



*This is the earliest picture
taken of me, probably when I was
about two years old.*

The Nineteen Thirties

Fire up your computer and Google “Dockery” and “North Carolina,” and you’ll find there are literally hundreds of Dockerys throughout the Tar Heel State. I was one of ‘em. There’s a town named Dockery, a state park, a cemetery, and scores of businesses. The name appears on many buildings and public facilities. They weren’t named after me, since I left at age eighteen to join the U.S. Air Force before I could make an honor-worthy mark in North Carolina.

My name is Charles Croffard Dockery, and this is my story.

I was born on May 6, 1933, in a three-bedroom house on North Bridge Street in the small town of Elkin, North Carolina. Elkin is thirty-eight miles west of Winston-Salem in the foothills of the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains, the source of the Yadkin River that flows past the town. A few miles to the northeast is another small town, Mt. Airy, which was fictionalized as Mayberry in the 1960s hit television series *The Andy Griffith Show*.

Elkin is a typical company town. Chatham Mill, which was built in the 1860s, was Elkin’s major employer and remains in operation today making upholstery for auto companies. During prosperous times, the mill employed between 1,000 and 1,600 workers and frequently ran three shifts to keep up with demand for blankets and other woolen goods, especially during World War II when Chatham supplied the military and our allies. Elkin grew up around the mill as businesses were formed to supply workers with food, clothing, furniture, entertainment, and other necessities and as companies sprang up to supply the mill with raw material, machinery, and services.



This house on North Bridge Street, Elkin, NC is where I was born, May 6, 1933. Elkin was, and still is, a small town on the banks of the Yadkin River. The headwaters of the river are in the Blue Ridge Mountains west of Elkin.

To say that I was born into an uncertain time would be an understatement. In 1933, the seeds for a world war were being sown as Adolph Hitler, a native of Austria, rose to power with his Nazi party and was appointed chancellor of neighboring Germany. Through racial propaganda and fear he was soon able to outlaw other political parties and set himself up as dictator.

“In 1933, the seeds for a world war were being sown as Adolph Hilter rose to power...”

Japan, which was already occupying Manchuria, joined Germany in withdrawing from the League of Nations. America and much of the world was in the depths of the Great Depression, with millions out of work.

North Carolina was hard hit, but the Chatham Mill continued operating in Elkin, somewhat easing the impact of the economic disaster, although wages and workers were cut. Adding to North Carolina's misery, the Outer Banks hurricane hit the coastline and offshore islands, taking as many as forty lives and causing more than a million dollars' worth of damage.

On the bright side, Prohibition had ended and Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president in 1932, taking office in March 1933, just before I was born. He was a Democrat and our 32nd president. One of his first actions was to institute New Deal programs aimed at getting people back to work. North Carolinians soon knew the acronyms WPA (Work Projects Administration), ERA (Emergency Relief Administration), and CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). Those programs were established in the state beginning in 1933 and put thousands of North Carolinians to work building and repairing roads and other public facilities and establishing parks and recreational areas.

