

Note - in terms of the timeline of Farm history, most of this story ties in with or follows Cliff's blog entries below:

<http://farmola.wordpress.com/2009/06/15/technologies-for-living-year-2/>

and

<http://farmola.wordpress.com/2009/07/10/tent-life/>

Photos in here are taken by various Farm photogs and non-photogs including D. Frohman, D. Stevenson and other - used with permission when possible.

Martha and I started out as members of the West Virginia Farm, a small satellite operation with approx. 40 brave souls hacking basic survival out of the hollows of the Mountain State. A good friend from Philadelphia, Andrew Stein, had also come out to WV and joined with our efforts.

In early 1972, it was decided that the main Farm (TN. Farm) would purchase an additional 750 acres next to the existing 1,000 and that the WV Farm residents would move south in an attempt to consolidate a larger workforce and better connected community. In April of 1972, we packed up a few buses, cars, pickups and a U-Haul and headed down to the Motherland.

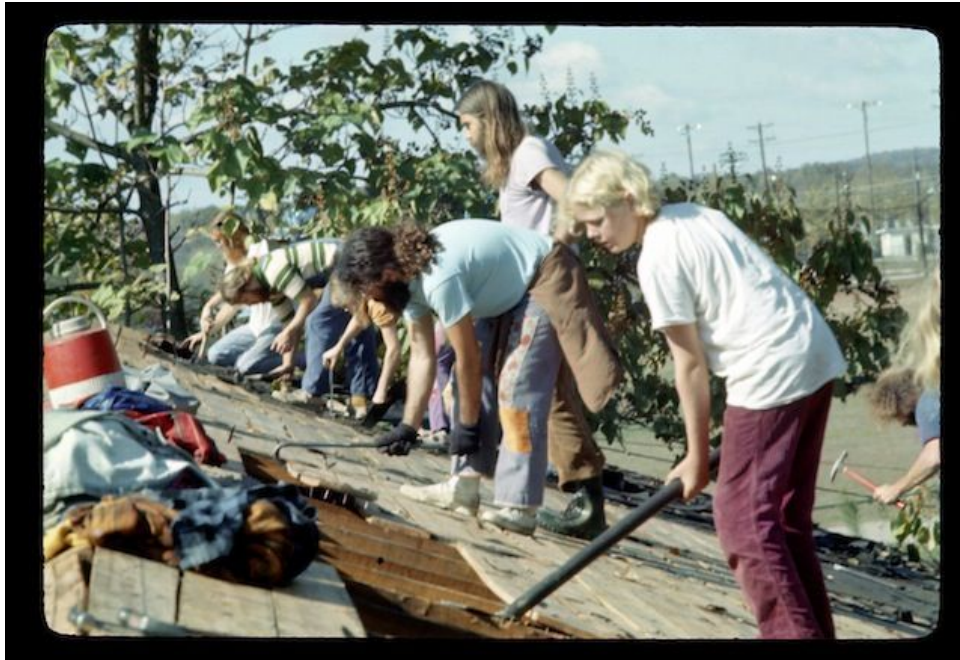
Upon settling in, various job offerings were made available via a bulletin board. I chose to start working at the Soy Dairy, which fit well with my introverted character, as our crew consisted of only 3 full time milkmen. This turned out to be an enjoyable gig and, of course, I was able to stay well nourished on soy milk and eventually other products which we created such as soy ice cream, soy yogurt, soy shakes and soysage (upset stomachs aside!). The job had other benefits such as being able to listen to the Farm Band practices, which took place in a tent adjacent to the Soy Dairy.

After a few months at the Dairy, Andrew approached me and asked if I wanted to join a new crew he had just become the "crew chief" of. Although there had formerly been a Salvage Crew, Andrew had the energy to take the effort to a much higher level, so I was excited to become a part of the newly christened Wrecking Crew. The idea was simple - we needed vast amounts of materials for tent floors, community buildings and houses and the best way for us to get them was by recycling old houses, barn and commercial buildings. We did this by taking them apart from the top down - piece by piece.

The reader should keep in mind that I knew absolutely nothing about construction, engineering or any related fields. I was neither a mechanic nor a gearhead, but luckily Andrew had confidence that he could whip me and the rest of the crew into shape.

The first project I helped on was a two story house in Mt. Pleasant, TN. I remember the first day at work taking up the flooring with crowbars. We were working as hard as we could, but not really accomplishing much. Andrew jumped into our midst with a crowbar in hand and shouted "hey guys, this is how you do it" and started pulling up the flooring at about 4X the speed we were

going. I was later to realize that the pace which he set was nigh impossible to keep up with, he having to only do it for a few minutes (he was the boss), while we had to keep at it for hours. Still, it fooled us and we forged ahead at higher speed.



