



Molly's "Beaufort Town"

by Lynn Allred

*A 10-chapter story celebrating
Beaufort and colonial history.*

Chapter One - "Busy Bees"

Molly, a bright-eyed girl of colonial Beaufort, twirled her dark curls with one finger while dipping another into her mother's pudding.

"Is it sweet enough?" her mother asked.

Molly had been rolling hoops with her cousin Lydia. When Lydia had been called in for dinner, Molly had come in through the kitchen door with a sad look on her face. Only a couple of minutes had passed since Molly and Lydia had parted, but Molly was already bored. When she saw her mother making fig pudding, Molly ran over to the table to help.

Mother had picked the figs right from their backyard and had just cooked them over the hearth fire. Now she was adding the sugar, eggs and spices. Molly begged to mix it with the wooden spoon. She quickly wiped her dusty hands across the front of her apron and started stirring, making lopsided circular motions in the large pottery bowl. Her mother smiled as Molly absentmindedly stuck out her tongue and placed it at the left corner of her mouth. That was Molly's way of concentrating when she was doing something she thought was important.

"Have you and Lydia been in the creek today?" Mother asked. She knew that on hot days, the two girls loved to jump into the nearby creek - in just their underclothes, mind you - when they thought no one was watching. Mother had warned them over and over again to be more "ladylike" but had long given up when the warnings continued to fall on deaf ears. Besides, the neighbors didn't seem to mind. In fact, by talking to them to find out what the girls had been up to, Mother found out that the neighbors secretly wished they could do it, too.

Molly whined. "Yes, but it was so hot! And we didn't mean to do it. We were just wading up to our knees. But the water was so cool - we wanted to pretend that we were otters, swimming and playing in the sea!" Molly flashed that wide, snaggle-toothed grin she had. Then a puzzled look suddenly came across her face. "How did you know we went swimming?"

Mother smiled. "Mothers just know these things, Molly," she explained. She didn't share the rest of her secret. The real reason she knew the girls had been swimming was because Molly's dress was buttoned wrong - all the way down the back!

Molly went back to stirring, glad her mother was not angry. Summer days in Beaufort could be so hot when no breeze came from across the harbor. Even now, at the table in the corner of their house, she and Mother were wiping sweat off their brows as they finished dinner for Father, her brother Jacob and baby Sarah.

Tonight, they were eating fish, roasted corn, stewed potatoes, applesauce and cornmeal bread, with fig pudding for dessert. Molly sure was tired of eating potatoes. How many more ways could her mother cook them? And whatever was not eaten tonight was sure to be served tomorrow. She hoped her father and Jacob were hungry, so not much would be left to eat later.

Thinking about Father and Jacob made Molly wonder where the two of them could be. Everyone else was accounted for. Nine-

month-old Sarah was there in the kitchen where Mother could watch her, sleeping peacefully in the cradle next to the open window. Every now and then a breeze would come in and flutter the crisp white curtains.

Sarah had almost outgrown the cradle that their grandpa had built when her mother was born. Her family had brought it over from England and all the children in her family had slept in it. Toby, Jacob's pet beagle, was sleeping too, there on the hook rug at the back door. His feet were moving back and forth as he slept. He was probably dreaming about chasing rabbits, again.

"Where are Father and Jacob?" Molly asked. "Will they be late for dinner?"

"They're out raking clams," Mother said. "I want to make a pot of chowder tomorrow and the tide is out, so they should be able to find plenty. We have lots of potatoes to add to the clams and we can get milk from your Aunt Susan's cow. It's a good thing our families share what we have."

Molly groaned. Just thinking about eating more potatoes, even if they were to be added to a clam chowder, did not appeal to her at all. Where was it going to end? It seemed to her that all Mother ever did was work. She cooked. She cleaned. She made candles. She sewed clothes. She wove rugs. She made jellies and jams. She churned butter. And now she was cooking enough clam chowder for two families!

But for some reason, Mother was always smiling. She even sang a little song as she worked. The same tune, always, but the words were hard for Molly to make out - something about a busy bee?

Molly finished stirring the pudding just as she heard her father and Jacob coming up the stairs of the wide front porch. How she loved that porch! The railings needed to be painted - Father said he would do the painting this fall when the weather was cooler - but it was a special place. After dinner, her parents would sit there in their cane chairs and the children of the neighborhood would play together as friends and family came to visit. Porch gatherings were an after-dinner ritual in Beaufort. And at dusk, the fireflies, which she, Lydia and all the other children on their street called "lightning bugs," would be flickering beneath the live oak trees, just waiting to be caught and released, one by one.

Baby Sarah started to stir and cry. "She must be hungry," Molly thought. "I wonder if she likes fig pudding? And I wonder if one day she'll swim in the creek and catch lightning bugs, just like me?"

*Next week, chapter two -
"The Quilting Party"*

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Learn more about colonial life!

Kitchen fireplaces

In colonial American homes, the kitchen served as the main room of the house. Because fires provided heat and light, families spent much time in front of their kitchen fireplaces where they also prepared meals on the hearth. For "hearth cooking," colonists used pans with long handles and iron kettles that hung inside the fireplaces above the fire. They boiled vegetables or meats and vegetables together to make hearty soups and stews. Heated bricks placed in or close to the fireplace served as an oven for baking breads.

(Photo of hearth cooking, courtesy of the Beaufort Historical Association and the Carteret County News-Times)

