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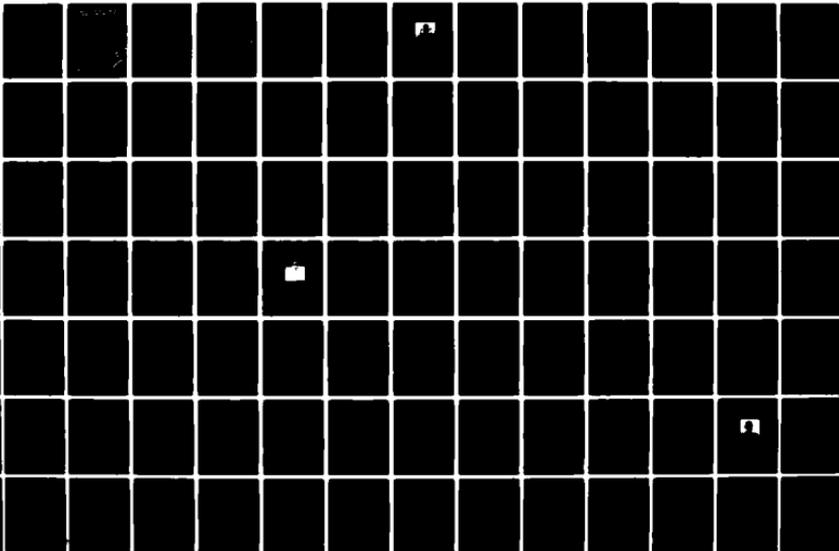
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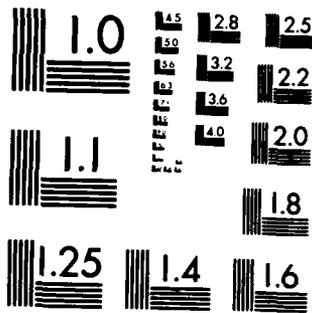
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS TOMBIGBEE HISTORIC TOWNSITES PROJECT

AD A127391

Volume 3
(Interview Numbers 112-116)



Compiled by:
James M. McClurken
and
Peggy Uland Anderson
with an Introduction by
James M. McClurken

Submitted by:
Dr. Charles E. Cleland
and
W. Lee Minnerly
The Museum
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

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THTP - Oral History Interview OH 112
An interview with
Daniel Lether Brown

conducted and edited by
Betty E. Mitson



Daniel Brown was born near Detroit, Alabama on November 22, 1893 and moved to Monroe County, Mississippi when he was a small boy. This interview concentrates on Mr. Brown's boyhood along the Buttahatchie River. He clearly recounts the story of his education, recreation, and holiday activities. Since his life centered around the family farm, he remembered such events as neighborhood log rollings, trips to town for supplies, and the methods of farm production.

The interview with Mr. Brown was conducted in his home on January 17, 1980 by Betty Mitson.

M: This is an interview with Daniel Lether Brown for the Tombigbee Historic Townsites Project by Betty E. Mitson on January 17, 1980. We are taping the interview at Mr. Brown's home at Route 1, Greenwood Springs, Mississippi 38848, and his telephone number is 256-8262.

Mr. Brown, I'd like to ask you where and when you were born?

B: I was born in Alabama, up near Detroit, about two or three miles this side of Detroit, on November 22, 1893. My daddy moved here in 1904. We moved here in December, and I started to school up here at Center Point in 1904 and 1905. Mormon Dean was teaching school up there. I went up there that year, and Miss Beulah Sharp was teaching in 1906 and 1907. I went to school up there about two years. I could go either place.

M: I want to return later in the interview to your schooling, but first I would like to ask you some other questions. Do you know why your daddy moved from Alabama?

B: Well, all I know is that he just sold out up there and bought down here.

M: Do you know if he had any relatives already here?

B: Well, he had two brothers that lived in Sulligent, Alabama, and one brother lived over here across the creek near Splunge.

M: Did they come before he did?

B: They was over there when he come.