Old houses often present poor harvests of wood due to age and lack of nicer materials, but we still were bringing home some nice piles of wood - and, let's face it, the beggars on the Farm were in no position to be choosy! There was a basic choice - either dirt floors, pallets or the recycled wood we brought back. Before long, folks were standing in line vying for the salvage we were delivering.

Andrew's skills were soon noticed by one of the few "adults" on the Farm. I use that term because, frankly, most of us were young kids without real world business experience or trade skills of any sort. In this case, a fella named Robert Moore talked to Andrew and said something like "Andrew, I know you're from Philly and it seems like folks from the East Coast actually know how to get things done". There was an apparent reference to the fact that between the weather and the hippie movement, the Californians tended to be more laid-back whereas we easterners were often imbued from birth with the so-called Protestant Work Ethic (or guilt, depending on your outlook!)

Mr. Moore turned out to be correct on that front, as Andrew said he would be glad to take on any project which may be upcoming. It turned out that the Farm had received an offer to tear down a massive factory building in Pulaski, TN. The old Stevens Pants Factory was a full city block in size, built in "mill" construction and 4 stories high. The property was owned by the First National Bank of Pulaski, which had their headquarters adjacent to the factory.

And so it was decided that we, a bunch of inexperienced but eager young idealists, tore this massive building down brick by brick.

My first memories of the effort involve two parts of the demolition. First, we needed to remove all the cast-iron radiators which heated the building. As I recall, there was one under each window. These were tempting morsels because we could turn them in for scrap immediately and bring in a few dollars to the infamous Farm Bank Lady. I say “infamous” because these women had to be tight with a buck! Money went in, but rarely came out, which is the way it had to be when you have 1,000 people living on about a dollar per day per person. Too many people on The Farm were not working for cash, so those of us who could bring in some greenbacks were especially valuable.

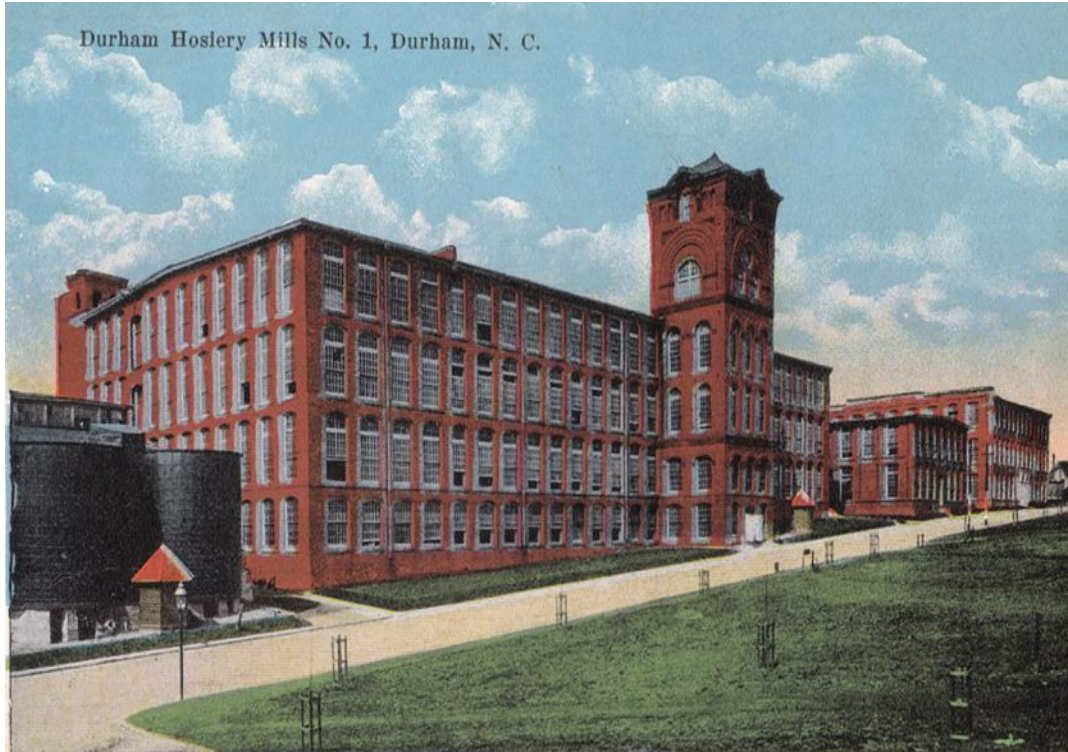
The radiator removal method was thought up on the fly - we’d pull a flatbed truck with a few piled up mattresses in the rear under each window and toss the radiators down. This worked like a charm and we soon had truckloads of prime cast iron to bring to a local scrapyard.

