

# Autryville shows thanks to an old companion

By TOM WEAVER  
Staff Writer

If you lived in the Autryville area and needed somebody to sign your note, fix your stove or locate water on your land and dig a well, you knew just who to call.

"There's so much I could say — Mr. Ennis is just a wonderful person and a friend to everybody," Mrs. Jake Spell said.

"Mr. Ennis" is Ennis Horne, who came to the community from nearby Cumberland County back in the 1920s.

This week his friends and neighbors honored him on his 90th birthday.

A table was set up at Spell Furniture and Appliance Co., across Main Street from where the sawmill that first employed Ennis was once located, with a birthday cake and all sorts of refreshments.

Horne, who doesn't look anywhere near his 90 years, retired three years ago.

"There are a lot of things you forget," he said.

"One question I can't answer is

when they ask me if I feel like I'm 90 years old. I don't know, I've never been 90 years old before."

He started out as a sawyer when he was 18 years old.

"I worked all my life up to about three years ago," Horne said. "When you work all day, come in and clean up and eat supper, that supper is good — and my wife was a good cook."

His wife, the former Daisy West, died 17 years ago. They were married when he was 20 years old and she was 17, and had seven children, five of them still living.

Although he thinks of his profession as a sawyer, Horne operated a cotton gin, and drove a truck regularly to New York during his busy career.

"I used to know every truck stop between here and New York," he said.

Knowing that the name Horne is a familiar one in North Carolina, he said he didn't expect to see it up north.

"But when I first got to New York one of the first things I saw was a

store with the name 'Horne's'" he said.

He's seen tragedies right in the small Sampson County town in his time.

"We had a boiler blow up at the sawmill one time," he said. "Tom Williams was killed and another man was badly burned."

He also recalls an accident in the gin that claimed the life of a man named Ira Autry.

"I've about seen Autryville build to what it is. There wasn't much here when I first came."

There was, however, a busy railroad line through the town.

"The depot was right over there" (indicating the general direction behind the post office). "We used to have the mail train come in at 11 a.m. and earlier in the morning there was a passenger train every day."

The late I.L. Vinson Sr., mayor of Autryville for many years, was owner of both the sawmill and the gin.

"We had to move the sawmill,"

Horne said. "The dust pile got so big we moved it and started up again at the new site."

Ben Jaynes, postmaster for the past 25 years, is grateful to Horne.

"I had a heart attack," Jaynes said. "He fixed our stove and wouldn't take a dime. That's the sort of thing he was always doing."

But when Ennis was asked if he was doing much hunting and fishing, his answer was different from most retirees.

"I don't own a shotgun or a fishing rod," he said.

Frances Lewis said Horne was the town handyman for years.

"If he didn't have a piece to put in he'd make a piece," she said.

His inherent generosity has cost him, but he doesn't seem to be too resentful.

"If anybody needed a dollar and he had a dollar he'd let them have it," John Spell said.

Sometimes, however, the loan amounted to many dollars, and often was never paid.

"I signed a note one day so a man could buy a mule," he said.

"They wouldn't take his note," he

said. "But they said if I would sign he could buy all the mules in the state."

Ennis wound up paying off the note and finally had to take the mule over, but could only sell it for \$5.

"I bought him a bridle and everything too, and I lost it all," he said.

When Horne reached the age when most people retire, he wasn't about to quit.

"He could find water, and he'd dig a well the old fashioned way and furnish a pump," Johnny Spell said. "When he was in his 80s he was still crawling under houses to fix water pipes."

Spell said he remembered, as a little boy, visiting Horne when he lived on South River.

"He lived at a place called 'Wolf Yard,'" Spell said. But nobody present could say what the meaning and origin of "Wolf Yard" might be.

"It was a stopping point for rafting and logging on the river," He said.

Spell, now 40 years old, said he was "eight or 10," at the time.

"He had two pet monkeys," he said.

"He performed more services just helping people than he did for pay, that's the way he's always been," said Spell.

Ennis looks back over his years in Autryville with satisfaction.

"I'm happy to say if I've got an enemy I don't know it," he said.



Mrs. Jake Spell served Ennis Horne a piece of his birthday cake as Autryville citizens honor

the 90-year-old citizen for his long service to the community.