

South Creek

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Many of the people reading this are familiar with the town of Aurora, but as shocking to them as the news may be most people have never heard of it. It is their loss. Especially if they never saw the Aurora of a few years past.

I very clearly and very fondly remember my summers spent in Aurora. Well, not actually Aurora, it was a place six miles east called "South Creek". I lived in Raleigh and South Creek was as different from Raleigh as night and day. My favorite Aunt lived right where Muddy Creek joins the Pamlico River and to me, as a child, that was the most beautiful place in God's creation. I can still remember the smell of a kerosene lamp kept on the table in case the lights went out. I also remember the endless hours I have spent exploring the shores of that creek and the memories I have of days on Mr. William Jarvis' crab boat will go with me forever.

There were things there that a kid from Raleigh found exciting like Mr. Edward Springer's artesian well and Mr. Springer himself. The water at South Creek always smelled bad. It was probably the most healthy, invigorating, liquid known to man, but it smelled BAD. My Aunt used to have an old hand-pump beside the sink for water to wash dishes, but even she wouldn't drink that water. Mr. Springer lived about three houses down the road and had an artesian well that ran constantly summer, winter, drought or flood. Personally, I didn't think the artesian water was all that good, but at least it wasn't BAD. When I was little I measured my growth by that well. I can't remember carrying the first gallon jug of water, but I distinctly remember my feeling of accomplishment the day I was big enough to pick up a jug of that water in each arm and carry it back down the dirt road to my Aunt's house.

I guess it was about that time when Mr. Springer began to spend some time with me. He was a decorated veteran of World War I and told me fascinating stories of the Bello Wood and Mustard Gas. He took great pride in his collection of metal banks. I especially liked the one where you would place a penny on a gun and when you fired, the penny would narrowly miss a squirrel and fly into a slot in the tree.

Equally fascinating to me was Mr. William Jarvis crab boat. He was one of the old "line crabbers" with his mile long line baited with bullnose. Going to work with Mr. Jarvis meant waking at four AM so the line could be out by dawn. Once the line was out the ritual began. The line was placed in "U" at the top of a basket submerged in the water and we slowly rode the boat along the line. I can still clearly remember the low "put-put-put" of the motor and the quiet click of the crab's claws as the "U" knocked them off the line and they fell silently below the water into the basket. At the end of the line the basket was winched from the water and moved to the back of the boat. A draw string was released and dozens of bright-blue crabs fell chattering and scurrying to the workbench below. There, Mr. Jarvis would throw the small crabs back and put the "keepers" into the big metal drums lining the boat. That ritual lasted until the sun got hot, and then it was back to the crabhouse.

At the dock to the crabhouse I can still remember Mr. Jarvis getting 5¢ a pound for the

crabs and buying 22¢ a gallon gas. When this transaction was completed the crabs were dumped into huge baskets along with the other crabber's catch, lowered into a steamer and steamed. In a few minutes the steamer was opened, the baskets were winched to the dock where they were dumped into wheel barrow type affairs, and the bright red crabs were rolled into the crabhouse where dozens of lightening fast hands picked them free of their flesh. In just a few minutes, the crabs that had taken hours to catch were no more than some cans ready for market and scraps of shell ready for the trash.

Somewhere along the line, something happened. My summers in South Creek didn't seem as important as going to the movies with my friends, or dating, or a hundred and one other things that teenagers do. Then there was college and eventually marriage. Occasionally I would return to South Creek. My wife loved my Aunt and my Aunt loved my wife. It was good, but eventually came children and all the other things that keep a man from being a boy.

In my heart I never really left South Creek but the South Creek I loved really no longer exists. I buried my Aunt not too long ago at the little church just down from her house. Mr. Jarvis died several years back and Mr. Springer was drowned in the river he knew and loved. I guess the crabhouse is still there, but the line-crabbers are gone. They fell victim to high gas prices that made pots and traps more efficient to use. I have no idea what they pay for live crabs today but I'm sure it's as far a cry from that 5¢ price as it is for that 22¢ gas.

Yes, those things are gone, but not really. I can still live them in the smell of a kerosene lamp.