Starting at the Top

While I am certain Andrew was thinking all of this through, I was somewhat lost on exactly how to progress in this gargantuan task. He led about 20 of us “monkeys” (a Farm name for people or men) up to the roof, equipped us with crowbars, shovels, pitchforks and other implements and told us to start removal of the flat tar roof. This was hard and unrewarding work, as the materials could not be recycled and even the planking (roof deck) was not in the greatest shape...but better pickings awaited us as we delved deeper into the structure.

A Word on Mill Construction

Mill construction was widely used on industrial buildings from the start of the USA right up until the 1920’s, after which concrete construction became more commonplace. An example of typical mill construction is shown below. The Pants factory we demolished was actually quite similar to the one pictured.



The interiors of such buildings are made up of the following elements:

1. Large vertical wooden posts, which hold up
2. Large horizontal wooden beams, upon which sit
3. Floor Joists (2X12 or larger) and finally the flooring itself.

This demolition picture gives the layman an idea of how these elements go together - or, in our case, come apart.



One floor is stacked right on top of the other. In Pulaski, the basement vertical beams were 16" square, while the top floor they were only 12" - heavier ones are needed below because they support the weight of 4 floors.

Back to Wrecking

We continued pulling off the built-up tar roofing and throwing it over the side into dumpsters for removal. Soon we reached the first useable wood, although barely, as we removed the roof decking. Much of this was very discolored from tar and weather, but it was fine for flooring of the aforementioned tents, so much appreciated on The Farm.

Striking Gold

Once the roof decking was removed, they stood naked in all their glory! No, not the wrecking crew, but those beautiful 22 foot 2x12 (not nominal, but full measurement) floor joists. There were 180 of them on each floor (720 total) and they were in perfect shape. Moreover, they were very easy to remove without splitting or otherwise damaging. My recollection is that we sold a lot of these for \$5 each. It may be that we didn't have a need for many floor joists back at The Farm, or more likely the Bank Lady and Andrew were trying to figure out how to pay for all the gas, dumpsters, tools and other costs of our large crews. Speaking of crews, our core crew was only 5 or 6 people, however we would put out the call for however many crew we needed and they would magically appear. When the work was available, we had crews of 10-20 each day. Various vehicles would meet up at the job site. I personally drove a Metro truck outfitted with the tools of the trade. Andrew also had his own truck and we had use of, through the motor pool, many others. I remember using one of the school buses which had been modified to be a combo of a flatbed truck and a crew hauler. As many as a dozen monkeys could fit into the cab, while the rear could be stacked with lumber or bricks.

Hitting the Bricks

Once the lumber from the top floor and roof deck had been harvested, it was time to take action on the brick walls. There were basically two choices - pull them into the building or pull them so they would fall outside. Pulling them outside would result in a long fall which would likely destroy many of the bricks, which we intended to salvage, so Andrew made the decision to pull them onto the interior floor. Due to the large windows, this meant pulling one section at a time (the area between the windows) over onto the flooring. Doing so could destroy some of the weaker floors, so we developed a method of making sure the floor was temporarily buttressed from below as well as placing some plywood down on top of the flooring. A "come along" (chain or cable hoist) was attached to the interior vertical beams and a chain wrapped between the windows...and timberrrrrrrrrr!

Once the bricks were on the floor, we had to deliver them down to the blacktop area surrounding the building, so we devised some wooden sliding boards (ramps) to do the job. At the bottom of the ramps were crews of aptly named "brick ladies" who had been provided with masonry chipping hammers. This was not forced labor...I have to assume that many of the Farm ladies relished the idea of getting off the Farm for a day and enjoying the benefits of our crew (Dr.

Pepper, etc.). The bricks were cleaned of excess mortar and stacked on pallets, which were then covered with some of the tin ceiling scraps and banded tightly with a steel banding machine.

These bricks were used in the Farm Gatehouse as well as other buildings, but the vast majority of them were sold to a local Church of Christ for 5 (or .10?) cents apiece. I recall 200,000 bricks being sold to the church, which would have been a total sale of \$10 to 20K. The Bank Lady must have smiled when that and other similar checks came in.



Farm Gate House with Pulaski Red Bricks - 40+ years later!