M: So they already knew about this area.

B: Yeah.

M: I plan to talk more to you about your childhood, but before we do, I want to ask you a question about the river that is nearby. First, I want to explain where we are located. We are fifty miles from West Point, I think, aren't we?

B: I guess so, yes.

M: And West Point is the area in which the Tombigbee Historic Townsites Project is doing most of its research. I'm in this area today mainly to find out about the Buttahatchie River and what kind of commerce there was on the river in earlier days.

Where you live right now and where you've lived most of your life, about how far have you been from the Buttahatchie River?

B: Well, I've lived here all my life, ever since 1904, but I've worked several places. I've worked at Amory a few years, and I worked on the railroad in 1917 until I went into the Army in 1918--World War I.

M: But, say when you were a little boy, how far did you live from the river?

B: I guess it's about four miles from here to the closest place on the Buttahatchie River. See, this is Sipsie down here. It runs into the Buttahatchie down about Greenwood Springs, down in that bottom at Gattman.

M: Sipsie is just like a creek, isn't it?

B: Yes, it's smaller than the Buttahatchie. It's about half a mile from here to it.

M: The Sipsie is not big enough for any boats to go up it, is it?

B: No, there was no boats on it.

M: What about the Buttahatchie? Have you ever seen any boats on it?

B: No, I have never seen none, no. But way back they might have had; I think they did have. I'm not certain, but I think way back yonder they did have.

M: What makes you think that they had?

B: Well, it seems like I've heard my daddy say something about boats in Buttahatchie.

M: Do you remember if he said anything about what kind of boats they might have been?

B: No, I don't.

M: And you don't know if the boats carried any cotton or anything else?

B: No, I don't know. I don't guess they did. Way back they might have, but I don't guess they did.

M: Of course, his memory of the river would be just from 1904 on. He wouldn't know about the river before that time.

B: No.

M: And you didn't hear about it from any other people?

B: No.

M: As a boy, did you ever go swimming in the Buttahatchie River?

B: Yes, I went swimming in the Buttahatchie.

M: Would you tell me something about it?

B: Well, there were a bunch of us. We went over near Gattman, and we went in swimming just above the river bridge, this side of Gattman, up above there. I went in a time or two; I never. . . . I done most of my swimming in the Sipsie, but I did go in the Buttahatchie two or three times.

M: Was it skinny dipping?

B: Huh?

M: Do you know what I mean by "skinny dipping"? Without bathing suit?

B: Yeah. That's right. (laughter)

M: It was all boys, huh?

B: Yes.

M: How big a bunch would go?

B: Oh, there were three or four or five of us would go in the summertimes.

M: How about in the Sipsie? Would you go skinny dipping there, too?

B: Yeah. We went several times in it when I was just a boy, fifteen and sixteen years old. We'd go two or three times a week.

M: Does the Sipsie change its level quite a bit in the course of a year?

B: Well, do you mean up and down?

M: Yes.

B: Yeah, it does.

M: What periods is it high and when is it low?

B: Well, it's just up and down, according to the rain, you know. It's up and down a whole lot.

M: Would you tell me a bit about the weather in Mississippi?

B: Well, at this time of year it is sometimes warm like it is today, but we have lots of cold weather, too.

M: Can you get rain any time of the year?

B: Yeah, a whole lot of time. It has rained a whole lot this year. Last year it was dry so long, but we still got rain in time to make a fairly good crop.

