable condition by the owner who acquired the structure for next to nothing and plans to make it into a home for himself (Grifton Township).

investment.

In addition to houses which are vacated and re-occupied at irregular intervals, there are large numbers of houses which pass in and out of usage on a seasonal basis. These are the dwellings which are reserved for the migrant workers who arrive each year to help with the tobacco harvest. These houses are occupied for only a matter of weeks and then left vacant for the remainder of the year.

With occupied houses constantly being vacated, abandoned housing being destroyed, vacant housing being re-occupied and the seasonal

occupation of other houses adding to the confusion, it can be seen that the situation is very flexible and in a state of almost constant change. In light of the above it would be foolhardy to claim that this chapter presents a minutely detailed description of the rural house abandonment situation in Pitt County. Instead, a more general account is offered of the areas of high, medium, and low percentages of house abandonment along with the relationship between rural abandoned housing and the other features of the settlement pattern of Pitt County.

Rural Areas Adjoining Urban Places

The urban areas of Pitt County account for almost exactly half of its total population and the great majority of the urban population is in the county seat of Greenville. The outward expansion of Greenville into the rural areas of Pitt County nearest the town appears to be a factor which leads to a decline in the percentage of abandoned housing within those areas. As Greenville expands, land is taken out of agricultural production and turned to more profitable usages which are then available to the owner. At that stage there may be an amount of house abandonment due to urban expansion as former agricultural laborers are forced to seek employment elsewhere. However, that stage is merely transitory as urban expansion brings to the area an urban-directed population to replace the farm population that has been displaced. This urban population may re-occupy the vacant dwellings or the older buildings may be demolished to make room for new commercial or residential developments.

In the Greenville area the outward edge of urban expansion is beginning to affect the use of agricultural land on Evans Street south of the city limits and on Greene Street north of the city limits. Other areas are also being affected, but in the areas mentioned above several houses have recently been vacated in preparation for the urban advances. Behind the lines of urban expansion in the Hooker Road section of Greenville, that process is in a much more advanced stage. Several of the former farm houses along the road have been abandoned and a few destroyed in order to make room for the other types of land uses. Residential areas have been constructed and former agricultural land converted into a city park. Just off the 264 bypass southwest of Greenville, two abandoned houses stand back in a field only a few hundred feet from the backyards of a recently built housing development. The field in which those houses stand has not been planted for the 1973 season and the houses remain as a remnant of an agricultural land use which has been superceded by the urban advance.

However, for every house that has been abandoned in those areas near urban places, dozens of new ones have been constructed (Fig. 6). That means that the percentage of abandoned housing near urban areas, as a rule, is smaller than in areas beyond the reach of urban encroachment. In order to see the relationship between the percentage of house abandonment and the distance from the nearest urban place more clearly, mile-wide concentric circles were constructed around the principal urban centers of Pitt County out to the fifth mile. The percentage of abandoned housing in each concentric circle was calculated and the results compiled in Table VII.



Figure 6

Abandoned house near the entrance to one of the more affluent housing developments in the Greenville area (Winterville Township).

The influence of Greenville, as might be expected, was found to be much greater than that of any of the smaller towns in keeping the percentage of abandoned housing low (Fig. 7). The larger population, over 29,000, of Greenville could be expected to make its influence felt over a larger area than would the smaller towns of Farmville (4424), Ayden (3450), Grifton (1548), or Bethel (1514). The increase in each concentric circle as one moves outward is fairly regular for Greenville, except for the outermost circle in which the percentage may be artificially low because at that distance the circles of Greenville cross the town of Winterville.¹

Table VII
The Impact of the Urban Places of Pitt County upon the Percentage of
Abandoned Housing in Adjacent Rural Areas

Greenville	<u>% of Rural Abandoned Housing</u>	Farmville	<u>% of Rural Abandoned Housing</u>
Less than 1 mile	0*		0
1-2 miles	.4		6.5
2-3 miles	2.7		18.8
3-4 miles	5.5		15.9
4-5 miles	<u>6.0</u>		<u>19.3</u>
Total	4.1		14.9
Ayden		Grifton	
Less than 1 mile	6.0		3.1
1-2 miles	12.0		5.2
2-3 miles	12.1		11.0
3-4 miles	14.0		18.7
4-5 miles	<u>17.2</u>		<u>22.6</u>
Total	13.8		14.1
Bethel		Combined Urban Places	
Less than 1 mile	12.5		7.1
1-2 miles	18.7		5.8
2-3 miles	28.9		10.3
3-4 miles	11.8		10.5
4-5 miles	<u>30.7</u>		<u>13.6</u>
Total	21.2		10.3

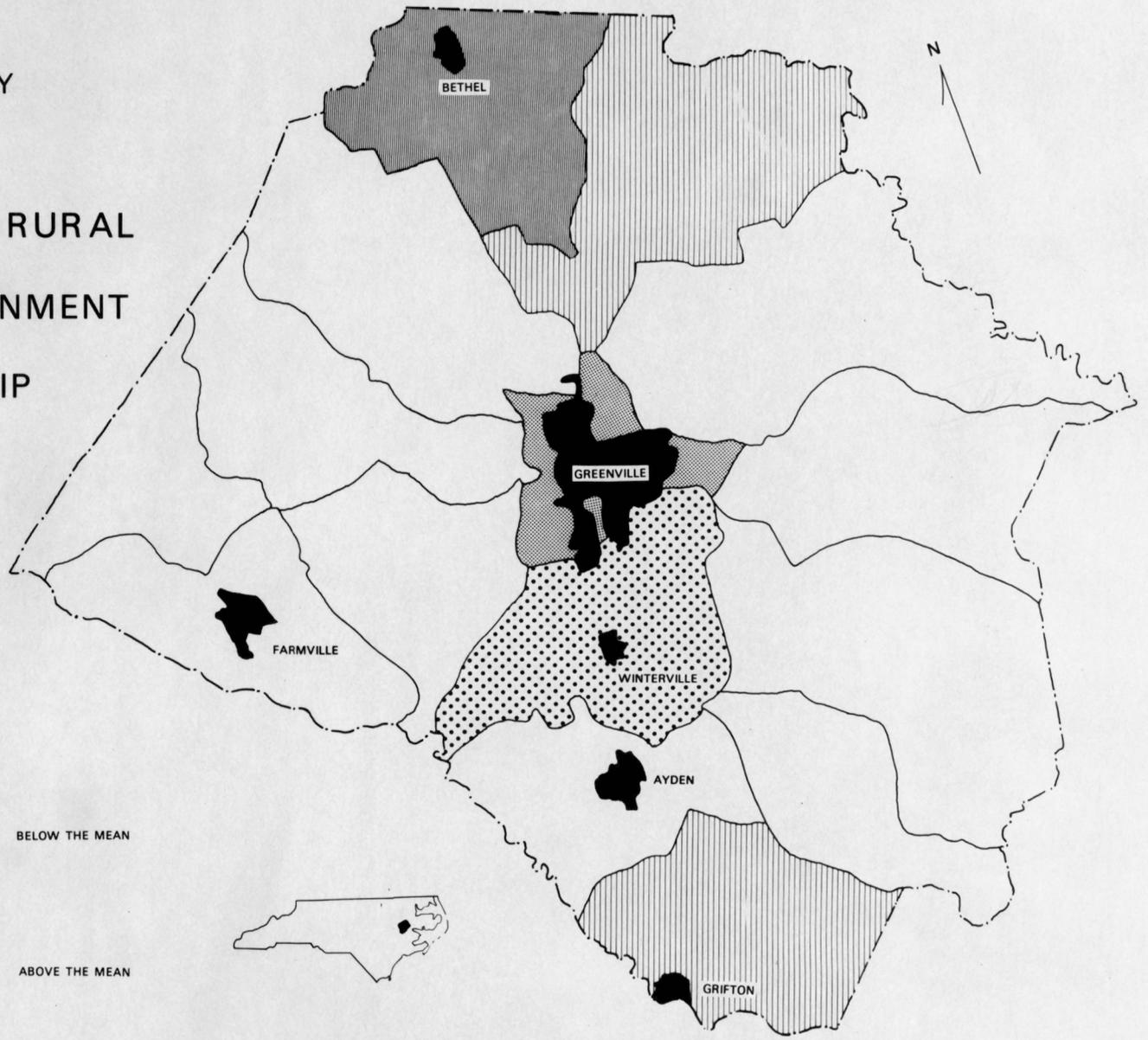
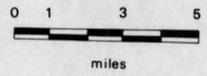
*Denotes circle in which there is no rural housing.

The percentage of house abandonment increases in each successive ring for the smaller towns of Pitt County also, except for the fourth circles of both Bethel and Farmville. For Bethel this fourth circle has a lower percentage of abandoned housing than even the innermost

¹Although in population Winterville compares with Bethel and Grifton, concentric circles were not constructed for it because of its proximity to the much larger town of Greenville. The figures for Winterville would have reflected the impact of Greenville upon the area much more than that of Winterville.

PITT COUNTY

PERCENTAGE OF RURAL
HOUSE ABANDONMENT
BY TOWNSHIP



PERCENTAGES

	2.2 - 6.4	BELOW THE MEAN
	6.5 - 10.7	
	10.8 - 15.0	ABOVE THE MEAN
	15.1 - 19.3	
	19.4 - 23.6	

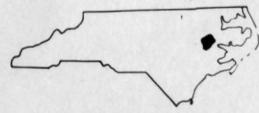




Figure 8

Abandoned house just outside the corporate limits of Bethel. High rates of house abandonment occur in this area right up to the city limits (Bethel Township).

circle (Fig. 8). This anomaly is difficult to explain, but may have something to do with the fact that parts of the Bethel area were not counted because they lay outside Pitt County. The addition of those areas may have righted the situation, however the most logical explanation for this anomaly is that the urban range of Bethel just does not extend that far into the rural area. It therefore does not influence the area sufficiently to create a successively increasing pattern such as surrounds the other towns.