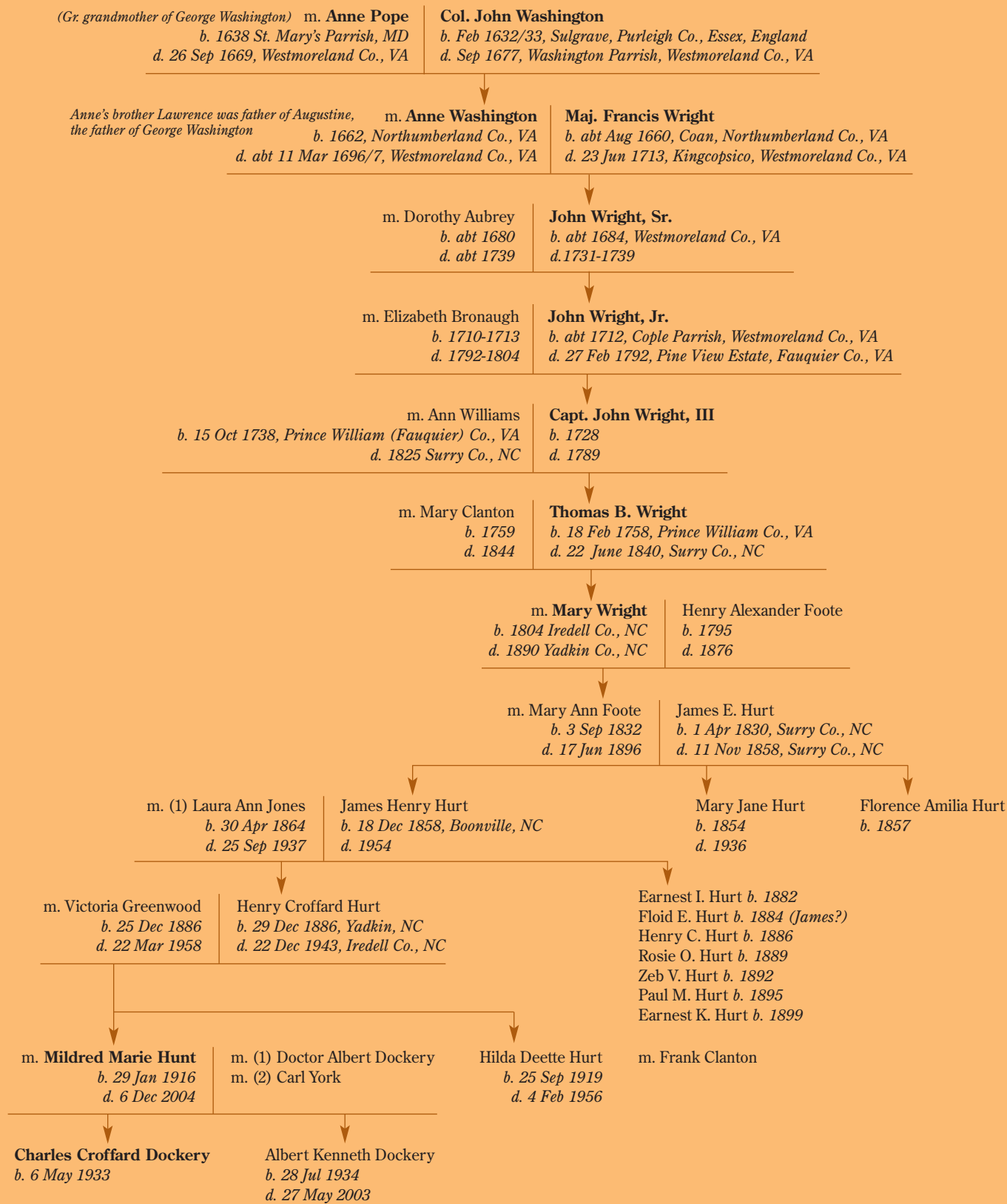
Recreational facilities along the famed Blue Ridge Parkway were among the many projects built then that still exist today. Roosevelt signed the act creating the Tennessee Valley Authority in May 1933, and two dams were under construction by the end of the year. He would be reelected three times and died during his fourth term in the spring of 1945.

I don't think I'm giving away a deeply held family secret when I mention that I was conceived out of wedlock, but my mother didn't remain single for long. Maybe teenagers

