

**From Roy Bailey Culbertson via the “Comments” form, 4 March 2016:**

Gene, Thanks for this well done, obvious labor of love. I am one of George Culbertson's children. We live in Richardson, Texas, a Dallas suburb, and have for 40 years. We have a daughter in Nashville, so I sometimes drive thru Mississippi when visiting her. One year, we drove the Merigold to Drew road, but did not see anything of the plantation buildings (e.g. the store that Dad saw, perhaps around 1977.) I suppose there is no trace of things from the 1930s. I read the Mozelle Chason book, *When Sweat Turns to Tears*, a few years back. I am glad Dad was able to communicate with Sunflower folks while it was still possible. Thanks again for the excellent web site. Best wishes, -roy

**Gene's reply:**

Roy,

Thank you for taking the time to send those kind words. Your message was a very pleasant surprise.

You're correct – there is nothing left of the old buildings which formed the core of the Sunflower Plantation: the Store, cotton gin, barn, mule shed, community center, manager's house, etc. In fact, only a handful of the government-built family homes constructed by the FSA (1937-1939) still exist. (There had been 100.)

As farming mechanized (tractors, mechanical cotton pickers, chemical grass & weed control), fewer and fewer 'hands' were used to provide the labor of cotton farming. The final push was the successful development of the mechanical cotton picker – pushed to the fore by an insufficient supply of labor for picking in the first place. (Picking had been far and away the most labor-intensive phase of the cotton growing cycle.) Diversifying into other farm crops (rice, soybeans), which had long since been mechanized, accelerated the exodus of people from the old Mississippi Delta and other farm areas as well. In effect, there was a mass exodus from the Ol' South King Cotton region beginning with World War II right through the 1960s.

For the web site, I plan to prepare an additional background document which discusses mechanization (especially the mechanical cotton picker) – its development and impact on the farm economy and people's lives.

Sunflower Plantation almost totally depopulated. The Baptist Church there, which had a membership of over 200 when I lived there, eventually found itself with 3 members. One of my best friends owned a furniture & dry goods store in the local town of Drew. He hung on for as long as he could but, in the end, he didn't (couldn't) sell the business – he simply closed the door one day and did not reopen.

The proud people who grew up on Sunflower Plantation while it was a 100-family-strong yeoman farmer community still have reunions – on even-numbered years, first Saturday in June, alternating the venue between the two churches of the community. [this year (2016): June 4 at Bethany Baptist] You and your family would be enthusiastically welcomed. It surprises people to know that generally about 200 people show up. We developed very strong bonds.

Again, thank you for your kind words. You can be proud of the legacy of your great grandfather, George Bailey. Under his care and management a great enterprise flourished and enabled the later community in which I, and several hundred like me, thrived.

Sincerely,  
Gene Youngblood

P.S. Would it be permissible to add or acknowledge your email message on the web page which links to the letter from your Dad? A simple statement that you did make contact or perhaps an edited version of the email itself?

**And Roy's OK to include:**

Gene,

Thank you for the interesting and informative reply.

Yes, it is fine with me to acknowledge, or quote, our contact on the web site.

Best wishes,

-roy