The fourth ring of Farmville is not as sharply deviant as that of Bethel, but Farmville is a larger town and its influence should be

felt at that distance. However, large parts of the Farmville fourth and fifth circles lie outside of Pitt County, so that may account for some of the discrepancy. Also, the village of Bell Arthur lies within the fourth circle and its presence may account for the lower percentage of abandoned housing within this circle.

In the total for all of the urban places the first circle has a higher percentage of house abandonment than does the second circle. That is because the towns with the lowest percentages in their first circles have very few total houses within those nearest circles. As a result, their lower percentages are outweighed by the higher percentages of the first circles of Bethel and Ayden which have larger numbers of total houses within their innermost circles. Aside from the first circle, the combined totals follow the same successively increasing pattern to which most of the individual towns conform.

The figures for the percentages of abandoned housing at the township level bear out this direct relationship between the percentage of abandoned housing and the distance from the nearest urban place only with respect to Greenville. Greenville Township has by far the lowest figure among the townships while Winterville and Grimesland, the townships which border Greenville on the south and east respectively, have the next two smallest percentages of rural house abandonment (Table VIII). It is no coincidence that Greenville has been expanding most rapidly to the south and east. There has been significant urban expansion to the north of Greenville, and

Table VIII
Percentage of Pitt County Rural Housing Which Is Abandoned, By Township

<u>Township</u>	<u>% of Rural Abandoned Housing</u>	<u>% of Rural Pop. Change, 1960-70</u>
1. Arthur	14.1	-14.2
2. Ayden	13.6	-8.4
3. Belvoir	11.8	-3.6
4. Bethel	20.0	-30.5
5. Carolina	18.9	-22.2
6. Chicod	12.2	3.0
7. Falkland	13.5	-21.5
8. Farmville	13.0	-13.9
9. Fountain	11.8	-17.8
10. Greenville	2.1	-9.9
11. Grifton	18.4	21.1
12. Grimesland	11.4	5.1
13. Pactolus	12.0	2.1
14. Swift Creek	13.0	-8.8
15. Winterville	<u>8.8</u>	<u>-6.6</u>
Total	12.4	-8.4

Source for abandoned housing percentages is a field survey conducted between May and October, 1972. Source for population data is the U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population: 1970, Number of Inhabitants, North Carolina, Table 10. The numbers to the left of the township names refer to Figure 7.

the percentages of abandoned housing for both Belvoir and Pactolus townships, which border Greenville on the northwest and northeast respectively, are both below the county mean. However, the figures for the parts of those townships nearest Greenville are far below the mean and it is the large amount of house abandonment in the parts of those townships which are further away from Greenville that are responsible for bringing the township figures up near the mean.

In the case of the smaller towns of Pitt County, the townships that bear their names appear to have greater percentages of house abandonment than those townships in which there are no urban places.

That leads to the conclusion that the influence exerted by these smaller towns upon house abandonment in surrounding rural areas does not extend more than a few miles. Therefore, at a township level the figures for percentage of rural house abandonment are largely unaffected by the presence of one of these smaller towns.

However, the influence of these towns becomes a great deal more visible when Pitt County is divided into units smaller than a township. In order to accomplish such a division for the purposes of this study, thirty-three points, scattered more or less evenly throughout the county, were arbitrarily selected and regional boundaries constructed from the perpendicular bisectors of the lines connecting these points.² In this way the thirty-three arbitrary regions whose percentages of rural house abandonment are given in Table IX were created. Their relatively small size allows greater accuracy in pinpointing areas of high percentage house abandonment and decreases the amount of generalization necessary in discussing the distribution of abandoned housing in Pitt County. The thirty-three arbitrary regions and their percentages of house abandonment indicate that the areas of lowest abandonment are the area around Greenville, the areas immediately to the east and southeast of Greenville, and the

²This practice was amended slightly in order to let the Tar River, rather than a perpendicular bisector, serve as a regional boundary whenever it lay between two of the points. This was done in order to keep the regions from straddling the river and joining together two areas, for all practical purposes, that were not contiguous because of the lack of connecting transportation facilities.

Table IX
Percentage of Pitt County Rural Housing Which Is Abandoned,
By Arbitrary Regions

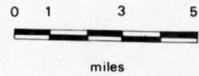
<u>Arbitrary Region</u>	<u>% of Rural Abandoned Housing</u>
1. Ayden	12.4
2. Bell Arthur-Ballards Crossroads	18.7
3. Belvoir	13.0
4. Bethel	18.8
5. Black Jack	14.8
6. California-Kings Crossroads	22.0
7. Central Pactolus	26.9
8. Conley High School	6.3
9. East Greenville	1.7
10. East Pactolus	9.9
11. Falkland	11.3
12. Farmville	11.4
13. Fountain	10.4
14. Gardnerville	17.1
15. Grifton	4.7
16. Grimesland	13.2
17. Grindle Pocosin	25.0
18. Hanrahan-Littlefield	15.6
19. North Greenville	2.3
20. Penny Hill	22.0
21. Renston-Roundtree	16.8
22. Saint Johns	30.6
23. Shelmerdine	16.7
24. Simpson	8.8
25. South Greenville	5.2
26. Staton	14.3
27. Stokes	18.7
28. Venters Crossroads	13.4
29. Voice of America	10.5
30. West Greenville	6.1
31. West Pactolus	19.8
32. Whitehurst	24.1
33. Winterville	<u>12.3</u>
Total	12.4

Source of data is a field survey conducted between May and October, 1972. Numbers to the left of arbitrary region names refer to Figure 9.

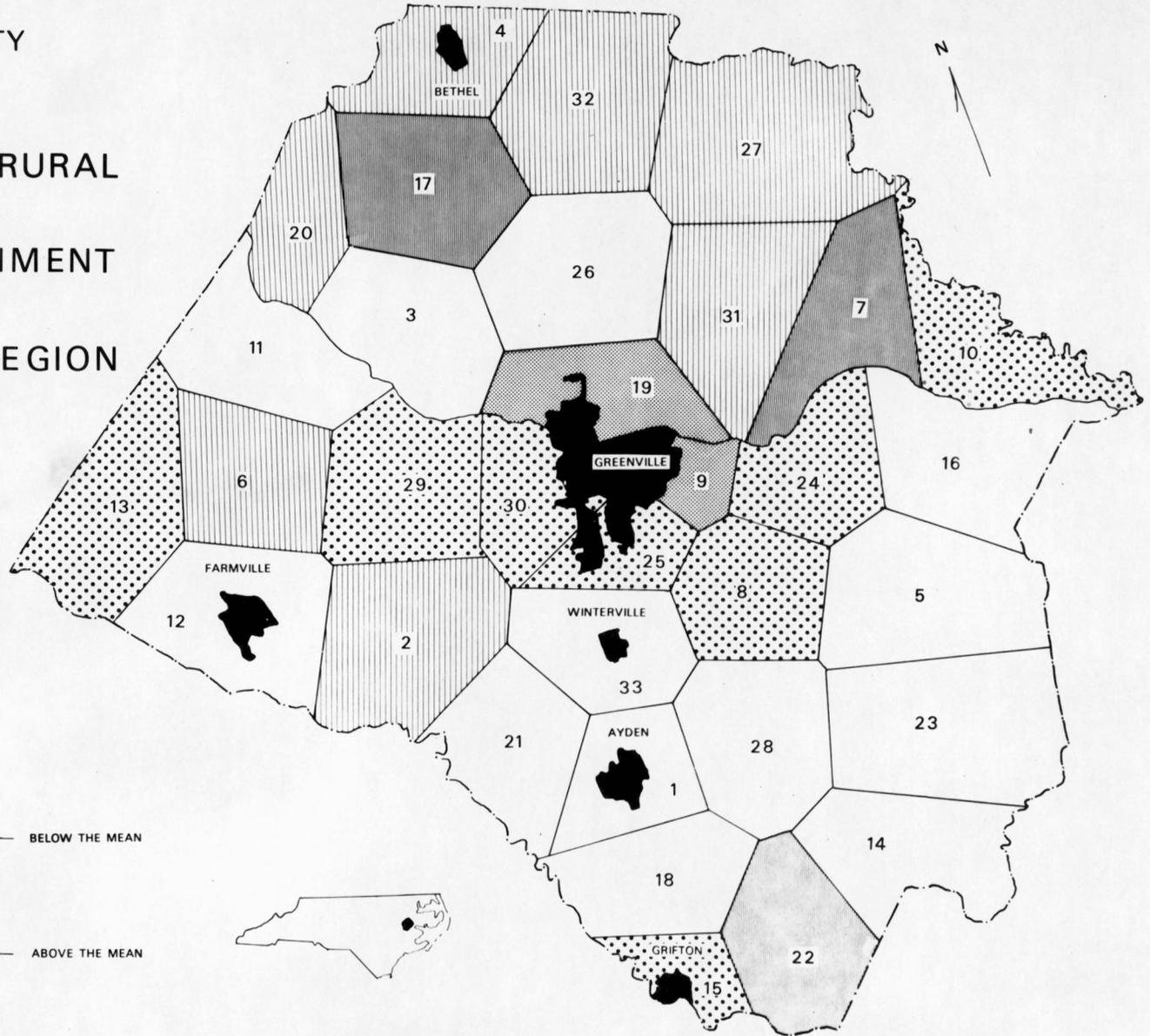
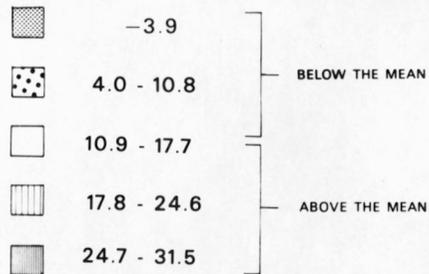
Grifton area (Fig. 9). The impact of Greenville upon rural house abandonment patterns can be seen to be definitely greater to the

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BY ARBITRARY REGION



PERCENTAGES



east and southeast than in any other direction. The percentage house abandonment figures for the arbitrary regions surrounding Bethel, Farmville, Ayden, and Grifton have a relatively lower percentage of abandoned housing than other areas within the same township.³ All of this fits in neatly with the suggestion made earlier that the rural areas bordering the urban places of Pitt County have lower percentages of abandoned housing than do the rural areas which are located further from urban influences.

