THE 1989 REUNION THEME:
THE MYTH OR STORY OF THE BERRY CLAN

(From the 5 presentations BVP chooses
Jim Berry's for reproduction here)

There is a Berry story of some marvelous sub-
tance. It's the story of WN and Bess who in 1910
put 2 lives together based on a common approach to
how life should be lived. After about 80 years we
come here to celebrate that event in some small way
and to explore its meaning.

My first memories go back to 800 Douglas St.
where we lived on the corner and went to Caldwell
School, not much more than a block away on Asheboro
St. By the time I went into fourth grade we had
moved to the other side of town and went to St.
Benedict's.

But that's not what I'm here to talk about.

What I wanted to spend some time on was de-
lineation of what might be called the basic assump-
tions that our family came to regard as controlling
considerations in working out our lives.

Primarily we came to regard life as a serious
thing indeed. One must undertake life according to
a set of rules. First and foremost one must be
"good," that is, virtuous, upright, honest, looking
the world straight in the eye, unflinching, ready
to lay down one's life for the right. Self-
sacrifice was what one stood ever ready for. Just-
tice and the right demanded that the last full mea-
sure be laid on the altar of worthiness.

Underlying this devotion to being good was
the foundation of religion, not just any religion,
Roman Catholic religion. Let no one be mistaken.
Berrys are Catholics. One proved his or her Catho-
licity by going to Mass every single Sunday unfail-
ingly, no matter how far the scoutmaster had to
drive through the mountains to find the remotest
priest in the hills. If one did not get to Mass
one did not make the trip.

One also proved Catholicity by seeing that
nuns got where they wanted to go. For a while that
meant hitching up the horse Bess to a wagon and pro-
viding that kind of transportation. In a million
other ways, too, the Berrys established that being
Catholic was what they were to be identified as.

But Berrys were also closely identified with
the struggle to achieve the Great American Dream of
a house in the suburbs, automobiles in the drive-
way, and recognition as having succeeded. There
is, accordingly, a remarkable regard for education,
education in the sense of a training of the intel-
lect to comprehend what life is all about. Not so
much education for money making as for penetrating
the mysteries of life and for qualifying as an edu-
cated person. That included the educated woman as
well as the educated man, an uncommon view at the
time. The result has been notable intellectual

achievement on the part of many Berry women. Moth-
er might not have described herself as one, but I
think she was right much of a feminist, at least
insofar as she thought of herself as exercising
equal power in how things went in the household.

We were proud to be Americans and proud to be
patriots. We believed what the history books told
us of the nobility of the American story and we
went to war with a will and an energy of the kind
that electrified the whole world and made the na-
tion into a holy force for good. Or so we thought
at the time anyway, before we came to know that
venality was not something alien to these shores.

But venality was alien to WN and Bess. They
did not act out of selfishness or greed, and it is
truly a part of the Berry story that dedication to
something other than one's own interests must ener-
gize us—that when we come together to brag about
ourselves and our children we are most proud of
those achievements which demonstrate a devotion to
a cause, to something bigger than ourselves, out-
side ourselves, things which demonstrate that we
were able not only to look after ourselves, but
that we had something left over to use looking af-
ter someone or something else.

Perhaps the word is service. There is a
Berry tradition of service to good causes that WN
and Bess treasured and that we hope those that fol-
low us will also treasure. And that's the best con-

continuity for the Berry family!