



PROJECT MUSE®

Nothing Could Be Finer?: George Stoney's *Tar Heel Family*
and the Tar Heel State on Film

Devin Orgeron

The Moving Image, Volume 9, Number 1, Spring 2009, pp. 161-182 (Article)

Published by University of Minnesota Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mov.0.0043>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/362428>

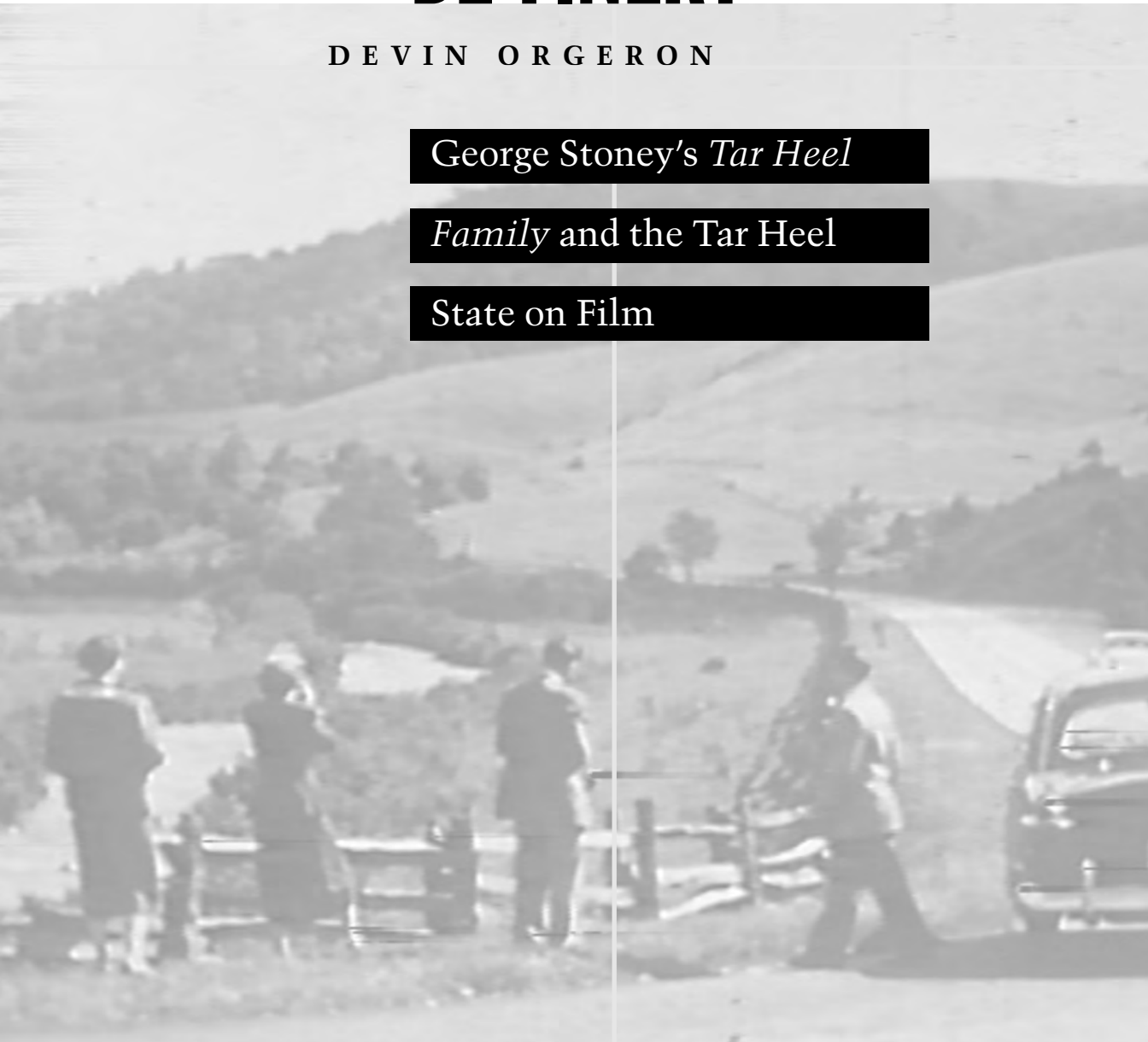
NOTHING COULD BE FINER?

DEVIN ORGERON

George Stoney's Tar Heel

Family and the Tar Heel

State on Film



I tell you, it is hard to say all that North Carolina is. But she is all of this and more.

—FROM THE FILM *NORTH CAROLINA: THE TARHEEL STATE* (1953)

Yes, this is North Carolina. The Old North State . . . yours and ours. From its mountains to the ocean and with simple hospitality, its home-folk bid you welcome.