Smaller Communities

Pitt County also contains several villages and hamlets with populations of less than one thousand. The impact which these communities have on the percentage of abandoned housing in the surrounding areas is quite small. Even within the communities themselves abandoned housing is fairly common, although the percentage stays relatively low because of the clustering of occupied housing at those points. The villages and hamlets in high house abandonment areas tend to have comparatively high percentages of house abandonment while those in low abandonment areas have lower percentages. In other words, it appears that with smaller communities it is the adjacent areas which have the influence on the communities as far as house abandonment is concerned, rather

³Winterville is somewhat different because of its proximity to Greenville. Parts of Winterville Township have very low percentages of rural abandoned housing, but this is due more to their nearness to Greenville than to their nearness to Winterville.

than vice versa as is the case with the larger towns.

That is not to be unexpected because villages and hamlets are very much a part of the rural landscape of Pitt County. The nature of those communities, many of which are merely a few houses and a general store clustered around a crossroads, is much more rural than urban. Many of the same factors that would have an effect upon abandoned housing in open rural areas would have much the same effect within small communities. In the next section of this chapter those open rural areas will be discussed.

Open Rural Areas

It is in the rural areas which are not located in close proximity to any of the towns, villages, or hamlets of Pitt County that abandoned housing is most common. Although these areas vary among themselves in percentage of abandoned housing, on the whole, the majority of such housing in the county is located here.

That suggests that whatever the causes of total house abandonment may be, they are essentially of disseminated rural settlement phenomena and can be linked to factors within the open rural areas themselves rather than urban-related factors acting upon the rural areas from without. In fact, we have seen previously in this chapter that while the advance of urban settlement patterns into rural areas may cause some house abandonment, the total effect of such advances is to lower the percentage of abandoned housing within the area.

In those open rural areas especially, and to a lesser extent

in other areas of the county, the nature of the road upon which a house is located appears to be related to its chances of being abandoned. The percentage of abandoned housing along unpaved roads is considerably higher in most sections of the county than along nearby paved roads. Prunty noted this phenomenon in other parts of the South almost twenty years ago.⁴ Conclusions by Prunty indicate that housing which is not readily accessible to the automobile in all types of weather is not as desirable as that which is accessible. His conclusions apply also to Pitt County. As farm labor becomes more and more scarce, those laborers who remain have a greater variety of housing from which to choose. Houses whose locations at considerable distances from the nearest paved road are constant threats to the well-being of the family automobile are likely to be looked upon with disfavor and shunned when possible, other factors being equal. The builders of new houses also take this into consideration and almost all of the new housing that has been constructed in rural Pitt County within the last five years has been built along paved roads. However, the question of paved roads versus unpaved roads may cease to be a meaningful consideration within the near future as more and more of the county's secondary road system becomes paved. There are a handful of houses located quite a distance from any road; however, logistical problems have already forced the abandonment

⁴Merle C. Prunty, "The Renaissance of the Plantation", The Geographical Review, XLV, No. 4 (October, 1955), p. 483.

of most of them.

In addition to living near paved roads, rural folk also seem to desire to live near one another. The isolated farmstead based upon an agricultural system where each family worked its own plot of land is a thing of the past. It is a rarity indeed to find a house in rural Pitt County which is more than a quarter mile from its nearest neighbor, and it is safe to say that a majority of the rural residents of the county live within one hundred yards of another occupied dwelling. Many of the houses that are found off by themselves are abandoned. The overall settlement pattern of rural Pitt County is much more clustered than dispersed, and to a great extent this has been influenced by people's desire for the company of their fellows.

It might be thought that since relatively isolated houses are more apt to be abandoned than more accessible ones, the abandoned housing would reveal a relict settlement pattern that would be more dispersed than the present one. This is somewhat true in that much abandoned housing reflects the system of sharecropping that was prevalent in Pitt County up until relatively recent times.⁵ The settlement pattern associated with sharecropping as practiced in Pitt County included a large number of dispersed houses for the use of the sharecroppers, each house being located near the plot of land which the sharecropper had

⁵Prunty discusses the settlement pattern that was associated with sharecropping in other parts of the South, Ibid., pp. 470-1.



Figure 10

Three similar houses in a row, all built for tenants. At the time of the photograph (May, 1973) only the one in the middle was occupied. At least three other abandoned houses stand within one quarter mile of this site (Fountain Township).

been allotted by the owner (Figure 10). This pattern is still in evidence near Yankee Hall in Pactolus Township and near California in Farmville Township; however, now almost all of the houses in this pattern are abandoned. The few people who remain in these houses are more likely to be wage laborers than sharecroppers. It is probable that the relict settlement pattern that is in evidence in the two locations mentioned above would occur in other areas of the county except that many of these former sharecropper houses have been destroyed or removed from

their original locations.

The destruction of abandoned housing has been discussed at an earlier point in this chapter, but the movement of those houses is also a topic which is worth consideration. As the sharecroppers' houses became vacant, the owners discovered that although the buildings were of little use to them where they were, if they were brought up from the fields to the main farmstead, they made excellent storage facilities or additions to other houses. Those houses were for the most part very small and could be moved by mule power with very little difficulty. They could be put behind the main house and used as a large closet for all those things too good to leave outside but not good enough to bring inside, or they could be attached to the back of another house and used as a kitchen.

The transformation of sharecroppers' houses into modular storage units which can be moved around the farm and used where needed is just one stage in the pattern of sequent occupance which applies to the rural housing of Pitt County. The pattern remains basically constant for all types of rural housing, but the number of stages in that pattern through which a particular house passes depends largely on the stage at which it enters the sequence. The small houses of the sharecroppers enter the sequence well down the line so that they pass through only the last few stages. The entire sequence begins with the landowners' houses which are usually relatively large and the occupants of which are generally white. As the years go by, a lack of heirs



Figure 11

House vacated by death of relatives of owner who is now seeking agricultural laborers to put into this house (Fountain Township).

who are interested in actively pursuing agriculture may lead to absentee ownership with the owner following some other occupation in a nearby town. The owner's house will then probably pass along with the land to a tenant who leases the land from the owner (Fig. 11). As the house becomes older, the tenant may build a new house or the land may be let to another tenant who rents several farms from different owners and works them all from a common base of operations which may be on none of them. When the tenant moves to new surroundings, the house may fall into the hands of sharecroppers who split their crop with the

owner in exchange for the use of the land and necessary equipment, or as is more likely nowadays, a laborer who works for the tenant. During this stage the laborer may get a job in a nearby town but still retain the use of the house in return for the labor of his family during seasonal peak periods. From this stage the house may move directly into abandonment or it may go through a period in which it is used for seasonal labor, being occupied only a few weeks out of the year and standing vacant the remainder of the year. When the house is finally abandoned, it may pass through a stage in which it serves as a storage facility, but for the purposes of this study the house becomes abandoned when it is no longer being considered as a possible residence for human beings. The ultimate end to the abandonment stage is demolition.

That is a very general outline of the sequent occupance of rural housing in Pitt County. Individual houses spend differing amounts of time in each of the stages and many skip one or more of the stages completely. This paper is primarily concerned with the entry of houses into the abandonment stage. That entry may occur directly from any of the preceding stages, as it is not extremely rare for houses to go from owner's residence directly to abandonment. The next chapter will delve much more deeply into the factors which effect that latter stage of the sequent occupance pattern and explore the reasons behind the appearance of large quantities of abandoned housing upon the rural landscape.

The General Distribution

There is abandoned housing in all sections of rural Pitt County but when it is taken as a percentage of all rural housing a definite pattern of high, medium, and low incidence emerges. The most striking feature of this pattern is the paucity of house abandonment within the rural areas adjoining the town of Greenville. In rural areas adjacent to the other towns of Pitt County the percentages of abandoned housing are less than those in the rural areas further from these towns, but the influence of these smaller towns upon the general pattern is nowhere near as pronounced as is the impact of Greenville. From the analysis of that phenomenon it would appear that the larger the population of an urban place, the greater its influence will be on the distribution of abandoned housing in the surrounding rural areas.

Reaching out from Greenville, which is located near the center of Pitt County, are three elongated zones of less than average house abandonment. The first extends south along state highway 11 through the towns of Winterville, Ayden, and Grifton. The second stretches eastward along U.S. route 264 through the villages of Simpson and Grimesland and the third reaches to the northwest on either side of the Tar River through the townships of Belvoir and Falkland.