Burning the Pipe



Brick Chippers

Another important part of the job was removing the vast network of steel pipes throughout the building. These consisted of heating and plumbing pipes, as well as some lines which probably fed steam for pressing pants. Sizes ranged from as small as ¾" to as large as 8". These pipes were held to the ceiling joists and beams with heavy-duty hangers and clamps. We became very experienced in the use of acetylene torches to burn through the pipe and the hangers and drop the pipe. It is truly amazing that we did do without a single injury. In fact, I think the entire building demo was done without serious injury to a single person. There is definitely a God.

A Well Oiled Machine

We progressed down and down, removing all the flooring, joists, beams, walls and pipe as we went. Once the systems were in place, thing went very smoothly. One slight roadblock was when we attempted to pull over a chimney on the side of the factory. We hooked a chain to to the top of it and tried to pull it with the heaviest school-bus/Truck in our fleet. I remember the but actually lifting up into the air when it tried to pull over the chimney, but the heavy structure just would not give. Later, a close inspection of the bus indicated we have actually flipped the leaf springs upside down!

Other than this and a few other small bumps, we were humming along, making money and delivering vast quantities of lumber back to the farm and to some of our neighbors.

A Free Black Family

One of the vignettes I remember is when a black farmer came driving up and negotiated for 20 or so of those great 2x12's. After he paid, I followed him home to his farm to deliver and unload the joists. I was struck by the scene because, frankly, this was one of the first free black families I had ever met! Let me explain.

While all Americans were technically free, economics, prejudice and segregation made it so that equality was more of a talking point than a reality. The black folks I had met and known near my hometown of Philadelphia were usually quite low on the economic totem pole and, in most every way, were not integrated into the larger society. The riots of the mid and late 60's were barely over and the civil rights laws passed in the mid to late 1960's had not been heavily enforced yet.

But here was a hard working, skilled and self-sufficient black man and his family living in a nice ranch house on acreage in rural Tennessee. The working farm was productive and they seemed to be enjoying the fruits of their labors as every free person should.

To the layman, this may not sound like much - but having lived through those years and met a lot of black folks in jails or jails of their own and societies making, I was struck by the peace and beauty of the scene. It's ironic that it was that rare - and doubly so that it was happening in an area where many of the gas stations left the "colored only" signs on the bathroom door barely

covered with watered-down paint. The South often presents such irony and dichotomy and this was surely one of them.

Cleaning Up

The rest of the job went very smoothly. All the harvested materials were either sold or brought back to The Farm. As we neared the end, we didn't need as large of a crew, so we said goodbye to the Brick Ladies as well as the massive crews we had been rounding up. Soon we were left with nothing but a hole in the ground and a lot of rubble which had to be moved and graded for the final clean up.

The Crawler Loader

We had amassed quite a collection of tools and trucks as the job progressed, but one thing we lacked was heavy machinery. There may have been a rubber tired backhoe on The Farm, but it was needed for the constant projects there and was not really capable of cleaning up a demolition site of this magnitude. Andrew looked around and found a crawler loader - a type of bulldozer which ran on tracks but also could load dump trucks with the leftover rubble. An example of such a machine is shown below:



Providence allows me to place an approx. date on this, as Martha was pregnant with Valerie who was born June, 1974 - so the loader must have been purchased and the building demo done approx. April, 1974.

I never did get to see the loader in action because (I believe) most of the crew except for Andrew

and one or two helpers left the job to start another. My guess is that we went to take down the warehouse/bowling alley which is where the large bowed steel trusses which form the community center teepee came from. This timeline will have to be checked and verified.

“I Wanna Play With It”

As the story goes (and I was not present at the time), only Andrew and one or two others were operating the crawler loader because they were the only ones experienced enough and qualified to use it. Bulldozers and Backhoes present special dangers, and you don't want just anyone operating them.

Thomas, one of the members of Stephens Gaskins' Family, approached Andrew and asked to run the crawler....despite his having no experience on the wrecking crew or with Andrew. In fact, his job was playing keyboards in the Farm Band. Andrew politely refused, stating that only trained operators could run the machine and, beside, there was currently no need for multiple operators as the job was virtually finished. Andrew held his ground and Thomas stormed off less than happy and reported back to Stephen what had went down.

Busted Down In Summertown

With little thinking, the decision was made to remove Andrew from his position at the head of the Wrecking Crew. Of course, Thomas could not just say “Andrew, you are fired because you would not let me play on the crawler”, so a more “Farmish” tack was taken. Andrew was accused of “Starting an Empire” in that he succeeded so well in the Wrecking Crew. Such Empires were considered dangerous on The Farm because monkeys are considered to be all the same, and letting their heads swell bigger because they accomplish something was frowned upon. More important was Andrews “spiritual growth”, which Thomas and Stephen decided would be enhanced by being removed from a position of authority and sent back to the Farm to hoe weeds or clean outhouses or so other such tasks.