—FROM THE FILM *NORTH CAROLINA: VARIETY VACATIONLAND* (1940)

SELLING “VARIETY” IN NORTH CAROLINA

After World War II (WWII), North Carolina, like so many states in search of tourist, developmental, and industrial dollars, began an aggressive and highly successful image-boosting media campaign. As far back as 1928, the Division of Public Relations was already considering how best to disseminate information to the rest of the country about the state of North Carolina, and by 1932, the division was actively discussing the effectiveness of motion pictures in this state-boosting pursuit.¹ North Carolina’s postwar efforts were a retooling of promotional programs that started in the years following the Great Depression, when the state coined and began to use (in brochures, booklets, and postcards) the slogan “North Carolina: Variety Vacationland” to lure guests and, perhaps, future residents to the Old North State (see Figure 1).² By all available accounts, the post-Depression media surge was enormously successful, resulting in an unprecedented number of travelers requesting information about and eventually spending their vacation dollars in the Tar Heel State. Hoping the formula would serve equally well when the state needed another economic shot in the arm during and just after WWII, state leaders dusted off the slogan and once again began to pitch North Carolina’s supposed endless leisure-time possibilities and its unparalleled drivability.³

North Carolina’s carefully engineered and craftily circulated reputation as “the state that has it all” (mountains, beaches, small-town charm, mid-sized city convenience, and culture, etc.) was by no means unique. Other states have historically adopted and promoted colorful slogans, nicknames, jingles, and accompanying myths of bounty to increase revenues when the economy threatens to falter. Consider, for example, these well-known and optimistic monikers: the Golden State, the Sunshine State, and Sportsman’s Paradise.⁴ North Carolina native and pioneering documentary filmmaker George Stoney complicates this rhetorical consistency and the state’s reliance



Figure 1. Front and back cover images from a post-1951 reprint of the Department of Conservation and Development's full-color "Variety Vacationland" brochure. On sale here is a form of "variety" Stoney's film smartly (and presciently) calls into question. From the collection of the author.

on a vague but celebratory notion of "variety" in his 1951 film, *Tar Heel Family*.⁵

A graduate of the University of North Carolina, Stoney (who, as of 2009, is still an active filmmaker and faculty member at New York University) is the director of well over fifty films, many of them sponsored. Often

these focus on the particular challenges faced in the American South, attesting to Stoney's legendary commitment to racial and social justice, which was chronicled in a 1999 festschrift/special issue of *Wide Angle* dedicated to his life and career.⁶ *All My*

Babies (1953), an instructional film aimed at African American midwives, is perhaps the best known of these. But the roots of this curiosity about and concern over the South has roots that stretch further back to the director's days with the Southern Educational Film Production Service (SEFPS). Founded in 1947 with a grant from the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board, the nonprofit organization, based in Athens, Georgia, was a joint effort of nine states seeking a regional film service to help their agencies communicate with their constituents.⁷

Joining the SEFPS after his wartime service with a U.S. Air Force photo intelligence unit, Stoney immersed himself in the documentary debates that fuelled (and sometimes redirected) the careers of so many like-minded, politically concerned filmmakers of the era in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. As a service to its members and Southern filmmakers and educators more generally, the SEFPS published a newsletter called *Southern Film News*. Dedicated to "advancing education through films," the newsletter offered updates on recent releases, featured advice columns for aspiring filmmakers, and discussed the role motion pictures and filmstrips might play in the modern Southern classroom. The SEFPS, with its ideological commitment to the creation of socially engaged media with a practical purpose, was an ideal continuing education for Stoney. He directed three films for the collective: *Palmour Street*, *Land and Life* (both 1949), and *Tar Heel Family* (1951).

In 2007, Colorlab produced a new answer print of Stoney's rarely viewed, rarely discussed *Tar Heel Family*, which was then screened at the Sixth Orphan Film Symposium at New York University in 2008. This new print and an original, circulating print reside at the North Carolina State Archives alongside more conventional state-produced films like the 1953 *North Carolina: The Tarheel State* (written and directed by the well-known North Carolina author John Ehle, then teaching and producing media at the University of North Carolina) and two versions of *North Carolina: Variety Vacationland* (a 1940 version produced by and prominently featuring the products of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and a 1951 version written and directed by Ehle).⁸ The expected differences between these state-boosting films and Stoney's film are only slightly less jolting, however, than Stoney's own careful and knowing reliance upon the logical structure of what was, by then, a well-known campaign for the state.

Stoney's film, in other words, manages to use and then, in an effort to foreground the Southern contradictions that so fascinated him, call into question the very rhetoric these state campaign films pushed so aggressively.

Made for the Department of Conservation and Development and very much the curious products of an economy under stress,

***The Tarheel State* and both versions of *Variety Vacationland* boast of the many delights on offer in North Carolina. Designed to stimulate and perpetuate a new breed of modern consumerism (more “development” than “conservation” in spite of the departmental name), these films are romantically photographed and narrated,**

at times sounding like some long-lost, breathlessly poetic advertisements penned by Walt Whitman. And, not surprisingly, all three films depict a world of endless fulfillment.

Produced in the early 1950s by the Communication Center at the University of North Carolina and “dedicated to The Young People of North Carolina,” *The Tarheel State* begins interrogatively, asking the viewer to ponder the meaning of statehood, and promises to give an impression of “what North Carolina is to a North Carolinian.” Aimed less at potential tourists, *The Tarheel State* sells the state’s variety—some of it innate, some of it the fruit of the state’s quite deliberate efforts—to its inhabitants. The film is filled with what are meant to be heart-swelling glimpses at those elements of the state that make “us” proud. In this respect, travel and geographical beauty are by no means disregarded; they are simply organized within a broader structure of achievement, progress, and change for the better. A section of the film focused on the mountains, for instance, comprises scenic images of peaks and valleys, accompanied by a narrator’s observation that “no matter where mountain people go, they find a good deal more beauty than they have a right to bargain for” (see Figure 2).

The Tarheel State, however, is equally interested in presenting the state’s agrarian and industrial history in an effort to demonstrate North Carolina’s unique commitment to modern business and the deep roots of Southern tradition (a different sort of variety, to be sure, but one the film is keen to subtly promote). “Tobacco,” our narrator tells us, is “the gold that grows in fields.” The film proudly moves viewers through the stages of cigarette production, an industry that embodied the film’s idea of modernity walking in step with tradition.