There are also three general areas in which the percentage of abandoned housing is well above average. The largest of the areas includes most of the county north of the Tar River. It

forms a wide, east-west arc stretching from the northwestern section of Belvoir Township through Bethel and Carolina Townships and finally southeastward into the central sections of Pactolus Township. The second area of high percentage abandonment is located in the southeast corner of the county, consisting of the eastern half of Grifton Township and the southern parts of Swift Creek and Chicod Townships. A third such area begins in the region near the point where Falkland, Fountain, Farmville, and Arthur Townships all come together and then forms an arc extending southeastward through Arthur and into the western portion of Ayden Township. The areas of high and low percentages can be seen to a certain extent in Fig. 9.

The preceding paragraphs describe the general distribution of abandoned housing in rural Pitt County. Parts of this distribution can be explained by proximity to an urban area, but the remainder seems to be the result of factors within the rural areas themselves. In the next chapter those factors will be examined as to their effect upon the rural house abandonment situation in Pitt County. The light thus shed on those factors should help explain not only the distribution of abandoned housing within the county, but also the very existence of that phenomenon.

Chapter IV

THE CAUSES OF HOUSE ABANDONMENT IN RURAL PITT COUNTY

In Chapter II various possible factors related to rural house abandonment in eastern North Carolina were investigated at a county level. No obvious or simple explanations were forthcoming at that time, so that it was concluded that inquiries in a single county might prove to be more fruitful. The results of those inquiries are recorded in this chapter and, although the explanations presented below are still not simple, it is the belief of this writer that they are valid. In Chapter II it was concluded that rural house abandonment and rural out-migration are related in some way but that their exact relationship to one another is not entirely clear. Closer examination of the methods by which the rural out-migration process functions in Pitt County has led to a greater understanding of that relationship, and it is with an explanation of that process that this chapter begins.

Rural Out-Migration and House Abandonment

In the period between the 1960 and 1970 censuses, the rural population of Pitt County declined by over three thousand persons or seven and one-half per cent.¹ When this figure of rural population decline is broken down into townships, as has

¹U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population, Number of Inhabitants, Final Report PC(1)-A35, North Carolina (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1971), p. 19.

been done in Table VIII, a great diversity among the different regions of the county can be seen. The greatest loss of rural population seems to be occurring in the northern and western portions of the county, while the eastern townships are gaining rural population (Fig. 12). The two townships, Carolina and Bethel, which suffered the greatest losses from 1960 to 1970 are also the leading townships in percentage of rural house abandonment. This would seem to indicate a striking relationship between those two factors, however, the townships with the next greatest declines in rural population, Fountain and Falkland, had only moderate rates of house abandonment. Furthermore, Grifton Township, which led all townships in rural population gains between 1960 and 1970 also had the third highest percentage of rural house abandonment. The latter cases are indications that the relationship between rural house abandonment and rural population loss may not be as direct as might be thought.

A partial explanation of the cases which deviate from a direct relationship is the matter, previously discussed in Chapter II, of the expansion of urban areas across corporate limits and the subsequent annexations of those areas into the urban places. The town of Grifton had expanded its corporate limits, but by 1970 had not formally annexed the areas into which it had expanded. The presence of a significant population within those areas which were still classified as rural for the purposes of the census was the leading reason for the gain in

rural population in Grifton Township between 1960 and 1970. The town of Greenville, on the other hand, annexed a considerable amount of territory between 1960 and 1970 and that is the main reason for Greenville Township showing a significant decline in rural population.

However, the principle reason for the less than perfectly direct relationship between rural house abandonment and rural population decline is that there is not a one-for-one relation between those two phenomena. Not every person who migrates from the rural areas of eastern North Carolina leaves an abandoned house behind him, and not every abandoned rural house is the result of an out-migration. In fact, many of the migrants from the rural areas of Pitt County do not leave as family groups, but as individuals, usually young individuals who have been living with their parents or other relatives, so that there is no house left unoccupied upon their departure. Those youths see no future for themselves in agriculture and so seek employment in the urban areas of North Carolina and states farther north. That leaves only the old folks at home and when they die or become too old to work and move in with relatives, their houses may become abandoned. In cases such as this there is a time lag of several years between the actual migration and the subsequent abandonment of the house. And if new occupants can be found for the house, there may be no abandonment at all.

This youth migration applies not only to laborers and

tenants, but also to the farmers themselves. One farmer in the southeastern section of the county has seen two of his sons reject agriculture for more profitable occupations in the North. A third son who has remained on the farm has built himself a newer house on a nearby main highway. Thus, when the farmer and his wife pass on, it is likely that their house will join the ranks of the abandoned, not directly as a result of the migration of the occupants, but indirectly through the migration of heirs. A Falkland Township farmer has experienced a similar loss of children to non-agricultural pursuits. Both of his daughters have found clerical positions in Greenville while his son works at a large industrial plant in neighboring Beaufort County. Even the farmer himself has left the farmstead for a house in the nearby village of Falkland. However the farm house has not become abandoned, as the farmer has rented it to a man who works in Farmville but prefers rural living. In this case the youth migration to the towns has not resulted in any house abandonment, but their exit will be reflected in census data referring to rural population loss. This case also shows one of the ways in which the expansion of an urban-directed population beyond the city can counteract trends toward both rural population decline and rural house abandonment.

More of that youth movement may begin to have an effect on house abandonment, however, as the parents of the migrants, the farmers, tenants, and laborers, become older. The average

*The repercussions
of the grand exit of the
young in the 60's + 70's
may not even truly be
felt yet until parents
die in 80's + 90's*

age of the farm operators in Pitt County is now over fifty years.² Each year many of them are removed from the farm by death or retirement. And as they are removed, a considerable proportion of their housing will probably be left vacant due to current trends in farm consolidation and improvement in the general quality of housing. Nevertheless, it is likely that a significant period of time will have passed between the migration of the children of the occupants and the ultimate abandonment of the house. That time lag between the migration of youth and the abandonment of their parents' houses is an important reason for the imperfectly direct relationship between rural out-migration and rural house abandonment.

Another reason why the relationship between those same two factors is less direct than it could be is that the last occupants of abandoned houses, excepting those who depart for the uncertain destinations attainable only through death, tend to remain in Pitt County. Most of those moves are only a few miles and most do not show up anywhere in the census figures because no political boundaries are crossed in the course of the move. The high percentage of moves on the part of the last occupants of abandoned houses which end as well as begin in rural Pitt County reflects the high mobility

²Ed Yancey, Pitt County Chairman of the North Carolina State Agricultural Extension Service, interview, May 17, 1973.

rates of the agricultural laborers of the area.

That high degree of local mobility on the part of the rural proletariat of Pitt County is partially the result of the tenuous grasp which that group has upon its housing. Few of those farm workers own their own homes, nor do many of them pay any rent. Most of them are supplied with the use of a house free in exchange for the availability of their labor and that of their families to the farmers who own the houses or to the farmers' tenants. This not only puts the occupant more or less at the mercy of the owner as far as his housing is concerned, but also creates a situation in which a minimum of concern about the well-being of the house is generated among its occupants. Disagreements and misunderstandings between farmer and laborer are not uncommon, and since there are usually other farmers looking for laborers, movement resulting from change in employers takes place frequently. The laborers in most cases have few ties with the house and little loyalty to the owner. If another farmer offers a better house to a laborer for comparable work, he is likely to move his possessions down the road and begin work for his new boss. In that way, when families of laborers do move into town or "up North", the poorest houses are the ones most likely to become abandoned even if the out-migrants do not leave directly from them.

*some got stacks
w/ tools they
cant maintain
eg Land's end*

When such families do leave the farm, that out-migration must be considered in the context of the highly mobile background from which they are likely to have come. Among families

Table XI
Destination of Moves on the Part of the Last Occupants
of Abandoned Housing in Rural Pitt County

<u>Destination</u>	<u>% of Moves from Carolina Twnsp.</u>	<u>% of Moves from Study Areas</u>	<u>Combined %</u>
Rural Pitt County	47	53	50
Urban Pitt County	21	24	22
Other North Carolina	17	10	14
Outside North Carolina	$\frac{15}{100}$	$\frac{14}{101^*}$	$\frac{14}{100}$

Carolina Township figures are based upon 66 usable replies gathered in a survey of abandoned housing in that township of Pitt County during the summer of 1972. The second column of figures represent 59 usable replies from a survey of abandoned housing in randomly selected study areas in Pitt County during the spring of 1973. The third column is the combined percentages of the first two.

*Column does not add up to exactly 100% because of rounding.

moving as a unit there is a great deal more movement within Pitt County than there is between the county and the outside world, at least on the part of the last occupants of abandoned houses (Table XI). The figures in this table represent only the last occupants of abandoned houses, but it can be assumed that the pattern of their movements is more or less comparable to those of Pitt County agricultural laborers as a group.

The entire picture, therefore, shows a great deal of local movement on the part of rural families, particularly agricultural laborers, with only about every fourth move being to a destination outside Pitt County. For example, one family of laborers worked on at least three different farms in the southeastern portion of



Figure 13

Abandoned house vacated by a family of farm workers who lived in two other places in rural Pitt County before moving to New Jersey (Chicod Township).

the county in a period of five years before finally migrating to New Jersey. Only one of their former houses is now abandoned (Fig. 13). In another example which illustrates how this local movement works toward the overall improvement in the quality of rural housing, a family working on one farm for seven years moved up through a series of houses owned by the same farmer. Starting off in the poorest house, one which is now abandoned (Fig. 14), the family moved into a better house on the same farm when it became vacant. Later, when a still better house, the one in which they presently live, became vacant, they moved into



Figure 14

House abandoned by farm worker who now lives in the house in the background. Both houses are owned by the same farmer (Farmville Township).

it. This house had become available when the previous occupant had gotten a job off the farm and had been able to move into a new brick house nearby.

