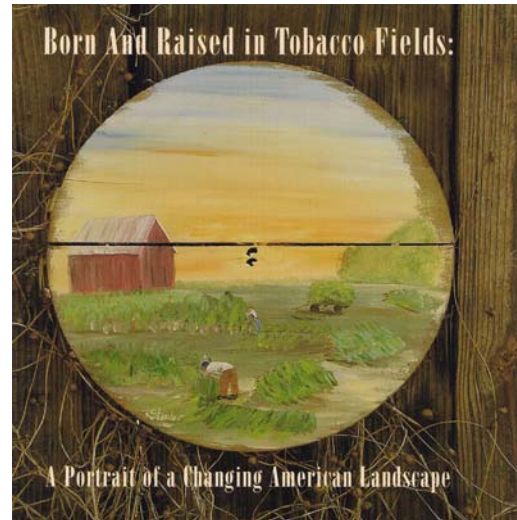


CD captures the people, their emotions, their stories

by Bob Lewis

*Born And Raised in Tobacco Fields:
A Portrait of a Changing American Landscape*
58 minutes, 17 seconds; Audio CD
written by Carrie Kline and Adam Nordell
engineered by Michael Kline
produced by Talking Across the Lines, LLC



Tobacco, or *sotweed* as it was referred to in 17th century Maryland, was the thread that held the fabric of colonial life together. So it is no surprise that authors, journalists, academics, and armchair writers have produced a wealth of literature on the subject. Tobacco's economic dominance on southern Maryland agriculture lasted the better part of 350 years. But as the old saying goes, nothing lasts forever, so it is with the tobacco culture of southern Maryland. Currently poised on the brink of extinction, with no sight of government intervention to stop the decline, tobacco agriculture and the tobacco heritage of Maryland is one changing landscape we may never witness again. In fact, the Governor's 2000 Tobacco Buyout plan is well underway and nearly 80% of tobacco growers have hung up their hoes in favor of alternate crops such as cut flowers, organic vegetables, and the "final crop," residential housing.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that several new publications featuring tobacco culture are now or soon-to-be on the shelves in bookstores. *Slackwater's* recent tobacco volume appeared on store shelves about two years ago and the Calvert County Historic District Commission's new publication will be out this spring. *Born And Raised* is the perfect compliment to either of these two publications

It is not the impeccable audio quality nor the folksy painting on a crab basket that adorns the newly released compact disk's box that grabs me. It is not the delightful and thought-provoking use of background music and farm life sounds or the narrative content. It is the voices — fourteen southern Maryland people who have experienced 20th century tobacco agriculture.

"That's how we made it. . . . When it's part of your life, it's kind of hard to see it vanish . . ." reflects Judith Leavitt of Calvert County in an interview with Carrie and Michael Kline, former instructors at the College. But what these words in text do not convey is Leavitt's complex feelings regarding the changing agricultural environment in southern Maryland. *Born And Raised* captures her voice with the emotion — the sniffles, even sobs, as she laments the loss.

Born And Raised is devoted to the personal stories of the informants: tobacco farmers, sellers, and officials. Not only have the Klines captured these stories for the Calvert County Historic District Commission, who share ownership of the transcripts, they have woven these

stories together into a provocative opus. Balancing the attitudes about the buyout, the changing landscape, and the economic variables of new crops, *Born And Raised* succeeds in remaining objective. It does not come up with any conclusion or bias. But it will raise your eyebrows, stimulate your mind, and provoke a few emotions.

For me the climactic moment mastered through Kline's engineering magic occurs when a voice in the background sings "*growing houses in the field between the towns - spaces won't be spaces anymore*", as one farmer laments the loss of farmland and another remarks about the loss of air quality, "I've heard it said recently that one acre of trees removes thirteen tons of pollutants from the air a year . . . Huntingtown School cleared 54 acres of trees . . . multiply that by 13 tons and then by 50 years, that's a lot of pollutants we are going to eat," says one. Another farmer says of the loss of open land, "there's no place left to hunt - they done built it up." I get choked up just typing this — a result of hearing these voices pine for the past. You won't get this feeling from a book. You have to hear it, experience it aurally.

The five southern Maryland counties have lost 370,000 acres of farmland in the past ten years. At this rate, agriculture here will become only a memory. Already tobacco is approaching extinction and I can honestly say that, in St. Mary's County, I saw only two fields of tobacco last summer — up on Rte. 5 north of Leonardtown. It may just be that memories of tobacco culture are all that is left to celebrate the founding economy of our region. In my opinion, *Born And Raised* is the most successful publication to date at capturing the personal stories, the tragic loss of farmland, and the powerful emotions of those who are living through these changing times.

Born And Raised is available at Farthing's Ordinary in Historic St. Mary's City. Along with the Kline's other audio offerings, it is available on their web site: www.folktalk.org

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