As I remember, this happened almost instantaneously. Along with Andrews being fired, I was also dumped and accused of ignoring my pregnant wife in favor of my work relationship with Andrew and the Wrecking Crew.

Those who are familiar with the early days of The Farm know that these “busts” or “your number came up” were very heavy situations, as you were effectively demoted, disciplined and branded in the eyes of 1,000+ people. In most cases, including ours, there was not even a chance to discuss the matter. I heard about my bust 2nd or 3rd hand.

Moving On

I was assigned to a carpentry crew which worked on the Farm - and, lucky me, it turned out to be the crew of Michael Gavin, Cliff Figallo, Charles Hunnicutt and later Doug Stevenson. Since

Martha was due soon, we worked on projects such as the original school - I remember nailing down the T&G flooring and Ina May came by and asked to bang in a couple nails. Before long, it was June 4 and Valerie was born.

Andrew, being single and less attached, had decided that he was going to leave The Farm. Although I cannot speak for him, I sensed that he felt he had done everything in his power to make the Farm succeed and yet had asked for little or nothing - and it came back to bite him in the arse. It may have shattered his idea of "we can build it" and replaced it with "you need permission from folks with higher social position". Hopefully he will be able to clarify. Andrew came by our tent a day or two after Valerie was born to see her and then to say goodbye - and back to Philadelphia he went!

Maybe the Cream Rises to the Top?

I'm pleased to report that Andrew and I still consider each other close friends - AND, more importantly, that he has had a successful career in construction as well as a fine and loving family (4 children and Carol, a lovely woman). His success on The Wrecking Crew was no accident - the same skills of leadership, honesty, trust and hard work made his company into one which has perhaps the best reputation in the entire Main Line (Philly burbs) area. He tackles the very difficult jobs, as many of the homes there are made of stone, plaster and other difficult-to-work-with materials.

By some accident of fate, I also was able to start my own remodeling company and do well enough to keep my family fed. This was more due to the work ethic learned on The Farm than it was from talent. Andrew, as well as Mick Gavin and friends, taught me enough that I was able to go from there. Many of the same lessons served us (Martha and I) well when we started in the retail alt energy business in 1978 - and, again, because of the support of many people, past and present, we were able to rise to the top of our industry and achieve financial security...which is so important in the "real" world we found ourselves living in. We have now been married for over 40 years...married on the WV farm with Dennis & Bernice and Ralph & Susan- in a "3-fer" ceremony performed by Stephen, who was visiting.

Summary and Lessons Learned

The Farm experience and Stephen's teachings presented many lessons - however, I suppose that each individual had a different experience - and therefore a different summary. Since this story is more fact than philosophy, I'll stick to the truly helpful and simple points which anyone anywhere may be able to use to further their own lives, careers and relationships.

The Good Stuff

"Dazzle them with your fancy footwork" was Stephens way of imparting that a person should always deliver MUCH MORE than was asked for or contracted for. A book could be written on this topic alone, but suffice it to say that the bass player who counts how much he or she is

being paid for each note will not be exciting the audience!

Modeling and Learning - There is no better way of learning trades, behaviors and other skills than working with and watching those who have qualities you desire.

Stretch a Bit - This was certainly not my strong suit, but having Andrew lead the charge propelled me into doing things which I had not thought myself capable of. Most leadership works this way - responsibility is given, accepted...and those carrying the torch have an obligation to keep it held high.

Enjoy Yourself - I cannot remember a single day on the Wrecking Crew when I woke up in the morning and didn't want to go to work. The same went for the Carpentry Crew.

The Not-So-Good Stuff

While I dislike using such a title, the Wrecking Crew experience does (IMHO) point to one factor which may have hurt the Farm's chances of financial success. That was the ability of almost arbitrary hirings and firings of valuable workers based more on emotion or power as opposed to practicality. It stands to reason that if our crew had this experience, that it may have been epidemic throughout the peak Farm years.

The ostensive reasoning for these "busts" was that they would be good for the spiritual development of those on the receiving end. This may have had some truth, but it also bears the question of "who are you to tell me what is good for my spiritual development?" The answer to that, at the time, was probably Stephen. However the Farm became too large of an enterprise for one person to operate as a business - and, according to some, Stephen was not really keen on being the business manager. This may have resulted in his trusting others inside his family and out for responsibilities they were unqualified to take on.

thanks for reading

Note - the above represents my memories and opinions from 40 years ago and should not be considered as fact. Andrew has not written any of this nor has he checked it or my facts and dates. He has expressed interest in doing so, however is very busy with family and work.