The local movement of agricultural laborers between farms and between houses on the same farm is another major reason for the lack of a greater correspondence between rates of rural out-migration and rural house abandonment. Houses can be abandoned in that way without any rural population being lost to the area. From the discussion of the relationship between rural out-migration and rural house abandonment which has been presented

on the preceding pages, it can be seen that these two phenomena are not without certain areas of resemblance, however, a number of complicating factors prevent their relationship from being precisely direct. The two most important of those factors are the migration of young people rather than entire families and the high degree of local movement among rural agricultural workers.

Despite the fact that rural out-migration is not completely synonymous with rural house abandonment, there are enough areas of correspondence so that further investigation into the causes of the former phenomenon are justifiable in the pursuit of the causes of the latter. At least one-fourth of the last occupants of abandoned houses in Pitt County are leaving the county entirely and the reasons behind their departure are certainly germane to this paper.

There is no doubt that migration from the rural areas of Pitt County is taking place. The census figures show that plainly enough. The rural farm population of Pitt County has dropped from almost thirty-seven thousand in 1940 to less than twenty thousand in 1960³ and to less than eleven thousand in 1970.⁴

³County Population Trends in North Carolina 1790-1960, Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina and Statistical Service Center, 1969.

⁴U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population:1970, General Social and Economic Characteristics Final Report PC(1)-C35 North Carolina (Washington:U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 493.

What the census figures do not say is why these people are leaving and where they are going.

When those same questions were discussed briefly in Chapter II as they applied to the whole of eastern North Carolina, it was observed that there is a measure of disagreement among geographers and others as to whether the so-called "pull" factors or "push" factors take precedence in explaining the rural exodus. There is a similar difference of opinion among the rural residents of Pitt County. The largest group sides with the pull factors in asserting that the migration of the farm workers is a direct result of increased economic opportunities in places other than rural Pitt County, however there is also disagreement on the form that those economic opportunities take. Most would agree that the average black agricultural worker can make a great deal more money in the factories of the North than he can in the fields of the South. With more factories opening in North Carolina each year, the agricultural laborer is finding that he has less distance to travel in order to achieve economic independence from the soil, making the attraction even stronger.

It is that economic independence that the average worker most relishes about a job in town. He is no longer dependent on the farmer for his housing because he has the resources to buy a home of his own, whether in town or in nearby rural areas. Not only are those houses of better quality than those which the average farmer can provide for his labor, but also they belong to the workers themselves who no longer have to remain in the good

graces of their employers in order to retain a roof over their heads. The wages which industry pays its workers are high enough for the individual worker to establish a large measure of economic independence, while in most cases the wages paid by the farmer to his labor are usually not.

The farmer realizes that he is competing with industrial wage levels for labor, but he cannot afford to keep pace with those rising wage levels. Most of the farmers are aware of the opportunities that are opening up for their laborers outside of agriculture and do not blame them for leaving the farms, in fact some of the smaller-scale farm operators are being tempted by the same opportunities. Since they cannot hope to win an economic struggle with industry for their labor, many farmers have tried various forms of compromise. One of the most common of such forms is for a farmer to give a person who has a full-time non-agricultural job a house in which to live in exchange for the labor of that person and his family during the few weeks of peak activity which the production of tobacco requires. That type of situation is fairly common in Pitt County, however, it can lead to difficulty when the worker is required to choose between his two masters.

In a recent occurrence on a farm near Farmville a laborer who worked in a factory in town was not allowed to leave his job for the few weeks necessary to bring in the tobacco crop of his landlord. He was therefore faced with the choice of either having to quit his factory job or move out of the farmer's



Figure 15

House abandoned by factory worker who could not fulfill his obligation to the owner to help with the farm work during peak periods (Falkland Township).

house. He chose the latter presumably because houses are easier to find than jobs (Fig. 15). Also, as has been mentioned above, workers who hold down full-time non-agricultural jobs are not in an economic position where they must accept free housing of this type and generally prefer to own their own homes if they can afford it.

Although most farmers realize that they are vying with private industry for their labor, a few feel that their real competitors are the federal and state governments which, they



Figure 16

According to the owner, this house was vacated by farm laborers who went to live in a government-subsidized house (Winterville Township).

believe, are luring their laborers out of the fields with offers of free housing and food stamps (Fig. 16). That is one reason for their dislike of welfare and government-subsidized housing, for they believe that it only encourages laziness among the workers and robs the farmer of the labor necessary to raise his crops. Although there are undoubtedly some workers who take advantage of this avenue of escape from the farms, it appears that they are only a small minority, for only a very few of the farmers with whom this writer talked mentioned that

factor when asked about rural out-migration.

However, a large number did mention labor-management problems as a cause for rural laborers leaving farms. Disagreements arise over the amount of wages paid, the type and amount of work done, the quality of the housing provided by the farmer, and numerous other things. Many workers feel that the farmer is only interested in getting as much work out of them for as little money as possible. Many farmers believe that all the workers are interested in is seeing how little work they can get by with (Fig. 17). Because most of the farmers in Pitt County are white and most of the agricultural laborers are black, the labor disputes are likely to take on racial overtones. In one case on a farm in the northern part of the county, the white owner entered into a sharecropper type arrangement with a white laborer, providing him with land, machinery, and other necessary materials and then splitting the crop with him. A black laborer who worked another part of the owner's land on a wage basis also wanted to enter into this type of arrangement with the owner, feeling that it would be more profitable. However, the owner refused and the laborer, believing that he had been slighted on account of his race, left the farm altogether. Incidents such as this not only add to the migration from rural areas, but also speed the internal movement of laborers from farm to farm.

Some house abandonment can be directly attributed to the labor-management disputes, not only because the workers are likely to move away, but also because the farmer, soured by



Figure 17

House abandoned when the owner removed the last occupants because of their failure to do enough work to justify their occupancy of the house in the estimate of the owner (Carolina Township).

an experience with what he felt to be lazy or poor-working or troublesome workers on his farm, may decide that laborers are not worth their wages and that he is better off trying to make it without the benefit of hired labor. In a case such as that the former laborers' house will stand vacant or be put to uses other than as a residence. Some farmers take the position that they do not like to let workers live in the houses on their property because of the destruction that they do to the houses, and that the houses are of more use to them as storehouses or

animal sheds. Eight years ago a farmer in the western part of the county loaned a laborer two hundred dollars in order to help him settle his family in one of the farmer's houses. The laborer, however, used the money to settle his family in the vicinity of New York City and the farmer's house is still vacant.

Personal clashes such as those between farmer and laborer are only a minor cause of rural out-migration, although often they may serve as straws which break the camel's back. Disagreements with management serve as a push factor for rural migrants, however the pull factors discussed earlier are a much more important cause of rural out-migration and related house abandonment. Those pull factors are the economic opportunities outside rural Pitt County and they are a major cause of the rural migration from the county. The effect of that out-migration of the rural proletariat upon agricultural methods and practices is examined in the next section.

The Labor Shortage

One thing about which almost all Pitt County farmers will agree is the shortage of labor. There are many farmers in all parts of the county who have vacant houses on their land that they would be happy to give to any family that would consent to help with the farm work, even if only on a part time basis. The lure of better paying jobs in the towns and in the North have had the effect of drawing off the more ambitious of the farm



Figure 18

Vacated house whose owner is seeking farm workers who are willing to live in this house and help with the farm work (Swift Creek Township).

laborers and many of the farmers are not impressed by the quality of those who have stayed behind. The farmers have not been successful in their competition with industry for labor because they cannot or will not pay comparable wages. As a result they are forced to take whatever they can find in the way of labor or do without. It might be added at this point that not only do agricultural wages run lower than industrial wages, but also the working conditions encountered by the farm worker, as a rule, do not compare favorably with those of most other

occupations.

The labor shortage is felt most severely among tobacco growers, tobacco being the most labor-intensive and least mechanized of the principal crops of Pitt County (Fig. 18). Some farmers will not even consider tobacco unless they can line up the labor necessary for the summer by the preceding autumn. Otherwise, they are likely to rent their tobacco allotment to someone who can count on a steady labor supply. The rental price of those allotments has even been affected by the labor shortage. The more difficulty that a farmer is likely to have finding labor and the more he has to pay to obtain and keep that labor, the less the allotment is worth to him. Therefore, the shorter the supply of labor, the lower the rental fee for a pound of tobacco allotment.⁵ Farm labor is still relatively available in Pitt County and the price of renting an allotment there runs about 25¢ per pound. In the Piedmont of North Carolina where tobacco growers are competing for their labor with a much more extensive and varied industrial capacity, the farm labor shortage has driven the price of tobacco allotments down to around 15¢ per pound.⁶

In the face of this labor shortage Pitt County farmers have been forced to adapt and to reduce labor requirements in the

⁵Tobacco allotments are the government's method of controlling the amount of tobacco which can be grown in a given year. Each tobacco grower is assigned a maximum poundage which he can grow during that year.

⁶Yancey, May 17, 1973.