- M: Do you get more rain in the wintertime than you do in the summer?
- B: More than likely, yes.
- M: But you can get rain anytime of the year?
- B: Yes, we get rain anytime.
- M: Does it ever rain hard for days?
- B: Yeah, sometimes we get it just real hard, and the creek gets out pretty bad down here, well, everywhere. The Buttahatchie gets out all over the bottom, and Sipsie, too. This year it has not been out so bad, but I have seen back in times when it got out just all over everywhere down here, and the Buttahatchie was out everywhere, too.
- M: Did it get to the point where people had to evacuate their homes?
- B: No, we never did have to. Over near Aberdeen and down that way, sometimes they have to get out.
- M: Is that from the Tombigbee River overflowing or from the Buttahatchie?
- B: That's the Tombigbee. Let's see, you were talking about boats in the Buttahatchie.
- M: Yeah.
- B: I don't think there were ever any boats in Buttahatchie; I was thinking of the Tombigbee when we was talking awhile ago about boats. But I don't think there has ever been any boats on the Buttahatchie.
- M: Not to your knowledge or not in your lifetime.
- B: No, I don't think so.
- M: But you couldn't say about earlier?
- B: Well, I wouldn't think there was earlier because I never did hear my daddy say anything about any boats or nothing in Buttahatchie. But I have heard him speak about way back there were some boats on Tombigbee. There ain't been none lately, I don't think.
- M: The silting has made a difference.
- B: Yeah.
- M: We don't know if the Buttahatchie used to be deeper. Silting may have filled it up.
- B: It could have, yes.
- M: Is it pretty wide in places?

- B: Well, fairly wide in some places. Not too awfully wide, but it's a right smart bigger than Sipsie.
- M: We are wondering how the people along the Buttahatchie got their cotton to market. Did you deal in cotton farming?
- B: Yeah. We always hauled ours to Aberdeen.
- M: Your father hauled his to Aberdeen?
- B: Yes, ma'am.
- M: In the early days, when you were a little boy, was this on a horse-drawn cart?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Let's go back to your childhood now. You mentioned that you had gone to two different schools, and you could attend either. Why did you have a choice?
- B: Well, we just did. Really, all that lived this side of that break down there, about that line there, went to Irving Schoolhouse. Those from there up went to Center Point. I went to Center Point the first three or four years we lived down here, but then I went down here three or four or five years, down here to Irving School. And then, maybe, I'd change back for another year. I went till I was twenty-one years old.
- M: These were tax-supported schools?
- B: Yeah, that's right.
- M: Was your daddy a farmer at that time?
- B: Yes, ma'am.
- M: Primarily a cotton farmer?
- B: Yeah, and corn.
- M: Was that on this property where we are now?
- B: Yeah.
- M: May I ask how many acres he had that he farmed?
- B: That he farmed?
- M: Well, altogether, and then how much did he farm?
- B: Well, there was 160 acres on the farm, but back then when he was farming it was 30 acres I think. That was about all he worked, about

thirty acres of it.

- M: I would like you to describe the operation of the farm. Did he work it alone or did he have help? And how many children were in your family, and if they helped, those kinds of things.
- B: There was five of us children, four boys and one girl. He done it all himself. Of course, us children helped. I was eleven years old when we moved here. Of course, I wasn't big enough to plow much, but some, and I hoed. All of us worked together.
- M: Were your brothers and sister older or younger than you?
- B: Older, all but one. I had one brother younger than me; he was about seven years old when we moved down here. No he wasn't seven--he was born in 1897. Let's see, he was seven years old when we moved here, but he wasn't big enough to do nothing, you know.
- M: How many months of the year did you go to school?
- B: Well, way back then they only had. . . . There was a while they had seven-months schooling here in Mississippi, but then they dropped back to five or six months a year, sometimes. That was all they had.
- Alabama only had about four months a year. But Mississippi had, I think, for awhile, seven months and then six.
- M: Do you know why they dropped back?
- B: No, I don't.
- M: You don't know if it was for lack of funds?
- B: It probably was.
- M: Were the months you spent in school ever determined by whether your father needed your help on the farm?
- B: Well. . . .
- M: In other words, did you sometimes have to get out of school to help on the farm?
- B: Well, sometimes, but hardly ever. He hardly ever kept us out of school for farming. Sometimes we might lost a few weeks or something, but not often.
- M: Did you notice that quite often your friends would be out of school so they could go help on their daddy's farm?
- B: Yeah, several of them helped on their daddy's farm. Maybe they'd be a month late in starting, and maybe quit a month before school was out.