The Tarheel State borrows much (in imagery and rhetoric) from the *Variety Vacationland* films, which are more concerned with convincing travelers of the state’s unique and various treasures. The earlier version of *Variety Vacationland* opens with a series of titles, set against a map of the state and a stylized compass as pulsating organ music swells on the soundtrack. Like *The Tarheel State*, the film is “Presented to the



Figure 2. Nantahala, Cherokee for *Land of the Noonday Sun*.

“No matter where mountain people go, they find a good deal more beauty than they have a right to bargain for,” says the narrator over this image from *North Carolina: The Tarheel State* (1953). In the *Variety Vacationland* films, natural beauty draws travelers; in George Stoney’s *Tar Heel Family* it is both celebrated and smartly questioned.

North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development,” though the film’s less noble industrial intentions are given away in a title that announces the producer to be one Richard J. Reynolds Jr., tobacco heir.

This, however, is no cigarette commercial. As one would expect, the subject of tobacco is covered, but the film does not dwell upon it. It is the featured crop in a section of the film given to highlighting the state’s agricultural wealth, but agriculture, the film acknowledges, doesn’t draw tourists. While the intended audience for the film is clearly different from *The Tarheel State*’s, the structure is nearly identical. Where *The Tarheel State* offers its litany of attributes in the name of boosting pride, this early version of *Variety Vacationland* (while no less proud) wants its list to be taken as a sort of travel itinerary. Shots of hands tracing along a map of the state foreground this intention. Recreation (and not economic growth) is its chief display, and the narration works hard to be as relaxed as the producers would have viewers believe the state itself is. Casual, offhand, conversational, and observational, our narrator speaks to viewers like a somewhat distracted travel guide. In a sequence focused on the excellent fishing off the Eastern coast, our narrator simply says, “Boy oh boy, just look at that rod bend!” and “What a whopper! . . . Gosh, that must be close to forty pounds!”

This original 1940 version of *Variety Vacationland* moves about the state at a curiously rigorous pace in its twenty minutes, creating the erroneous impression that the sights on display in the film are merely a short drive away from each other. And this, of course, is the point of the Variety Vacationland concept: to sell the idea of one-state vacationing and its inherent simplicity (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Glimpsed but not dwelled upon, the tobacco industry is less critical than the recreation industry, here enjoyed as a beachside watermelon feast. Frames from *North Carolina: Variety Vacationland* (1940). Produced by R. J. Reynolds.



The narrational and conceptual ease of this early version of *Variety Vacationland* is subdued in the more formal 1951 version, written, directed, and narrated by John Ehle. Again produced for the Department of Conservation and Development, this version was made by the Communication Center of the University of North Carolina, where Ehle worked as a producer from 1949 to 1962, and cuts a somewhat more academic path. An orchestral score replaces the quaint organ music, and Ehle's narration—which shares more with the folksy eloquence found in *The Tarheel State*, which he also penned—takes the place of the earlier version's strange familiarity.

Though all three films have a great deal in common (indeed, footage is shared between the three films, and *The Tarheel State* and this version of *Variety Vacationland* feature the same cinematographer, Sebastian Sommer), these subtle differences in tone work to woo a different audience. The 1951 *Vacationland* still brags about variety. Here, however, the boasts are enveloped in the logic of industry. Our narrator is frank about the fact that tourism is a business, and North Carolina's success in this particular realm is the film's ostensible subject. We are told that North Carolina's "third largest business, larger than furniture, is her resorts" and "one of her greatest resources is not tobacco or timber, but climate."

After this appeal to Carolinian business, however, the film quickly gets down to business, spilling forth its lists of attributes, here cleverly divided by season. In the winter, visitors might enjoy sports (golf, lawn bowling, skeet shooting, horseback riding, fox hunting, and *relaxing*) in the mid-south region of the state (Pinehurst and Southern Pines). In the spring, the southeastern section (Wilmington) is unsurpassed for its botanical beauty, which might be enjoyed in its historic gardens or at the annual azalea festival. The region's beaches provide ample opportunity for boating, skiing, and fishing. Along the coast to the southern tip of the Outer Banks, summer is the hot time in Morehead City and Beaufort. And then it's along the Outer Banks and north to Roanoke Island for what our narrator tells us is that area's own peculiar contrasts. The region, it seems, is its own *Variety Vacationland*: greyhound racing, pirate tales, fishing villages and, of course, a performance of *The Lost Colony*. Finally, it's fall in the western mountain region along the Blue Ridge Parkway, which, our narrator tells us, is "perfectly engineered without commercialism, without hazard, along the oldest mountain range in America." This section of the film contains some of the most stunning photography to be found in any of the productions (see Figure 4).

Variety Vacationland ends with a hearty endorsement for the state of North Carolina, and its structure well summarizes the campaign's successful philosophy:



“From the men who live by boats and their villages; from the plantation homes of the Old South; from the wintry sun resorts of the mid south; from the grandeur of mighty mountains; North Carolina is the most varied of the states. In winter, spring, summer, and fall, America’s Variety Vacationland!”

Figure 4. Like a guardian over the Outer Banks’ variety stands Ocracoke Lighthouse, one of the sights to see on a perfect summertime coastal trip. Below, motorists on the Blue Ridge Parkway pause to take in its rolling vistas. Frames from *North Carolina: Variety Vacationland* (1951).

