



Cotton

A 50 Year Pictorial History

The Photographs of Harris Barnes

Mike Ballard and Betty Self catalog photos donated to the MSU Libraries by photojournalist Harris Barnes, opposite top.

Photo Collection Chronicles

Rise of Modern Cotton Farming

By Bob Ratliff

In 1946, Harris Barnes, Jr., began taking snapshots of his and his wife Jamye's first child, Harris III. Sixty years and three more children later, the Clarksdale resident has a photojournalism legacy that includes three books and hundreds of articles

and photos in a variety of farm publications.

Barnes' first book, *Cotton: A 50 Year Pictorial History*, was published in 2002. *The Beauty of Southern Agriculture* followed in 2004, and his latest, *Good Old Days on the Cotton Farm: A History*, is set for release in September.

It's accurate to say that Barnes was in the right place at the right time to chronicle the rise of modern row-crop farming, especially cotton farming.

The 1941 Mississippi State agricultural administration graduate was hired as manager of Baugh Plantation in Coahoma County following service in the Marine Corps during World War II.

"Baugh Plantation was on the cutting edge of farm technology," he said. "In 1948, we were the first in the area to use a mechanical cotton picker and began using herbicides on cotton when they were first introduced in the early 1950s."

Billy Connell, the son of the plantation's owner, was also interested in another type of technology—photography. It was Connell who introduced Barnes to his first "real" camera, a Kodak Flash Phantom, in 1946.

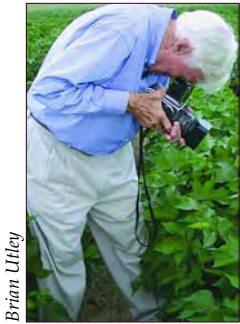
In addition to chronicling his growing family, Barnes began taking pictures around the farm and soon found that equipment companies and agricultural publications were willing to pay for his pictures of advanced farm practices.

"I was amazed that some of them would give me \$25 and \$50 for a black-and-white print," he said. "As farm manager, I was right in the thick of it and every time I saw a good picture I'd try to capture it. So thank the Lord I started saving pictures back in '46."

In the 1960s, Barnes began writing for *Progressive Farmer* magazine and other farm publications, which led to a successful career as a freelance agricultural photojournalist.

Pausing at an image in his *Cotton* book, Barnes noted that the combination of his years on the farm and behind the camera gave him a knack for spotting good pictures.

"My wife used to call that a turn around picture," he said. "I'd be driving down the highway and I'd see something that would really strike me, and sometimes I'd meditate on it for five miles or so. I'd say, 'I gotta have that picture,' and I'd turn around."



Brian Utley



Harris Barnes

A recent donation to the MSU library archives will make Barnes' historic photos available to future generations. He has provided 80 boxes of images, and more are expected.

"All are related to agriculture," said Michael Ballard, head archivist at Mitchell Memorial Library. "Most of the material focuses on the Mississippi Delta, but other parts include images from throughout the United States and several foreign countries."

Ballard added that portions of the Barnes Collection will enhance the Consortium for the History of Agricultural and Rural Mississippi (CHARM). A partnership between the MSU Libraries and the Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine, CHARM seeks to promote a better understanding and appreciation of the role played by agriculture, forestry and rural life in Mississippi's development.

"Through his photographs, Mr. Barnes has done an excellent job of recording the enormous changes in Delta agriculture during the past half century," Ballard said. "We are fortunate to have this collection in the MSU archive."