

Stotesbury, Rachel: As Time Goes Along ^[1]

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Rachel Stotesbury: As Time Goes Along

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 03/21/2004. Copyrighted.
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Rachel Stotesbury and her neighbors will lose their land and homes if the Navy builds its new Outlying Landing Field (OLF) in Washington County. She lives in Wenona, a quiet farming community roughly 140 miles east of Raleigh. Now 88 years old and a widow for 27 years, she has never left the old farmhouse that she and her husband, Oliver, moved into during the 1930s.

"He was a farmer and I was a farmer and it's all we ever knew," she told me. "We never had any money, but Oliver loved the land, and we lived." She paused, and then, with a dreamy, faraway look, said, "And, oh, Oliver, he was special."

Much of the public opposition to the OLF has centered on the threat posed by Navy jets to migratory waterfowl on the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, five miles east of her home. Rachel Stotesbury wanted me to understand that other things are at stake, too: generations of struggle on a harsh frontier, an abiding love of the land, a close-knit community and a world of memories.



Rachel Stotesbury. Photo by Chris Seward, 2004. To request permission to use the photo or to purchase a print, please contact the News & Observer.

When we grew up, that was the Depression and I tell you what, it got rough. I declare, Daddy, he sold eggs for 9 cents a dozen and corn for 50 cents. I remember one year he took a wagonload of soybeans to Plymouth, and all he got for it was 10 cents. He had an old Model-A Ford, and the license was \$12 and it sat under the shelter for two solid years. We couldn't even buy the license on it. We lived on the farm so we never went hungry, but we never had any money. You kind of lived on handouts. Plymouth was a little community, and Pantego was a little community, and this was kind of a wasteland in between. It was an old swamp. My father-in-law said that, in the old days, there was a tribe of Indians that had their camp there by what they called the Hoop Hole, and they came in by the old river. They cut this big canal with draglines and floating dredges, and then the land began to drain. The Roper Land Company had what they call the "open fence law." Nobody had fences, and your cows would go out and be wild. Oliver's father said you'd sit in the house and you'd hear a cow bellow and a bear would jump on that cow's back and maul her. He said, "As time goes along, families would find a little hill and they'd settle and they'd begin to work out. They cut it down and it would lay there and they'd burn it off, and then the neighbors would come in and they'd have what they called a "log rollin' camp." Some of the stumps were big around as this table. My father-in-law said that when his father died, he and his brothers worked in the logwoods. At night there'd be a stump that they wanted to dig up, and they'd take a lantern and sit on that stump and they'd begin to plant little crops around the stumps and, every so many years, they'd get it to a place where they could plow it. Oliver followed an old mule when we started. One furrow at a time. When he finally bought a little Farmall tractor, he said, "So many of the young people now take the attitude: I don't need you. They think that they can make it on their own. But we all need somebody. I know before all this happened to me, seemed like, long into winter, you get that depressed feeling. But when Patsy up the road found out I was hurting, it wasn't nothing before the whole neighborhood was calling. And my neighbor Harvey, he's just as rough and tough, but he's got a heart as big as outdoors. And I thought to myself, God forbid, it's always been that way here. When Oliver was in the hospital, the neighbors come together and got his corn crop in. Your neighbors would come in and help you at hog killing time. If your cow went dry and didn't have any milk, they shared it. As time goes along, you live with a lot of memories, but you survive. At your age, you want things and you want to do things, but when you've been there and done that, then you get to the place where you just want peace and quiet. You're thankful it's been a long lonesome time sometimes. Oliver's family, one is in Washington, D.C., one is in Chicago. Sometimes I go to bed and I think, well, Lord, they've all moved away from me and left me here in the middle of the field by myself. And

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From:

[Listening to History, News and Observer.](#) ^[7]

21 March 2004 | Cecelski, David S.

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