M: As a young boy, were you doing some of the plowing on the farm?

B: Yeah, after I got up, say. . . . See, I had two brothers older than me. Of course, they plowed. I just got to plow. . . . I guess, I was fourteen or fifteen years old before I made a regular hand at plowing.

M: Was it a horse-drawn plow? A mule, or what?

B: Yeah.

M: Mules?

B: Mules, yeah.

M: How many mules did your daddy have?

B: My daddy had, when we moved down here, first started out, I think he just had three. After that, in a few years, he had four. Of course, you know, you go to fix a field ready for planting you've got to work a week or more on it before you could get over it with mules. It takes a long time.

M: Was this ground that your family came to, had it been worked before as a farm?

B: Yes, most of it had. He cleared eight or ten acres more down here in the bottom after he came down here.

M: Did he have to take a lot of rocks and stuff out when he did that?

B: No, there wasn't no rocks much down here. He had all that timber, logs and things to move off of it, pile up and burn. Way back then people didn't think about saving timber. They burned a lot of it.

M: Was it a matter of cutting trees, or were these logs that were sunken in the ground?

B: No, he had to cut them down.

M: Oh, he wasn't able to salvage them for your home use?

B: No, there wasn't any sawmills when we moved down here no closer than Gattman over here. Of course, the people didn't think about if they cut down a tree, say, if it was a good tree. They just burned it up and went on. They'd have logrollings, you know.

M: Have you seen logrollings?

B: Yeah.

M: Where were they? On the Sipsie?

- B: Yeah. It seemed like you'd clear that land up there, have four or five acres down here. Well, in plowing time, he'd have a logrolling. People would come in and roll logs all day and eat dinner there. Sometimes they'd have two days of logrolling. They'd have enough men that they'd just have stakes under the log, pick it up and tow it and pile it.
- M: Oh. When you said "logrolling," I thought you meant in the water.
- B: No, just hauling it where you cleared land.
- M: I see, pile them up and get them ready for burning.
- B: That's right.
- M: And would they cut the branches off, to do that?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Then you'd have to burn the branch heap too, I suppose.
- B: That's right.
- M: Do you remember what kind of wood that was? Was it mostly pine?
- B: No, most of that he cleared, there was some pine in it, but most of it was oak, gum, and such like all as that. Just like it is now, you know.
- M: As a boy of eleven, were you part of that operation?
- B: Well, I piled brush, sometimes, when I wasn't in school. He done most of that clearing while us boys was going to school in the winter.
- M: How far was the school for you to go?
- B: When we went to Center Point up here, it was about two and half or maybe three miles. It's only about two miles from here to the Irving School.
- M: How did you get there?
- B: Walked.
- M: I haven't seen any snow since I've been in this area. Did you ever walk through snow?
- B: Yeah. We had some snow, not too often, but some.
- M: Do you think the weather has changed at all since those days?
- B: Well, it seems like it has changed a little, don't it?

M: I can't tell. In what way do you think it has changed?

B: Well, we ain't had as cold a winter so far this winter as we used to have. I can remember when the ground was froze hard enough to hold a wagon up that wasn't loaded too heavy.

M: When you were a little boy?

B: Yeah.

M: Do you remember if that went on for a week or two or longer?

B: Yeah, sometimes it would be froze for a week or longer, just that hard. Of course, when it turned a little warm and rained for several days, it would thaw out.

M: Were these schools that you went to one room?

B: Yeah, most of the time it was. But along in the last before I quit school, they'd have an assistant teacher up here at Center Point, but it was all in one room. Down here it was the same way: they had an assistant teacher. Of course, back in 1924 they consolidated Irving School and Center Point together and built a schoolhouse up here. The school up here had three rooms then.

M: But that was after your time?

B: Yeah, that was after I quit school.

M: Earlier, you said something about attending school until you were twenty-one. Where were you at, in school, at that time?

B: Well, I believe my last school was here at Irving Schoolhouse.

M: Were you in so long because you had missed so much school?