THE VARIOUS FORMS OF VARIETY: GEORGE STONEY'S *TAR HEEL FAMILY*

Differently conceived, funded, and aimed, George Stoney's *Tar Heel Family* (1951) nonetheless relies on the mythology of "variety" and "diversity" sold with such skill in the other films examined here. Stoney's film, however, uses these concepts to scrutinize the faulty, potentially detrimental logic at work within that mythology. Although the film was produced while Stoney was with the SEFPS, *Tar Heel Family* is hardly mentioned in their newsletter, *Southern Film News*.⁹ The more widely circulating *Mr. Williams Wakes Up* (directed by Gordon Weisenborn and scripted by George Stoney in 1947) and *Palmour Street* (which Stoney directed with Bill Clifford in 1949) are, by comparison, aggressively marketed by SEFPS. Their history can be pieced together from accounts in the pages of *Southern Film News*. Yet *Tar Heel Family* holds an important place in a career that began with and would quite frequently return to the subject of the South and its many, often veiled contradictions.

Though they are very different pictures indeed, some comparison between *Palmour Street* and *Tar Heel Family* is in order, as the logic of Stoney's earlier films helps lay the foundation for a set of abiding concerns in his socially engaged career. Both films are "about" the South, *Palmour Street* taking place in (and featuring the residents of) Gainesville, Georgia. More critically, however, both films examine the southern region of the United States through a distinctly familial lens, an organizational strategy Stoney would return to repeatedly. Proper parenting skills (actual or metaphorical), these films suggest, insure the continued health of our offspring (again, real or metaphorical).

Sponsored by the Mental Health Division of the State of Georgia Health Department, *Palmour Street* is an argument for strong familial bonds in an African American community where other forms of connection might be more tenuous. Though at times facile in its "like parent/like child" structure, the film nonetheless presents a complex and careful argument for responsibility, and it is this commitment that resonates across Stoney's career and between these two early works. A secure and responsible bond between the state and its inhabitants (all of its inhabitants), his film wants to demonstrate, will perpetuate its healthy growth and maintain the variety it cherishes so dearly but, perhaps, fails to comprehend.

Stoney's *Tar Heel Family*, like the previously examined state-boosting films, explores a litany of North Carolina's achievements, natural beauties, and industrial and social successes. True to the familial logic he had already established, however, Stoney also emphasizes the importance of protecting and nurturing the presumed "variety" the other films simply take for granted or choose to ignore. In fact, the film

(*Tar Heel Family*) is committed to quietly but authoritatively examining the very meaning of variety, questioning the empty celebration of its surface and investigating its depth.

The result is a film organized around a careful and subtle rhetorical geometry, the logic of which is quietly revealed in the film's opening title card, which reads: "This is the story of how North Carolina inherited a rich storehouse of resources and the problems which grew out of their use and development, and how we as a Tar Heel Family can determine the level of our living by the way we use the resources we have."

This text appears in front of a background depicting a map of North Carolina accompanied by the state seal. Graphically, if not tonally, this entrance resembles the openings of the previously explored films. And, in spite of the opening title card's more didactic tone, the first half of the film progresses in much the same manner as *Variety Vacationland* or *The Tarheel State*.

Narrated in a comfortable first-person style, the film seeks to reintroduce viewers to "our" state (the use of the first person is a key strategy) and to the elements that make "us" proud. This includes the state's discovery and its history. The other films spend some time here as well, but seldom move much further than *The Lost Colony* and the birth of the first white child in America. These sequences often feature reenactments from the Roanoke Island, NC production of *The Lost Colony*, an outdoor drama which debuted in 1937 and continues to run to this day. Stoney's film also uses reenactments. Stoney, in fact, was a proponent of their careful incorporation, claiming in an interview that "reenactment was the way we made films. Reenacted documentaries were part of the mode, just as the Film Board [of Canada] was doing. The redefinition of the documentary came with verité, which I still think is pretty limited. What we didn't know was how shopworn the traditions could get after a while."¹⁰ Stoney's reenactments and the narration that guides them, however, aim at depicting a sort of variety unexplored in the other films.

As picturesque landscapes and reenacted scenes of the state's early settlement flash across the screen, our narrator tells us that "it was a land of great beauty, so men came to find a living here. English settlers from Virginia built plantations in the tidelands. Often the craftsmen were men whose fine skills in metal work had been developed in Africa." Stoney's invocation of the diverse and not always self-willed immigration to the state, revealed early in the film, is where the film's different purpose first becomes apparent. Not simply a melting pot for Dutch, Irish, and Scottish settlers, *Tar Heel Family's* historical section begins with a reference to the skilled African slave labor that

helped shape the state as it began to develop the industries celebrated in the other films. The move is subtle but decisive, as it introduces a concept that the end of the film will circle back to. It is an especially important and controversial move in a film focused on a state that, in 1950, was about one-third African American.¹¹

A letter, dated February 1, 1951, from Stoney to Richard Weaver, director of the Resource-Use Education Commission, speaks to the radical nature of Stoney's decision to include the state's black population as part of its advertised variety. It is, apparently, a response to a letter from Weaver on behalf of the sponsoring commission, complaining about the film's "negro emphasis." Stoney's response is characteristic and quite telling:

As for the "Negro emphasis", the committee must decide whether they want an honest film about the state or not. I do not think that the cutting copy, as it stood on December 21st (save for the school sequence) gave enough attention to Negroes, but as a North Carolinian I knew that we could not go much further. I followed pretty exactly the outline set earlier in the year. If Dr. Erwin [superintendent of public instruction] and others feel this should be changed now, that is too bad. But this is a matter you and they must work out together. After all, you must bear the responsibility for the distribution of the film among all North Carolinians, white *and* Negro.¹²

Stoney's recognition of and desire to portray a kind of diversity invisible elsewhere is key to the film's difference from the other state-produced films. Perhaps even more critically, the filmmaker acknowledges the typically downplayed fact that films that might be used in a classroom can and should function in all classrooms, black and white. By the end of the film, images of black classrooms reinforce this concept, though, interestingly, the Teacher's Guide for the film (Figure 5)—produced by the Commission and not by Stoney—makes no reference whatsoever to race, save a buried suggestion to the teacher to "use the State song, folksongs, Negro spirituals." Like the other state-boosting films, however, the first half of the film seems committed to the same promotional agenda. The circle widens to accommodate and dignify non-Anglo citizens, but the litany of achievements and firsts is patterned on the celebratory logic of the Variety Vacationland campaign and its progeny.

After the more inclusive history lesson, Stoney advances the narrative by a century, examining how the state has fared since its settlement. This is where the proud list so integral to the other films, and still very much in use in the state's tourist campaigns, is unveiled in all of its force. In *Tar Heel Family*, however, this pride is mixed with

..... *Teacher's And
Discussion Leader's Guide*

Tar Heel Family

A COLOR-SOUND FILM BY THE
NORTH CAROLINA RESOURCE-
USE EDUCATION COMMISSION IN
COOPERATION WITH THE
NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT
OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION,
RALEIGH, N. C.



A 16 mm Color Sound Film
26 Minutes



The film produced by the **Southern Educational Film Production Service**, Athens, Georgia.

The film guide produced by the workshop in Resource-Use Education at **Woman's College, University of North Carolina**, Greensboro, N. C., under the direction of Dale Keller.

USE OF THE FILM

The film, *Tar Heel Family* could be used profitably by all teachers beginning with the grammar grades, and by clubs and P.T.A.'s interested in community development. Teachers of social sciences, science and vocational agriculture will find the film especially useful. The objectives of the film are:

1. To show the types of resources in North Carolina—human, social, and natural resources.
2. To show the past uses of our resources and how they are being conserved.

3. To show the potentialities of our resources.
4. To teach conservation of our resources.
5. To show interdependence of human, social, and natural resources.
6. To arouse the interest of the child in the development and proper use of the resources in the local community.
7. To assist communities in studying their problems and in developing suitable plans for resource management.

The North Carolina Resource-Use Education Commission
Education Building, Raleigh, N. C.

Figure 5. Cover of the teacher's guide for George Stoney's *Tar Heel Family* (1951). Efforts in the film to honestly depict the diversity of the state are, within these pages, reduced to a suggestion that students sing Negro spirituals. Courtesy of North Carolina State Archives.

an unusual and, given the tenor of the other films, sobering dose of realism.¹³ We are told that "our state is a leader in southern agriculture, with a total crop income ranked third highest in the nation. Today many families know comforts the old folks never dreamed of.

Yet we make our living out of the same things as did our grandfathers; the same mild climate, the same indifferent soil, and lots of family labor. Prosperity has come only as we have learned to make better use of these three things. And prosperity has come slowly."

The state's riches, in other words, haven't fallen from the sky, aren't simply God-given. They are worked for, and the work yields slow returns. As in the other films, tobacco is covered. But here, it is far from "the gold that grows in fields." The narration discusses tobacco as a "hand-made crop" and emphasizes the hard work it takes to make it viable. In place of the romance of Southern tradition, here and elsewhere in the film, *Stoney* gives viewers dignified images of black labor. Slowly spun into the fabric of *Stoney's* narrative, in fact, is this notion that to be a strong family, the Tar Heel Family needs to acknowledge its racial diversity and not simply the diversity of its geography or its climate. Black families are an integral part of the Carolina family, and *Stoney's* film makes this point by unobtrusively including references to and images of their contributions.

Indeed, subtlety and a hearty reliance on the familiar form of variety sold in the other films is where the first half of *Stoney's* film excels. This becomes a conveyance for *Stoney's* differently aimed thesis. Viewers learn of the state's varied agricultural successes, its bounty of peanuts, early and late vegetables, and high-quality dairy products. The film explains that, in the face of certain geographical disadvantages, Carolinian industriousness harnessed the swiftly moving streams, making the state a leader in textiles, tobacco production, and furniture. This portion of the film moves rapidly, like the romantically photographed stream, from one triumph to another, with familiar images and rhetoric. Hands harvesting tobacco; machines turning that raw material into cigarettes; spindles spinning out various colors of yarn; looms producing complexly patterned textiles out of that yarn; rough logs being split, followed by images of fine wooden furniture. This is the film's industrial crescendo.

This swell is followed by a preparatory statement and a transition into the film's final and differently pitched act. The narrator reminds us that, at one time, the state was derisively known as the Rip Van Winkle State, an unkind acknowledgment of the state's slow development and one of several explanations, though by no means the proudest, for the "Tar Heel" moniker, which some believe refers to Carolinian stubbornness.¹⁴ Now, viewers are told, visitors come to the state of North Carolina to study its developments in health, foster homes, education, and so on. This moment of pride is followed by the film's central and comparatively subversive argument, around which the rest of the film is organized:

Visitors see North Carolina as a place where industry and agriculture are both strong and where the joys of a simpler life have not been forgotten. Ours, they say, is the well-balanced state. A well-balanced state, they say? Visitors who stay with us for long find out that we Tar Heels look for facts behind such compliments. Our industry has grown splendidly, but how balanced is it? We have

little heavy industry, no steel mills, little machine building, few factories to use our rich clay and mineral deposits. Well over half our factory workers are in textiles, so trade cycles and changes in the market for this one industry can upset the whole economy of the Piedmont.