Figure 19

House abandoned when the owner switched his acreage from tobacco to string beans and no longer required the labor of its occupants (Winterville Township).

management of their farms wherever and whenever possible. This has included switching to crops which require less attention than does tobacco. Crops such as soybeans, string beans, and cucumbers are gaining in popularity among Pitt County farmers in part because of their relatively minor labor requirements (Fig. 19). The production of livestock is also a method of compensating for the lack of labor (Fig. 20). A farmer in the western part of the county sold his tobacco allotment several years ago because of the difficulty of keeping a dependable labor supply available.



Figure 20

Abandoned house which has been converted into a sort of base of operations for the tending of a herd of cattle, a few of which can be seen in the background (Fountain Township).

He has since turned to the production of a few dozen head of cattle and several dozen acres of corn, a combination which he can handle with the help of one full-time wage laborer.

Crop changes and improvements are one form of compensation for an absence of human labor, but the single greatest factor allowing the farmer to continue in production with a reduced labor supply has been mechanization. The farmers have found that it is cheaper in the long run to invest in machinery than to pay rising labor costs. Machines are not only cheaper but also more

dependable in that they rarely migrate to the North or get jobs in local factories. Also, when the machines are not in use, one can pretty much ignore them. Many of the farmers have displayed that kind of attitude towards their labor for years and that is one of the reasons why there is a labor shortage.

To a certain extent mechanization has been a response on the part of the farmer to a need to replace human labor, but in other cases it has been a response by the farmer to a desire to reduce his dependence on such labor. But the question of whether the machines have replaced the laborers on the farm or whether they have merely taken up the slack for a diminishing rural labor force is still a difficult one to answer. It will be explored more carefully in the next section which deals with the effects of mechanization upon rural out-migration and rural house abandonment.

Mechanization

The greatest effect of mechanization upon the agriculture of Pitt County, and the one with which this paper is most concerned, has been the resulting reduction in the amount of labor necessary in the production of the principal crops of the county. By reducing the amount of hired labor required on the farm, mechanization has turned many operations into strictly or primarily family affairs. By making the best use of tractors, harvesters, bulk barns, and other equipment a father and son combination are able to run a farm large enough to insure a reasonable return for both. Twenty-five to forty acres of tobacco are now described as

essentially a one-man operation.⁷

On one farm in the eastern part of Pitt County two men now work 300 acres, including 50 acres of tobacco, with the help of two tractors, an automatic primer, and eight bulk barns. Before World War II it would have required fifteen or twenty men to work that amount of acreage. That labor would have been provided by sharecroppers or wage laborers; however, it is no longer necessary for that labor to be available. Another farm in Carolina Township had twelve families of tenants working on it in 1945. Now the owner and his family work it by themselves with the help of one elderly laborer and seasonal workers. Most of the houses of the former tenants have been destroyed, but a few remain, mainly as storehouses.

The system of sharecropping, which had been prevalent in Pitt County from Reconstruction through the 1950's and has not entirely vanished today, has been the main victim of agricultural mechanization. The nature of the sharecropping system was discussed briefly in Chapter III, and, as was mentioned at that time, it involves the provision of the sharecropper by the landowner with the necessary land, seed, and equipment to raise a crop and then the splitting of the crop between the two. The advent of mechanization has meant that the owner can work the land himself if he is so inclined or he can lease it to someone with the necessary resources and not have to bother with the overseeing of a number of

⁷Ray Wilkinson, "Tobacco Talk", radio program, April 2, 1973.

sharecroppers. The displacement of the sharecroppers by machinery has left many Pitt County farms with several abandoned houses which the sharecroppers had used. That is the source of much of the county's abandoned housing.

However, the premise that machinery replaced the sharecropper is in direct contradiction to the premise stated earlier in this paper that machinery was adopted by the farmers in order to compensate for the labor shortage in rural areas. No doubt there are individual farms on which the tenants left for brighter opportunities elsewhere and machines were brought in to replace them. And there are also farms on which the owners brought in machines and sent their tenants packing, however, for the county as a whole no specific statements of causality, one way or the other, can be made about the complex relationship between the exodus of the sharecropper and the genesis of agricultural mechanization. Those phenomena are concurrent in time and space, but as to which one led to the other, no solution can be easily ascertained. The two phenomena, as they occur in Pitt County, are inextricably intertwined. Mechanization drives off labor but the high cost of labor, caused by its scarcity, invites mechanization.⁸

Perhaps the best way to describe the relation between mechanization and the labor shortage is as a gradual evolution that began in the 1940's and is still proceeding today. At the end of the Second World War the economy was booming and opportunities

⁸Yancey, May 17, 1973.

in its industrial sector were available to almost anyone who wanted a job. Naturally those opportunities attracted large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled Southern farm workers to the North where most of the jobs were located. At that same time agricultural technology had advanced to a state in which machines were available to perform many of the tasks that had previously been the function of farm labor. As the years passed, the labor force in the rural areas of the South, such as Pitt County, steadily dwindled while the quality and quantity of the agricultural machinery in those same areas constantly improved. Those two concurrent phenomena fed upon one another and each contributed to the momentum of the other. As labor became less plentiful, the farmers ordered more machinery. As more machinery arrived, more agricultural laborers were put out of jobs.

However, agricultural technology did not progress evenly for all phases of the raising of all crops. In tobacco especially, many of the tasks required for its production were left unmechanized until comparatively recently. Even now only a few of the tobacco growers of Pitt County have had both the capital and the inclination to totally mechanize their operation. As a result large amounts of labor are still necessary for tobacco production, but only for a weeks during the year. It is that predicament that has lead to a situation in which not only can farmers moan over the shortage of labor, but also at the same time agricultural laborers can grumble about being pushed out of their jobs by mechanization without either being contradictory of the other.

The farmers do need the labor for the tasks for which they as yet have no machines and for those tasks labor is relatively scarce. However, the labor cannot be expected to stay around the farm all year when the farmers can only pay them for a few weeks during the spring and summer.

At the time when human and animal labor were responsible for most of the work in Pitt County agriculture, the agricultural labor system was in a kind of equilibrium, in that the capacity for work on the part of the resources at the disposal of the farmer was roughly constant. When, in the not too distant future, machines are responsible for most of the work that kind of equilibrium can be expected to return. However, during the intervening period the equilibrium has been upset from both sides with labor leaving and machines entering, and both the farmer and the laborer are faced with difficulties of various sorts. Much of the house abandonment in rural Pitt County is wholly or partially a manifestation of that state of disequilibrium, in that in a situation in which many people are put into movement, either striding towards the future or running from the past, housing conditions are likely to reflect that movement. In an area such as Pitt County where much of the movement has been outward bound, an oversupply of housing can be expected and thus the abandonment of some of the poorer specimens.

It is hoped that the preceding paragraphs have given the reader some idea of the complex relationship between agricultural mechanization and the labor shortage. Neither one can justly said to have caused the other, however both of those phenomena developed

together and gave impetus to one another.

The mechanization of agriculture in Pitt County is not only tied in closely with the factors leading to rural out-migration, but also is related to changes in the system of land tenure in rural Pitt County. The disappearance of the system of share-cropping has already been discussed, but further changes in land tenure have been happening concurrently with mechanization and have been manifested not only in the abandonment of houses of tenants, but also the houses of farm owners and operators.

For one thing, mechanization needs large units of acreage on which to work in order to be effective and economical. This has led to the trend of farm consolidation which was noticed in Chapter II, not only in Pitt County, but throughout eastern North Carolina. Farm owners in Pitt County are now putting together larger pieces of land, utilizing acres formerly rented to tenants and buying up the land of neighbors who retire from farming. With the help of their machines and a few wage laborers, farm operators can now profitably plant land that previously would have occupied eight or ten families of tenants.⁹ That situation has resulted in a condition in which agriculture in Pitt County is increasingly coming to be dominated by a relatively small number of large operators. Therefore, it becomes a great deal more expensive for a newcomer trying to enter the field on a competitive basis, not only in buying the larger parcels of land, but

⁹Ibid., May 17, 1973.

also in obtaining the machinery with which to tend them. Agriculture in Pitt County has become a field of endeavor with an extremely limited access. At the same time exit from the field has remained easy, in fact it may even be easier now than ever before because of the number of large operators who are willing to purchase several more acres which in many cases will allow their machinery to work closer to its capacity. Also, much of the farm land around the urban areas of Pitt County, especially Greenville, is being diverted to urban land uses because of the expansion of those towns into the surrounding rural areas. Many of the farmers along the urban fringes who sell their land to developers take their profits and go looking for other farms in other parts of the county. Those people bidding against one another for a limited amount of farm land keep the price of land relatively high throughout the county and make it not only that much more difficult to enter Pitt County agriculture, but also that much more attractive to get out of Pitt County agriculture.

Besides trying to make it on his own or selling out, the small operator has a third option, renting out his farm. The tenant in this case is likely to be, not the sharecropper of old, but one of the large operators who will put his machines to work on the rented acreage and take the crop in return for a cash payment to the landowner. Operators of that type rent several farms each year within a certain area and may also own a farm or two of their own. By putting together that much land

they can operate a large amount of machinery more profitably. Those farmers who rent out their land year after year have no need to remain on the farm and so may move into town or build a better house at some other rural location, leaving their old farmhouses abandoned or renting them to someone else and moving them along the chain of sequent occupancy that was discussed in Chapter III. The mechanized farmers can sometimes be hired by the smaller operators to perform certain operations for which the latter does not possess the necessary equipment and cannot find the labor required to perform the tasks by hand.