B: No, I just went to school every year until I was twenty-one years old. I went just about as high as I could go at school here then, you know.

M: Uh-huh. What grade level were you at then?

B: Well, I guess. . . . Well, back then I don't know how the grades went, but they went just about as. . . .

M: Would that be equivalent to what we'd call high school today, do you suppose?

B: Well, it'd be up about the tenth grade, or along like that.

M: Were your grandfather and grandmother alive when you were a boy?

B: Yeah, they was alive. My granddaddy died in 1904, but my grandmother lived on until about 1912, I believe it was.

- M: Did they live close to you?
- B: It's four or five miles to where Grandpa Rhea's place was. That was my mother's folks. My daddy's folks lived in Alabama.
- M: Did you see your grandparents in Alabama frequently?
- B: Yeah. Well, when we lived up there in Alabama, it wasn't hardly a mile to my Granddaddy Brown's place. Of course, I seen him pretty often. He ran a cotton gin up there.
- M: Do you recall that he ever told you anything about his early life?
- B: No, I don't believe he ever did.
- M: Did you ever watch him operate the cotton gin?
- B: Yeah, I watched him operate it. He done it with mules.
- M: Would you describe it a bit?
- B: Well, I think there was about six head of mules that pulled the gin. Two worked together. They just went around and around, you know. Of course, they had a driver. I never did drive none, but my brother did. The mules had a seat back behind them. You could tap them up.
- M: Would your brother, sitting on the seat, go around with the mule?
- B: Yeah, he'd just ride around and around.
- M: So he saw to it that the mules kept moving, huh?
- B: Yeah, and every pair had a driver. There were about three pair of mules pulling it, you know, and each pair had a driver, some kid, someone. . .well, I believe Anse Ellet drove some.
- M: Did your grandpa give him a little bit of money for that?
- B: I think he give Ive about two bit a day.
- M: If one set of mules didn't move, that would hold up the others, wouldn't it?
- B: Yeah. You had to start them all off at once.
- M: Oh, yeah, to keep them in coordination.
- B: Yeah.
- M: This was all outside, wasn't it?
- B: Yeah, it was outside. And they pressed the cotton, back then, with a hand press, you know.

M: How did that work?

B: They'd tie the cotton out. They'd press it down and put ties around it and tie the bales of cotton out thataway.

M: They'd put it through the gin first?

B: They put it through the gin and pressed the lint cotton, bale cotton in, tie it, roll it. . . .

M: Of course, this was in Alabama that you're talking about.

B: Uh-hum, yeah.

M: Where did your father take his cotton to a gin?

B: He carried it there. See, his daddy run that gin until we. . . . Well, he quit and didn't run it much after we moved down here. Well, he died in 1900 or 1902, I believe. Well, my father carried it up there, and run the gin heads. He did, a whole lot for my grandfather.

M: After it went through the gin, where would the cotton go?

B: Well, after it went through the gin, it went into a press, all in there. And the seed stayed up in the ginhouse, and caught the seed there.

M: They could market the seed, too, couldn't they?

B: Yeah, they could, but most of them brought them back. Back in them days, they fed them to the cows.

M: Did you have problems with ticks on cattle in those days?

B: Yeah, we did.

M: Even back when you were a little boy they had problems with ticks?

B: Yeah, they had ticks. You know, if you had ticks, they had vats built around here. They had one over here at Splunge. If the tick inspectors came around and found ticks on your cows, you had to dip them, drive them over there and run them through that vat and dip them.

M: That was later, wasn't it? Wasn't it in the 1920s?

B: No, not in the 1920s. That was way back before 1920.

M: Was it when you were a boy?

B: Yeah.

M: Were they doing it when you first moved here?