As the narrator directs viewers back to the realm of reality, the film cuts to images of a lecturer in front of a terrifically skewed pie-chart with textiles consuming more than the entire right half (see Figure 6). Reverse shots of the lecturer's audience make it clear that the lecture—and, one presumes, the film—is also speaking to North Carolina industrialists themselves. Far from reactionary, this section of the film seeks to address a segment of the population in a position to change the state for the better, and it does so with characteristic dexterity. In an interview many years after the film's production, Stoney commented in a manner that speaks to both the substance and form of this section of the film. Though his comments are in direct reference to race—which, as we have seen, is a key element here—they also point to the source of a more general state of dysfunction within the Tar Heel family as this film explores it: “the only company I ever remember being ill at ease with was upper class male Southerners and it is their judgments that I not only have no sympathy for, but I was afraid of. I know the consequences.”¹⁵ At this early point in his career, Stoney was already learning to work through the discomfort in an effort to, however slowly, redirect these problematic judgments.

Figure 6. Education is key to the health of the Tar Heel family, and Stoney's film begins the process not in the classroom, but in the meeting rooms of Carolina industrialists.



The second half of the film sets about deromanticizing the state by speaking directly to and eventually with this segment of the population, exploring the less attractive underbelly of the elements taken for granted in the other films and, in fact, in the earlier part of this film. The point is not to bash the state, but to examine it holistically and with an ever-hopeful eye to the future. In this regard, Stoney's film walks a seldom-traversed line. The unquestioned litany of the first act is followed not by a simple counter-litany, but by the very questions taken for granted. The answers to these questions, the film suggests, will strengthen the "family" of the film's title.

The result is a highly effective call-and-response structure that begins slowly and metaphorically with a series of coolly delivered statements meant to disrupt the viewer's and, presumably, the upper-class Southern gentleman's moment of comfort and complacency regarding the state's achievements. Our narrator tells us that most groceries purchased in North Carolina are, in fact, the fruits of another state's labor. Pride in "our" agricultural accomplishments is tempered, perhaps nullified, by the fact that the economy relies almost exclusively on a single crop: tobacco. Viewers learn that, in spite of the potential diversity of the state's agriculture, many North Carolina farms rely on a single-row crop for the bulk of their income. Many acres of land sit idle while other income-producing uses are not explored. The state's livestock production, viewers learn, ranks a poor 40th in the nation. "When the prices are high and the mills are spinning," a segment of the state's population enjoys uncommon prosperity. Measured against the national standard, however, incomes in the state are near the bottom. Young people, the narrator warns, are a major resource and North Carolina is losing them by the thousands to the more stable, more promising economies of neighboring states. All is not well, in other words, in the Tar Heel family.

These statements are followed by a smartly placed section describing industry's effect on the state's delicate ecology. The ecosystem, within the film's structure, is analogous to and an integral part of the film's titular family. Like the young people leaving the state in droves, the land itself needs care and nurturing or, the film suggests, we risk losing it forever. Again, Stoney is remarkably delicate here, well aware of the skepticism this argument might invite. A standard but also quite diplomatic ecological thesis—"as man's needs grow, we complicate the natural balance . . . sometimes we forget it altogether"—is followed by a more forceful, literal call-and-response section that leaves no doubt as to the film's redeemable villain: the North Carolina industrialist. The pattern moves as follows: one after another, these presumably upper-class, white Southern gentlemen offer excuses for their unchanging practices. These excuses are followed by some reasoned explanation of the real ecological and social ramifications this complacency



Figure 7. Vacationland indeed! *Tar Heel Family* shows the by-product of Carolinian complacency.

might have. Those swiftly moving streams previously mentioned become menacing when, for instance, they are choked with industrial pollution (Figure 7). This section of the film ends with a usefully inclusive statement, followed by a similarly inclusive question: “All of us have forgotten nature’s balance. How can we Tar Heels find a steady, dependable future?”

Tar Heel Family answers its own question in its final ten minutes, returning to the idea of demographic variety hinted at early on and focusing on the importance of a broadly conceived familial infrastructure. Acknowledging the uncomfortable fact that the Carolinian economy is precarious and far from diverse, the film advocates restoring and preserving balance through the maintenance of a healthy and educated community. The state has made great strides in medicine and education, but too often, rural citizens, black and white, may not reap the same benefits other citizens assume. This disparity offsets the balance of nature; it disrupts the harmony of the family. Again, however, Stoney’s film maintains hope: “Once any community makes up its mind to prosper, its schools become centers of hope, places where the whole network of skills and talents are developed to support that prosperity.” The sentiment is strengthened by images of successful and well-appointed black classrooms.

But simply basking in this hope, as the other films explored here revel in the mythology of success, accomplishes nothing, and film has a decidedly activist appeal. Hope, within the structure Stoney so cautiously lays out, needs to be met with action, and this action needs to be universally inclusive. In the end, Stoney’s script recaps his

argument: “Solving these problems wisely makes possible an expanding level of employment, of education, of welfare, of health, and recreation. Our state will be a good place to live so long as we make sure that each Tar Heel born finds here a chance to know the fullness of his powers. For the skill and the strength to build a better life is found in many hands. North Carolina’s future is a family affair” (see Figure 8).