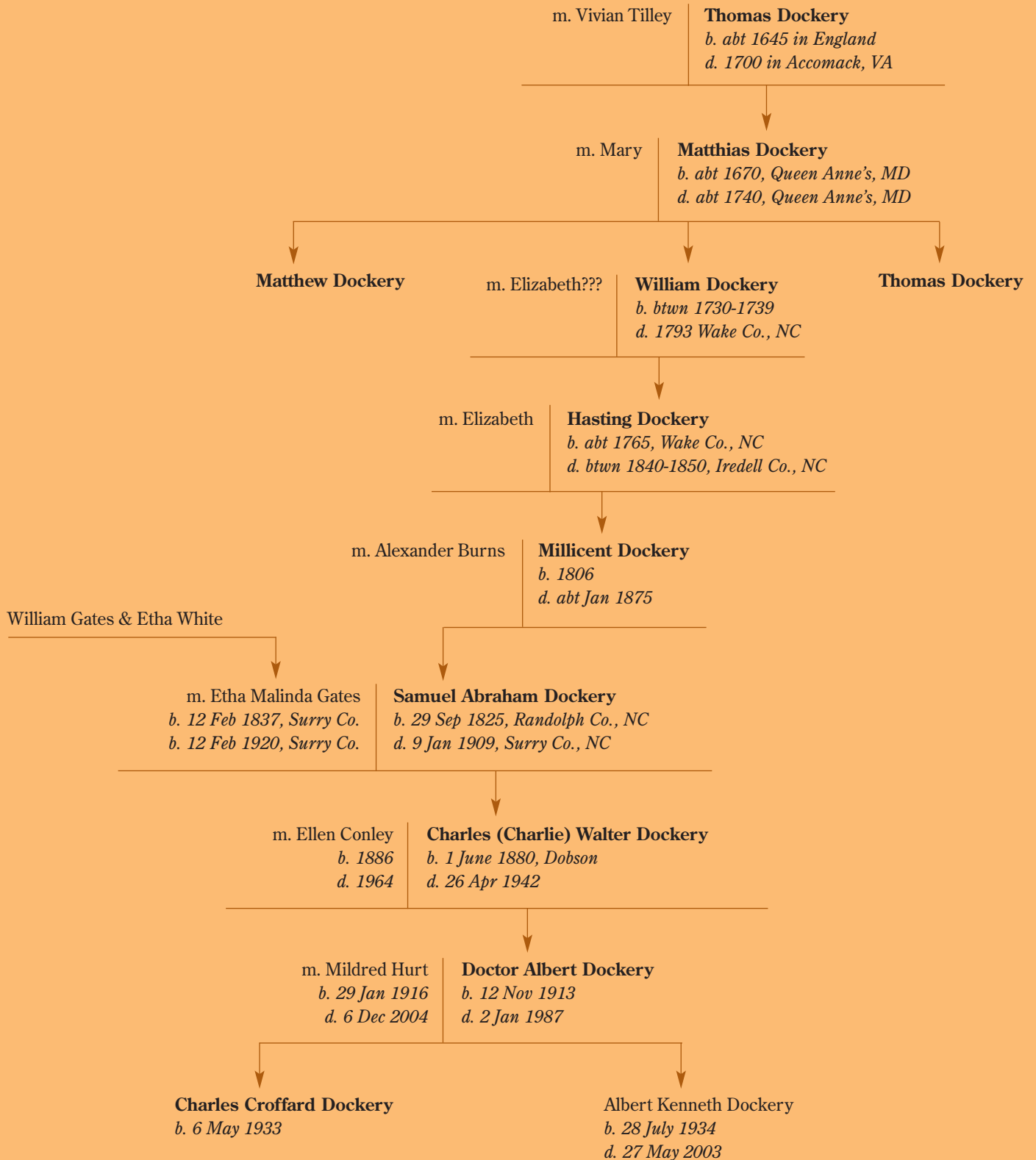


*My mother, Mildred Marie Hurt, at four months old.
She was born on 29 January 1916. She died on 6 December 2004.*

hurt family tree



dockery family tree



in the big cities were better informed, but in our small community there was no such thing as sex education. Birds and bees chats were virtually unknown, and many girls arrived in their teen years not knowing what caused pregnancy.

My mother, Mildred Marie Hurt, was one of those. She became pregnant at age sixteen and gave birth to me when she was seventeen. My father was Doctor Albert Dockery—"Doctor" really was his first name, but he was called by his nickname, "A."

Legend has it that my mother's dad, Henry Croffard Hurt, went to Dad's folks, Charles W. and Ellen Conley Dockery of nearby Union Cross, and told them, "Your son's going to marry this girl!" In a very short time Dad did the right thing, as most boys did in that day and age, and the wedding took place. I was named Charles Croffard in honor of my two grandfathers.

Here's a letter sent from my grandfather Henry Hurt to his mother on November 3, 1907 while he was working out west. He later homesteaded a "spread" in Idaho. His name appears in the 1910 U.S. Census in Gooding, Idaho.

To Mrs. J. H. Hurt
Jonesville, NC

R.F. D box 21

Postmarked LIND 4 Nov, 1907

7 P.M. WASH

Beamis, Wash.