Although mechanization has been associated with the origin of the machine tenant, it also has been a factor in the decline of the sharecropper-type tenant, who at this point in time has been the more widespread personage. In 1959 the percentage of farm operators in Pitt County who were tenants stood at 66.8%; by 1969 that percentage had fallen to 45.3%.¹⁰ That was not a case of tenants becoming owners of the land they worked for since the total number of farm operators remained approximately constant. It was instead a drastic decline in the number of tenants which brought about the drop in the percentage of tenantry during that period. The tenants have been propelled into motion by the same forces that have caused large numbers of agricultural wage laborers to desert rural Pitt County, the greater economic

¹⁰U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture:1969, Part 26, North Carolina, (Washington:U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), Vol. I, p. 288.

opportunities elsewhere in the world and their replacement by farm machinery. As a result the number of farm units is becoming fewer while the size of the individual units is becoming greater. In the period from 1959 to 1969 the number of farm units in Pitt County dropped from 3,926 to 2,174 while in the same period the average number of acres in each unit rose from 77.6 to 114.3.¹¹

Agricultural mechanization has brought about many changes in the agriculture of Pitt County within the last two decades. Many of those changes have contributed to the movement of people out of the rural areas of the county and thus to rural house abandonment. No one can ascertain entirely the degree to which mechanization has been a motivator of those changes and the degree to which it has been merely a response by the farmers to other changes, principally outside competition for their labor supply. Certainly mechanization has at times acted as both motivator and ✓ response. Furthermore, the cycle of mechanization leading to rural out-migration and rural out-migration leading to mechanization cannot be said to have any definite beginning or end. The pull factor of increased economic opportunities in places other than rural Pitt County and the push factor of agricultural mechanization have intertwined themselves to the point where they are practically indistinguishable. Even the individual migrant might be hard pressed to objectively state whether his departure from rural

¹¹Ibid., p. 285.

Pitt County had been motivated by hope for the future or despair of the present. Both agricultural mechanization and outside economic opportunities are important factors to be taken into consideration in the explanation of rural out-migration and the resultant rural house abandonment. Those two factors are the causes of rural house abandonment most directly connected with Pitt County agriculture and the changes which have affected it most within the past few decades. The third important cause is related only indirectly with Pitt County agriculture and rural out-migration, and it will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Improvement of Rural Housing

The third important cause of house abandonment in rural Pitt County is the general improvement in the housing of the area. Many of the houses that have been abandoned were vacated for the simple reason that they were no longer habitable and the occupants had to find alternative accommodations. Others were abandoned because better housing became available to the occupants. Previously in this chapter the pattern of local movement among the agricultural workers of Pitt County was discussed, and at that time it was mentioned that this pattern developed in such a way that as families moved out of the area, the remainder of the families readjusted their residences through internal migrations in such a way that the poorest housing in the area was left vacant. That phenomenon is part of the general improvement in rural housing in Pitt County which is now in progress.



Figure 21

New brick house with the occupants' former house sitting in the background (Pactolus Township).

In the course of the field work for this paper a few of the white inhabitants of rural Pitt County expressed to this writer sentiments to the effect that black people do not really care in what type of dwelling they reside. That, they explained, was the reason why so many of Pitt County's blacks lived in substandard housing. However, all other evidence uncovered by this writer is directly contrary to that. All of the residents of the poorer housing in rural Pitt County, both black and white, seem to be more than willing to desert their houses when ones of better

*Ability
to finance they may or
not. The < their
chance of survival*

quality become available in their area. Many black residents of Pitt County reported to this writer that the greatest single cause of abandoned housing in their areas was a desire on the part of themselves and their neighbors to obtain better housing. There are several cases within the county of people building new homes right next door to their old ones which are then torn down or abandoned (Fig. 21). In those cases the sole cause of abandonment is the improvement of housing within the rural areas of the county.

Of special attraction for many of the residents of rural Pitt County are the brick homes which can be built with the aid of a loan from the Farmers Home Administration. Even with such a loan those houses are usually beyond the financial range of the average agricultural worker, and so are generally occupied by the rural non-farm population, many of whom are former farm workers with a regular source of income, usually from a job in one of the towns of Pitt County. It has been estimated that over one thousand of those FHA-financed houses have been constructed in the rural areas of Pitt County within the last ten years.¹²

The availability of large numbers of new houses resulting from those FHA loans has been responsible for large numbers of abandoned houses in the rural areas of the county. Although there is not a one-for-one relation between new houses built and older ones abandoned because the number of families is not constant,

¹²Yancey, May 17, 1973.



Figure 22

Abandoned house located in the midst of a new housing development (Farmville Township).

the creation of a large amount of new housing within an area which is declining in population should lead to the abandonment of an equivalent or even greater number of older houses (Fig. 22).

There have been additional efforts in recent years to provide new low-income housing within the urban areas of Pitt County. Most significant of those has been that of the Greenville Redevelopment Commission as part of an urban renewal project for the city of Greenville. Several score new housing units have been built by the Redevelopment Commission in the Greenville area with the occupants paying a minor percentage of their incomes

as rent. However, most of the housing in those projects is taken by people who are already urban residents rather than migrants from surrounding rural areas. Also, those families whose former homes were demolished by the urban renewal project have priority in receiving the new housing.¹³ Overall only a few more housing units have been built than have been destroyed by the Redevelopment Commission so that the project cannot provide housing for more than a handful of families from the rural areas of Pitt County.

There is no doubt that the overall quality of housing in rural Pitt County is on the upswing. If age is taken as a factor in determining the quality of housing, then the housing of rural Pitt County is becoming much better for it is certainly becoming much younger. In 1960 57.4% of rural housing units in Pitt County were over thirty years of age and only 19.1% were under ten years of age. By 1970, however, 47.4% of such housing was more than thirty years old and 25.2% was less than ten years old.¹⁴ If present trends in the construction of new housing and the abandonment and destruction of older buildings continue, similar gains in the percentage of new houses and declines in the percentages of older houses can be expected for the next decade. As new housing becomes available to the low-income inhabitants of rural Pitt County, they are very likely to abandon their present homes

¹³Dr. Charles Price, Vice-chairman, Greenville Housing Authority, interview, May 9, 1973.

¹⁴U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Housing:1970, p. 288.

for new ones. That has been the case in the past and it has been responsible for a large amount of the abandoned housing found in rural Pitt County today.

The Causes of the Distribution of Rural Abandoned Housing

So far the three major causes of house abandonment in rural Pitt County have been named as being the economic opportunities available in the towns of Pitt County and outside the county, agricultural mechanization, and the improvement in the quality of housing. Those factors explain why abandoned housing exists, but do not necessarily explain its spatial distribution within the county.

There are other factors which influence the distribution of abandoned housing in Pitt County. One of the most important of those is the destruction of such housing. This is a very variable factor, dependent primarily upon the whim of the owner. If owners of significant portions of land within an area of the county decide to do away with many of the abandoned houses on their property, the result could be a part of the county unusually lacking in abandoned housing. Conversely, in areas where farmers have been extremely lax in removing abandoned housing from their land, the areas appear to have uncommonly large rates of house abandonment. However, the number of farmers who remove the houses from their land tends to balance out with the number who do not within any given area, so that rates of abandonment are relatively comparable among the different areas of the county.

Recently, though, an effort sponsored by a few local farmers in the area north of the Tar River has been begun with the goal of encouraging farmers to destroy all of the unneeded buildings on their property. Generally speaking, the areas where the demolition of abandoned housing is the most commonplace are the urban fringe areas of the county. Here destruction of the older buildings is necessary in order to prepare the areas for urban land uses, few of which are facilitated by the presence of abandoned housing.

The most important factor in determining the distribution of abandoned housing is the distribution of those people who are most likely to be affected by the three main causes of house abandonment which have been discussed in the previous sections of the present chapter. Those people are the farm workers, both sharecroppers and wage laborers. They are the ones who are most tempted by the higher wages of factory jobs, most likely to be replaced by agricultural mechanization, and most willing to move into low-income housing when it becomes available. The distribution of farm workers as it stood five or ten years ago should be a fair indication of the distribution of abandoned housing today. The vast majority of farm workers in Pitt County are black and many of the blacks in the rural areas of the county are farm workers so that the census data relating to the black population can be of use in discussing the distribution and movement of Pitt County's rural proletariat.

From the data that has been assembled in Table XII it can be seen that Bethel and Carolina Townships, the county leaders in

Table XII
Black Population Change in Pitt County 1960-70

<u>Township</u>	<u>% Change in Black Pop. 1960-70</u>	<u>% Black Pop. 1960</u>	<u>% Black Pop. 1970</u>
Arthur	-25.9	54.0	46.6
Ayden	-12.8	47.0	39.7
Belvoir	-21.5	60.7	46.5
Bethel	-31.1	63.5	54.5
Carolina	-29.7	60.7	54.8
Chicod	-17.2	32.4	26.3
Falkland	-23.2	53.0	51.8
Farmville	-10.2	49.9	44.2
Fountain	-26.7	48.8	42.7
Greenville	-6.0	32.6	25.8
Grifton	3.3	32.4	30.2
Grimesland	-7.1	48.3	42.7
Pactolus	-35.5	54.5	34.4
Swift Creek	-29.7	42.5	32.8
Winterville	<u>-19.9</u>	<u>50.1</u>	<u>34.4</u>
Total	-16.1	42.5	32.8

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population:1970, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Final Report PC(1)-C35, North Carolina.

percentage of house abandonment, are also the leaders in percentage of black population and rank second and third in percentage decline in black population between 1960 and 1970. Pactolus Township which leads the county in loss of black population might be expected to have a higher percentage of house abandonment, however, there has been a great deal of new housing added in recent years to that portion of the township near Greenville, much of it in the form of mobile homes. All of that new housing keeps the percentage of abandoned housing low for the township as a whole. A different type of explanation is needed for the high rank of Swift Creek Township in the percentage of black population decline column. Here there is a relatively small black population and although

there was a significant proportional loss in black population between 1960 and 1970, it did not represent as great a loss of total population as did the black declines in the northern townships where blacks make up a much larger percentage of the total population.