Where state-boosting and widely circulated films like *Variety Vacationland* and *The Tarheel State* did much to promote a certain type of consumerism in North Carolina—and, in this respect, formed a part of a much larger structure aimed at assisting the state’s precarious economy—their rosy images and dulcet tones are incomplete. Using and then calling into question the rhetoric of never-ending bounty, variety, and progress of those films, *Tar Heel Family* creates an exceptional response that takes pride not simply in what has been done in the state, but in what might be done. In this way, Stoney’s film, which ends with a statement in the future tense, remains, nearly sixty years later, hopeful rather than boastful. Where the other films seem quaint (*Variety Vacationland*’s “datedness,” in fact, was perceived almost as quickly as it began to circulate), Stoney’s

remains deeply relevant in a state still struggling to understand, profit from, and smooth the rough contours of its “variety.”

Figure 8. “North Carolina’s future is a family affair.” Stoney’s images and the ideology behind them suggest a different sort of variety. *Tar Heel Family*’s concluding montage of faces ends with a smiling African American boy, an integrationist nod seldom seen in such films of this era.



NOTES

Thanks to Kim Cumber and the North Carolina State Archives for assisting me in my search for films. What began as quest for tourist films became something else entirely when we discovered *Tar Heel Family* in the collection. Kim's determination and interest resulted in a new print of the film provided by Colorlab. Debra Blake, also at the Archives, assisted in tracking down the elusive paper-trail, and Graduate Assistant Brandon Winford, in the Manuscripts Department at the University of North Carolina, filled in where those documents left questions. George Stoney generously filled in historical gaps and put me in touch with Ledford Carter, his equally generous colleague at SEFPS. Dan Streible's efforts were instrumental to this project and I thank him for providing, every two years, an opportunity for us all to consider the vital connections that join academics, archivists, artists, collectors, and enthusiasts. Skip Elsheimer and Marsha Orgeron also played key roles in this and all of my nontheatrical film pursuits.

1. For early discussions regarding state advertising, see Second Biennial Report of the Department of Conservation and Development of the State of North Carolina for the Biennium Ending June 30, 1928, 101. For early references to the use of motion pictures, see Fourth Biennial Report, 31. The Division for State Advertising, which would helm the "Variety Vacationland" campaign, was in place by 1937 (Seventh Biennial Report, 131). Unless noted otherwise, all documents are from the North Carolina State Archive (NCSA) in Raleigh.
2. Richard D. Starnes, in his excellent historical overview of the tourism industry in North Carolina, indicates that the state was ahead of the general Southern curve in some respects. Several areas in the state had been tourist destinations since the nineteenth-century and, in the 1920s, North Carolina recognized the returns a hearty tourist industry promised. It wasn't until 1937, however, that an organized promotion of the state began to take shape. Richard D. Starnes, "Creating a Variety Vacationland: Tourism Development in North Carolina, 1930–1990," *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South*, ed. Richard D. Starnes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 138–41. Starnes, whose scholarship on Southern and especially Carolina tourism sets the standard in the field, narrows his geographical focus in *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).
3. Starnes, in fact, suggests that though tourism continued during the lean years, development in the tourist industry went dormant until after the war when it "assumed a larger role in the state's economy with an annual impact of nearly \$100 million by the 1950s." Starnes, "Creating a Variety Vacationland," 141. Quaint though it might seem, the concept of a "Variety Vacationland" is still in circulation. North Carolina's twenty-first-century Division of Tourism, Film, and Sports Development still pitches the same logic and occasionally indulges in the language of the slogan itself (see www.visitnc.com).
4. Ted Ownby, adding evidence to Richard Starnes's suggestion that states "love to say they have it all," quotes from a 2001 campaign for Alabama that

exaggerates this logic, combining the expected and the unexpected in a breathless litany of attributes: "Alabama. The eye-popping, golf-ball-chasing, deep-sea-fishing, suntanning, shop-aholic, outdoorsy, historic, panoramic, bird-watching, Ferris-wheeling, mountain biking, cricket chirping, restaurant-hopping, family-friendly, bed-and-breakfast, can't-wait-to-come-back State." Ted Ownby, "Nobody Knows the Troubles I've Seen, but Does Anyone Want to Hear about Them When They're on Vacation?" *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South*, ed. Richard D. Starnes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 247. This dedication to the notion of variety has a practical value as well. As Starnes and others have pointed out, "selling" the state as a whole is tricky business and inevitably leads to one tourist location accusing boosters of overselling another. For more on the local answer to state-wide promotion, see Richard Starnes, "Creating a Variety Vacationland," 142–45.