Nov 3, 1907

Dear Mother,

I will now drop you a few lines to day to let you know I am well and getting along nicely. I was glad to hear that Papa was keeping so well. Well I like my new place fine yes I have pretty good board they treat me as good as I could ask for. They are hired people as well as my self they are hired to run the place. Their name is, Ross, he gets up every morning and feeds our horses and have them fed every night when we come in. I am getting \$2.00 per day, no it is not very hard hauling wheat too of us haul and help one another load hauling brush about one load a day we get up at 4 o'clock and get to bead at about 7 or 8 yes I get a horse when I want it he told me the other day that they was too saddle horses one rubber tire single horse buggy and a too horse buggy and too drivers and when I wanted

to go anywhere all I had to do was just go and get one and take care of it. No I did not get any money from Fletchers for I did not want it to for I think it is good they could not beat me out of it if they wanted to for I could sell anything they got. Nor I did not take my for threshing they told me I could have it when I wanted every night if I want it but I had rather have it where it is than have it in bank. I have my trunk now Mr. Ross went to town the other day and brought it out with him. Has Zeb got drum and does he help tree possums too. They is 8 in family here now Mr Ross and 3 children youngest one about 5 years old and me and the other wheat hauler and school marm. Well I have saved \$2.50 since I have been here in Wash bought me some high top shoes paid \$7.50 and a macknow coat \$6.00 and cordaroy pants \$4.50 am very well fixed for winter it is getting a little cool now. You can send my mail to Beamis Wash they have changed the office. I sent you too combind pictures guess you have got them by now Mrs. Ross fixed them for me. You can give aunt Stella one if you want too, I dont know whether you can tell which is me or not I am standing there where that boy is sitting down that big fat fellow on the wheat wagon is Mr. Ross.

I was so sorry to hear Mr Snow was having such bad luck for it seems if he tried to boy, well guess I will close for this time as I can not think of anything more to write this time. H. C. Hurt.

Grandfather Dockery owned a country store at Union Cross from which he sold fertilizer, seeds, canned goods, and gasoline to local farmers. The only other building at Union Cross was the Methodist church. There he served as a part-time minister. His other job was as a traveling salesman for the Sweet Ore Clothing Company selling mostly bib overalls. Grandmother Dockery, along with my dad's brothers and sisters, ran a hundred-acre farm a mile south of the church and the store. Hurts and Dockerys could be found throughout the region, and the extended families included my great-grandparents, Laura and James Hurt of Boonville. My great-grandfather Hurt lived to be 101.

The Dockery family had immigrated to the United States from the village of Elphin in County Roscommon, Ireland. I visited Elphin in the 1990s and found one Dockery family in the local telephone directory, along with several Dockertys and O'Doughterys and various other spellings of Dockery.



My great-grandfather James Hurt of Boonville, NC. This photo was taken by my mother on Dec. 13, 1952. At that time he was 94 years old. He lived to be 101.



My great grandmother Laura Ann and great grandfather Hurt, of Boonville, N.C., with two of their sons, Everett and James.

I was just over a year old when, in the summer of 1934, we moved from my mother's parents' home in Elkin to Union Cross. Mom and Dad rented a small house near Dad's parents' home. Mother was pregnant when they moved, and my brother, Albert Kenneth Dockery, was born at the new home shortly after they arrived, fourteen months after I came into the world. During this time my dad worked at Spainhours' Clothing Store on Main Street in Elkin.

I guess I was about three or four when we moved to Winston-Salem, thirty-two miles east of Union Cross. That would have been 1936 or 1937. Winston-Salem was one of the tobacco capitals of the world, and farmers arrived from eighty miles around to sell their flue-cured tobacco each fall.

With tobacco and textiles leading the economy, North Carolina was the second most industrialized southern state. But tobacco wasn't immune from the effects of the economic calamity, and at the depth of the depression tobacco prices dropped so low that many growers didn't bother to take their crops to market after the first tobacco auctions. One year, grandfather Hurt took his small crop to market, refused to accept the low price being offered, and brought the tobacco back to the farm, where he used it as mulch around the Concord grape vines.