- B: Four of five years after I moved here. I guess about 1912 or 1913 they had vats. If you had ticks on your cows, you wasn't supposed to sell them till you got them off.
- M: I see. Did they think ticks carried disease?
- B: No, they just wanted to get rid of them. See, in this day and time there ain't no ticks much. There's a few but not much.
- M: Were they a big problem back then?
- B: Yes, back then.
- M: When you looked at a cow, you could see a lot of ticks on them?
- B: Oh, yeah!
- M: When you were a boy, did you ever have them on you?
- B: Yeah, I have had a few get on me when I was a little boy.
- M: Not to the point where it was a big problem?
- B: No, not too bad.
- M: What about what did you did when you were a kid. Or do you remember anything your grandpa or daddy told you about what they did, like games? What kinds of games did you play?
- B: Well, we played ball, had ballgames.
- M: Did you play baseball?
- B: Yes, some baseball.
- M: Where was there a field around here?
- B: I recollect we have played down here in the pasture, way back, a few times, not too many times.
- M: Were there more children in the area then than there are now?
- B: Well, in a way, I guess there was.
- M: It was a newer community then.
- B: Yeah.
- M: Did you play things like hide-and-seek?
- B: Yeah, we'd play hide-and-seek, and play "anti over" with a ball-- throw it over the house. One crowd would be over here and the other over there and see which side would beat, you know.

M: Anti over?

B: That's right, anti over.

M: Did you ever swat the ball against the house?

B: Yeah, did some.

M: Was there a play yard at school?

B: Yeah.

M: At both schools?

B: Yeah.

M: Did all the children in your family continue in school until they were around twenty-one?

B: My oldest brother went until he was about twenty-one, and my sister taught school, some, after she was married. Well, she taught some before she was married, over here at Grubtoe, my sister did.

M: So going to school until you were twenty-one wasn't unusual then, was it?

B: No, there were several that did it.

M: Most children leave school, now, when they are about sixteen or seventeen. I just wondered if you could explain why the difference? Had you been out of school quite a bit to help on the farm and you needed to stay in school longer because of that? Or was it just that everybody went to school longer then?

B: Everybody went to school longer, but now they go to school until the twelfth grade. Well, they go to the eighth here at Greenwood, and then they have to go to Hatley for the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth.

M: When you left school, then, did you get a job right away, or did you stay with the farm?

B: Well, after I got up big enough, there got to be a few sawmills around, so if I wasn't in school or wasn't farming, I'd probably work at a sawmill.

M: Did your daddy ever depend on hunting and fishing for some of the family food?

B: No, he never did fish much. He'd go hunting a few times--not very regular. He had. . . . Us boys hunted and fished--me and Greeley, especially. We hunted a whole lot--bird hunt and squirrel hunt.

- M: How young were you when you started that?
- B: Oh, I was about fifteen or sixteen years old. Greeley wasn't over ten or twelve years.
- M: Were the birds used for food?
- B: Yeah, we'd bring them in.
- M: Did you have to clean them yourself?
- B: Yeah.
- M: What kind of a rifle did you use?
- B: We used shotguns.
- M: What about holidays when you were little? Did you usually go to one of your grandparents' places for Christmas?
- B: A heap of times, yeah. Back then we'd take a week for Christmas, you know.
- M: Do you mean a week out of school? Or a week to go visiting?
- B: A week out of school; the school would close down for about a week.
- M: Then your family would go to visit your grandparents?
- B: Yeah, we'd go see them.
- M: Did you believe in Santa Claus?
- B: Yeah. (laughter)
- M: Really?
- B: Yeah, I believed in it till I was up eight or ten years old. Of course, I had sort of caught onto it a whole lot. After you go to school awhile, you learn about the idea of this and that talk about who Santa Claus was. But I wouldn't agree with them for a long time. But naturally, I didn't want to find out. (laughter)
- M: (laughter) So, you wanted to think there was a Santa Claus!
- B: Yeah.
- M: Did your family have a Christmas tree every year?
- B: No, we hung up our socks back when I was coming up. You'd hang your socks up on a chair, you know.
- M: Oh, yeah. No fireplace, huh?

B: Yeah, right on the fireplace.

M: Oh, you had a fireplace, but you hung them on the chair?

B: Hung them on the chair.