Grifton Township serves as the outstanding anomaly in the relation of the presence of black population to house abandonment. Grifton, although the third ranking township in percentage of house abandonment, has one of the lowest percentages of black population in the county and was the only township in Pitt County to increase in black population between 1960 and 1970. The cause of that anomaly has its roots in the increase of population in and around the town of Grifton. Those increases, which included both blacks and whites, offset large decreases in the black population of the eastern part of the township in which the greatest amounts of house abandonment are located.

The townships which have urban areas included within them, except for Greenville, slightly underestimate their percentages of blacks because these smaller towns contain a larger percentage of whites than the rural areas around them. The figures in Table XII include both urban and rural areas of the township while the house abandonment figures found in other tables in this paper include only the rural areas. Greenville Township on the other hand includes very few blacks other than those within the city limits of Greenville so that the figures in Table XII greatly exaggerate the percentage of blacks in Greenville Township when compared to house abandonment figures for the township.

With the limitations of the figures in Table XII in mind, it can be seen that the areas of greatest concentration of black population correspond very nearly with those areas which have the highest rates of rural house abandonment. Although other factors are responsible for the existence of abandoned housing within Pitt County, it is primarily the distribution of the black population in the rural areas of the county which appears to be associated with the distribution of abandoned housing.

The Principal Causes of Abandonment

The purpose of this chapter has been to show the factors which are the principal causes of rural house abandonment in Pitt County. It began with a discussion of the relationship between rural house abandonment and rural out-migration which revealed that while there is some degree of relation, two factors keep the relationship from being perfectly direct. Those factors are the large numbers of out-migrants who are young adults who have not yet set up households and who are therefore responsible for out-migration without house abandonment, and the large amount of local migration among the agricultural laborers of Pitt County which accounts for the house abandonment without out-migration. However, with those limitations in mind, the causes of rural out-migration can be treated as being practically synonymous with those of rural house abandonment.

The factors leading to rural out-migration have been divided into push factors and pull factors. The primary pull factor

operating in Pitt County is the attraction of higher wages being paid in the towns of Pitt County and the cities of the North. The primary push factor is the increasing agricultural mechanization among the farmers of Pitt County which is doing away with the need for large amounts of farm labor on the farms and putting agricultural workers out of jobs. In individual cases agricultural mechanization has forced workers to take advantage of opportunities elsewhere, while in other cases the migration of workers in order to take advantage of such opportunities has forced farmers to mechanize in order to stay in business. However, on the whole those two factors have gone on concurrently, reinforcing one another rather than one causing the other.

Agricultural mechanization and the economic opportunities outside the rural areas of Pitt County are only two of the principal causes of rural house abandonment. The third is related only peripherally to rural out-migration. That third factor is the general improvement in the rural housing of Pitt County within recent decades. Especially significant in this improvement in housing quality are the large numbers of houses being financed with low-interest loans from the Farmers Home Administration. As homes of this sort become available to low-income rural residents, older housing is rapidly abandoned.

Those three factors are the principal causes of house abandonment within rural Pitt County. However, the causes of the present distribution of abandoned housing within the county is principally the result of the presence of large numbers of people on whom the

three causes of house abandonment have the greatest effect.

Those people are for the most part the rural black and the areas of the county where they make up a large percentage of the population and have a high rate of out-migration are the county's principal areas of house abandonment.

Chapter V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis is to serve as an explanation of the distribution and causes of rural house abandonment within rural Pitt County, North Carolina. The study was initiated with the presentation of a general description of rural house abandonment in eastern North Carolina as a whole. It was thought that possibly Pitt County would fit into a regional pattern of house abandonment, the causes of which would stand out sharply in an analysis of the pertinent data concerning the area. Although several trends, such as agricultural mechanization, farm consolidation, and rural out-migration did arise, no clear cut relationship between any one of those factors and rural house abandonment could be discerned. It was decided that a better view of such relationships, if they existed, could be obtained through the examination of a single county.

Therefore, the remaining parts of the study were confined to Pitt County. The first major discovery of that part of the study was that the rural areas that adjoin the urban places of Pitt County have much lower rates of house abandonment than do the sections of the county farther from the urbanized areas. That is not necessarily because the urban places retard the actual process of abandonment, but because they foster so much new construction of housing that the abandoned dwellings are reduced to a small percentage of the total. Also, houses that otherwise would stand abandoned are more likely to be destroyed

to make room for new construction.

The reduced percentage of abandoned housing around the urban places, especially Greenville, is the most notable characteristic of the distribution of rural house abandonment in Pitt County. The area of least abandonment is the center of the county around Greenville and the areas immediately to the south and east of that town. The area of Pitt County with the greatest amount of house abandonment is the portion of the county north of the Tar River with areas of lesser extent in the extreme western and south-eastern sections of the county.

The pattern of sequent occupancy for rural housing in Pitt County is somewhat important in an examination of the distribution of abandoned housing. The housing of rural Pitt County tends to be passed on from owner through tenant, wage laborer, seasonal worker, and non-residential uses to total neglect. Although most housing does not pass through every stage, very few ever move in an opposite direction. The pattern sequent occupancy outlined in Chapter III is only an idealized scheme and is not meant to describe individual houses, but the rural housing of Pitt County as a whole. Because of that sequent occupancy pattern, it can be expected that those areas with the highest concentrations of sharecroppers' houses during the first half of this century should be the areas of greatest house abandonment at the present time.

The causes of rural house abandonment in Pitt County are a major part of this study. The relationship between rural house abandonment and rural out-migration has been deliberated in this

paper with the final conclusion that those two phenomena are less directly related than they could be because every abandoned house is not the result of an out-migration and all out-migrations do not result in an abandoned house. The first of those observations is warranted by the large amount of internal migration within the rural areas of Pitt County, while the second can be justified by citing the large numbers of young people who are migrating from Pitt County before they establish households there. Although the relationship between rural house abandonment and rural out-migration is not perfect, it is still close enough to suspect that both may arise from some of the same causes.

The two factors which serve as principal causes for both rural out-migration and rural house abandonment are the economic opportunities available in places other than rural Pitt County and the trend towards agricultural mechanization. The former lures the rural proletariat into areas other than rural Pitt County while the latter forces them to leave by taking away their jobs. The two phenomena have been operating within Pitt County concurrently rather than one being the cause of the other.

A third important cause of house abandonment in rural Pitt County is the improvement in the overall quality of housing within the county. A great deal of new housing has been constructed within the last decade and much of it has been made available to low-income families through FHA loans.

The other counties of eastern North Carolina have also been witnessing changes in the organization and techniques of their

agriculture and improvement of their rural housing to an extent similar to that of Pitt County. From that it would be reasonable to expect that at least some of the rural house abandonment in those counties has the same roots as that of Pitt County. However, each county is an individual case and it would be hazardous to generalize greatly about eastern North Carolina on the basis of a study of only one of its counties.

The causes not only of house abandonment, but also of the distribution of house abandonment are examined in this paper. The basic factor behind the distribution of rural abandoned housing in Pitt County is the distribution of those people who are most likely to be affected by the three principal causes of rural house abandonment. Those people are for the most part the rural blacks, most of whom are, or once were, agricultural laborers. Those areas of Pitt County with the heaviest concentrations of black people are generally those with the highest rates of house abandonment.

The number of abandoned houses and the migrations which they represent have had a profound effect upon the settlement pattern of Pitt County. The houses which are most often abandoned are those which are set off by themselves in the fields once worked by their occupants. With solitary homesteads being emptied and new housing being built in clusters along the main roads, the settlement pattern in many parts of Pitt County is losing its dispersed nature and is taking on more of a clustered appearance. That is the type of change most prevalent in the county as a whole, but in some instances in locations where the dwellings of

sharecroppers were grouped together, the abandonment of such houses is having an opposite effect.

A knowledge of house abandonment is important in settlement geography also in that settlement patterns are often derived from aerial photographs. However it is tremendously difficult, if not impossible in most cases, to differentiate between an abandoned house and an occupied house even on a large-scale aerial photograph. It is therefore essential that house abandonment be kept in mind when undertaking studies in the area of rural settlement patterns.

The conclusions of this paper are designed to describe and explain the distribution and causes of house abandonment in rural Pitt County only. However, the similarities between Pitt County and the other counties of eastern North Carolina in agricultural production, rural out-migration, and other factors suggest that the conclusions of this paper in the matter of rural house abandonment are also of a certain validity for those other counties.

The value of the research contained in this paper would be greatly enhanced by similar studies in other areas of the world. Comparison of rural house abandonment as it is found in various areas could point out likenesses and differences in the cause of that phenomenon from area to area and establish a basic literature for the field. Further study of the role of house abandonment in the alteration of rural settlement patterns is especially pertinent for the geographer.

The preceding paragraphs represent the principal conclusions

of this paper. They are the result of many months of field study and the assemblage of data. The purpose of this paper has been to explain the house abandonment situation in the rural areas of Pitt County, North Carolina and it is the belief, not to mention the fervent hope, of this writer that that purpose has been accomplished.

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