I wish my memory extended all the way back to my birth in 1933. However, for my writings about the early years, I have to rely on photos, incomplete family records, and stories and tidbits passed along by family members. One of my very earliest recollections is set in the kitchen at our home in Winston-Salem. I remember my dad



My dad, Doctor Albert Dockery, was born 12 November 1913. He died on 2 January 1987. In this photo he is fifth from left at Spainhours' Clothing Store on Main Street in Elkin. The photo was probably taken in 1934-35.

and his friend Samuel Garner spending a lot of time in that kitchen, which was unusual because men didn't do much cooking back then. One of those tidbits included my dad bragging about his friendship with Garner, the founder of Garner Food Company, makers of Texas Pete Hot Sauce, which is very, very popular throughout the South.



My brother Ken (behind me) and I try out our new tricycle. The background shows it was taken at my grandparents' home out in the country near the small community of Eagle Mills, NC. Eagle Mills consisted of a general store owned by Dash Gaither and a water powered Grist Mill located about a quarter mile from the store on the banks of Hunting Creek. Eagle Mills is 20 miles south of Elkin.

According to Dad, they were both traveling salesmen. They met in the kitchen at our home in Winston-Salem to try different recipes for hot sauce until they finally settled on the one for Texas Pete.

Misbehavior was not tolerated in our family, and I remember getting whipped pretty severely one Sunday morning. Not much interested in the church sermon, my brother and I started picking at each other. I guess I was to blame, because Dad took me outside, cut a switch from a rosebush, and used his pocketknife to remove only those thorns that interfered with his grip. I got enough lashes to leave my legs scratched and bloody. Corporal punishment for disobedient children was the norm in those days.

In 1938, Germany invaded Austria and the Sudetenland and started building concentration camps in preparation for the massive roundup and extermination of Jews and other non-Aryans. Germany had hosted the summer Olympic Games of 1936 and, in spite of the threat of an international

boycott, had restricted the German team to Aryans. They emerged victorious with the most medals. However, the U.S. team included Jesse Owens, a black athlete from Alabama. He won four gold medals for the United States, apparently displeasing Hitler, whose Nazi regime considered ethnic Africans inferior. But in 1938 in an event many

saw as the first U.S. victory over Germany, heavyweight-boxing champion Joe Louis, another black athlete from the South, knocked out German Max Schmeling.

By the time I was old enough to enter the first grade, we moved again, this time to the small community of Arlington just south of Elkin. This would have been about 1939. I was enrolled in the Jonesville Elementary School just across the Yadkin River Bridge from Elkin. Just for the fun of it, I would sometimes make the three-mile walk home from school with four or five buddies. We considered the walk an adventure.

Dad was running a small service station that was located on the south bank of the Yadkin River alongside US Highway 21. A small roller-skating rink was located behind the gas station and Ken and I had plenty of fun there, since we got to skate for free. Unlike today's kids, nobody had to force us out of the house to be physically active. There wasn't much for us to do in the house, so we were outdoor kids and we loved it.

When we arrived in Arlington, Mom got a job nearby at Chatham's in Elkin working as a burler. Burlers used a small hand-held instrument to repair burls—lumps and knots—in the woolen blankets being made there.



Ken and me at the home of Grandpa and Grandma Dockery. Grandpa Dockery died on 26 April 1942 at the age of 62. Grandma Dockery died much later, on 30 July 1964, at the age of 78.

“The biggest international event since World War I, the New York World’s Fair was held in 1939.”

The New York World's Fair was held in 1939. It was the biggest international event since World War I, a showcase for the United States to display what we could manufacture and an opportunity to lift the spirits of a population that had been severely battered by the Great Depression.

But good days weren't on the international horizon. As the decade was coming to a close, Germany had invaded Poland in an action that was considered to be the real start of World War II in Europe. Great Britain, France, and Canada had all declared

war on Germany. The United States remained officially neutral but aided Britain and its allies by shipping war supplies to Canada and across the Atlantic to Britain.

During the 1930s, Ken and I played happily in the sunshine of a simple rural life in North Carolina. We were oblivious to the dramatic world-changing events that started with President Roosevelt's New Deal to lift us out of a terrible depression, and the beginning of a world war that would leave millions dead and injured in the cities and on the battlefields of Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Poland, Italy, Scandinavia, Romania, the Balkans, Russia, North Africa, the Pacific Islands from Hawaii to the Philippines, Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, and Taiwan and on to Japan, China, and Korea. So, while war loomed abroad, we were blissfully unaware of the disturbing news that was printed on the front pages of newspapers across the land.