5. The 1999 special issue of *Wide Angle* on George Stoney indicates that the film was produced in 1949. See Lynne Jackson, "George Stoney Filmography," *Wide Angle* 21, no.2 (1999): 170. Stoney's own recollection of his travel and work schedule during those years, his tenure with the SEFPS, and the date code on the NCSA print also suggest the earlier date. SEFPS's circulation information, which George Stoney kindly provided from the collection of his partner at SEFPS, Ledford Carter, indicate that the film was "completed" in April 1951. This is confirmed by NCSA files from the Department of Public Instruction, under which the Resource-Use Education Commission operated until 1952. These records include announcements regarding plans for the film and a thirteen-part radio program to work in concert with it dating back to 1949 (Office of the Superintendent, General Correspondence 1907–54, Box 184: Resource-Use Education Commission folder); correspondence between the SEFPS and the Resource-Use Education Commission arranging screenings of *Florida: Wealth or Waste* (1947), which was to be used as a model (Resource-Use Education Commission 1943–55, Box 13: Film and Radio Committee Correspondence folder); contracts for the film, signed and dated in October, 1949 (Resource-Use Education Commission, Box 12, Films 1949–51: Signed Contracts 1949 folder); and volumes of correspondence that, taken collectively, tell the story of the film's inevitable and, for all parties, frustrating delay (Resource-Use Education Commission, Box 12, Films 1949–51: *Tar Heel Family* Correspondence 1950–51 folder). Principal shooting appears to have been active through 1950, and corrections were being made as late as February 1951. The Manuscript Department at the University of North Carolina holds Records of the School of Education (#40043). A folder on "Resource-Use" includes a program from the committee's annual meeting, May 14, 1951. The following description is found on page four of this document: "The film TAR HEEL FAMILY was completed April 1, 1951, pre-viewed and approved by the Film and Radio Committee, April 6, and shown at the State Teachers Meeting in Asheville, April 9. Agency prints should be available by May 15. Additional prints can be ordered now through the N. C. Resource-Use Education Commission. Ten orders by schools have been confirmed. The cost of each print is \$125.00."

6. See, for example, Lynne Jackson, "A Commitment to Social Values and Racial Justice," *Wide Angle* 21, no.2 (1999): 31–40.
7. John N. Popham, "The South Sees Itself via Its Own Educational Films," *New York Times*, Jan. 22, 1950.
8. Though the derivation of the term "Tar Heel" is disputed, it is generally written as two words and not as one, as it is in the title *North Carolina: The Tarheel State*. Additionally, the dates for these films are rather frustratingly difficult to verify, in part because they were so actively recycled and repurposed. *Variety Vacationland* was made and remade repeatedly. Starnes is vague on the chronology, but suggests that the first version was produced around 1938 (Starnes, "Creating a Variety Vacationland," 140–141). NCSA holds multiple copies—some edited, some unedited, some for TV broadcast—ranging from 1940 to 1954. Under discussion here is the full-color 1940 version (donated by R. J. Reynolds Jr., to the Department of Conservation and Development in 1939, which was circulating actively by 1940) and a 1951 version (also full color) meant to replace the still-in-demand but out-of-date original. For more on this chronology, see Thirteenth Biennial Report of the Department of Conservation and Development for the Biennium Ending June 30, 1950, 17.
- The Tarheel State* appears to have been made in 1953, though it borrows liberally from the 1951 version of *Variety Vacationland* and, like its predecessor, is composed almost entirely of footage shot in the 1940s. The Fourteenth Biennial Report suggests that both the newer version of *Variety Vacationland* and *The Tarheel State* enjoyed some time on broadcast television as well (and not just in the state of North Carolina). I suspect this explains the NCSA's black-and-white and color copies of these films (81–82). Finally, John Ehle's commitment to using the humanities to build the community of North Carolina is legendary. Graduating from the University of North Carolina with a degree in Radio, Television, and Motion Pictures, John Ehle was an important member of Governor Terry Sanford's staff in the 1960s, a key player in the creation of the North Carolina School of the Arts, and a founding member of the North Carolina Film Board. See "The North Carolina Film Board: A Unique Program in Documentary and Educational Film Making," *Journal of the Society of Cinematologists*, no. 4 (1964–65): 55–65. See also Joseph M. Flora, Amber Vogel, and Bryan Albin Giemza, eds., *Southern Writers: A New Biographical Dictionary* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 123.
9. Though the run of *Southern Film News* that George Stoney and Ledford Carter provided me is by no means complete, it is representative of the years in question. These newsletters have been deposited at NCSA, where they are being researched for possible accession.
10. Lynne Jackson, "A Commitment to Social Values and Racial Justice," *Wide Angle* 22, no.2 (1999), 33, brackets mine. Jackson quotes George Stoney from an interview with Barbara Abrash, Daniel J. Walkowitz, and Faye Ginsburg, Center for Media, Culture, and History, New York University, 1995.
11. Donald B. Dodd and Wynelle S. Dodd, *Historical Statistics of the South: 1790–1970* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1973), 38–39.

12. NCSA, Department of Public Instruction, Resource-Use Education Commission, Box 12, Films 1945–51: *Tar Heel Family* Correspondence 1950–51 folder, brackets mine.

13. It is, in fact, Stoney's particular brand of realism that is so captivating in this film and across his body of work. Lynne Jackson and others point to Stoney's neorealist inheritance. But Stoney's realism fascinates because it is less formal. Its power comes from its occasional awkwardness, its bravery in the face of contradiction and imperfection. The *Tar Heel Family* (as a collective, not as a film) is interesting for the same reason the families depicted in *Palmour Street* are interesting. They are good, but not perfect. They are prone to err. They are, in short, human. This sort of variety has become a central part of Stoney's cinematic approach.

14. Stoney, it seems, was fascinated by the 1819 Washington Irving story and its potential to comment on his home state. His story for *Mr. Williams Wakes Up*, made for the North Carolina State Board of Health, finds its titular hero waking up Rip Van Winkle-like to a new era of state-sponsored health care.

15. Lynne Jackson, "A Commitment to Social Values and Racial Justice," 31.