M: They were real socks, then, weren't they?

B: Yeah.

M: What would you get in your stocking?

B: Well, we'd get two or three apples, two or three oranges, little candy, sometimes some little old toy, not much. Santa Claus didn't bring much back in them days. (laughter)

M: And you didn't always have a Christmas tree?

B: No, let's see, I don't believe we ever had a Christmas tree until after me and you were married, did we? (Directed question to wife who shook her head negatively.)

M: So your main celebration was with the socks?

B: Yeah.

M: Did you exchange gifts, too?

B: Yeah. Of course, we'd get up early that morning, and every feller got his own gift.

M: Was it usually one gift for each child?

B: Yeah.

M: Of course, there usually wasn't any snow, I suppose.

B: No, hardly ever, but we did have some snow.

M: Would you do this at home and then go to Grandpa and Grandmother's place for dinner?

B: Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes we'd go there.

M: Would they have a Christmas tree?

B: No, they didn't have a tree.

M: But they'd have a big dinner?

B: Yeah.

M: And I suppose there'd be other relatives there, too.

- B: Yeah.
- M: When there was a big family gathering, did the children eat at the dinner table with the grownups, or did they have to eat in the kitchen?
- B: Most of the time, a lot of them would have to wait, or some of them would eat in the kitchen. A lot of times, you'd have to wait, you know.
- M: Wait until the adults had already eaten.
- B: Yeah, like that old song about what's his name who took a cold tater and wait.¹
- M: Yes, I've heard that one, too. When you were with the other boys playing, did you ever pull any stunts or pranks?
- B: Well, yes, some.
- M: Can you remember any?
- B: Let me see.
- M: Did you ever push over any outhouses?
- B: No, I don't believe we ever did. But, talk about playing pranks, I remember one time before we moved down here, there was a branch on that place up there. Me and my brother older than me was standing on the edge of the bridge, and he pushed me off into the branch.
- M: Oh, was this the Sipsie?
- B: No, it was just a little branch, like that one down there.
- M: When you say a "branch," do you mean just a small creek?
- B: Yeah, just a small creek. There wasn't very much water; it wasn't over that wide. But the ditch was about as deep as that mantel up there.
- M: Did you learn to swim when you were a kid?
- B: Yeah.
- M: How did you learn?
- B: Well, I just kept trying until I learned.

¹Little Jimmy Dickens sang, "Take an Old Cold Tater and Wait."

- M: Nobody forced you to learn?
- B: No, just by my own self. I remember going in the creek up here, in Sipsie. There was one place, it was over my head. It wasn't over my head no further to the other bank than from here to that couch over there. I got over on that other bank and dove in there and crawled on the bottom until I could get out where I could raise up. I just kept on like that until I learned how to swim.
- M: Oh, you'd dive right in, wow! Was it so deep that you could have drowned?
- B: If I'd have stopped back out there, I would have, but I'd keep coming.
- M: Would you dogpaddle until you got across?
- B: Yeah. I'd crawl along the bottom. I'd have an idea how far I'd have to go until I could raise up.
- M: You mean you'd hold your breath underneath all that time?
- B: Yeah, you'd have to hold your breath until you could come up.
- M: That was pretty brave. Were your mother and father strong disciplinarians?
- B: Well, pretty well, yeah.
- M: How did they discipline you?
- B: How'd they do which?
- M: If you did anything wrong, what would they do?
- B: Oh, we'd get a whuppin'. (laughter) My daddy never did whup me, I don't believe, but my mother has several times. I remember one time when Uncle Luce and Aunt *Fromme* came down here. They had a bunch of kids and I done something in there, and I had on a jumper, and my *mammy* was aiming to catch me and whup me. She caught me with the tail of the jumper, but I just throwed my hands back out of the way and let her have the jumper, and I went off. (laughter)
- M: Did she get you?
- B: She told me she would. Sometimes she would, but I'd watch and a heap of times after a day or two she'd forget it. I didn't get no whuppin'.
- M: What do you mean by a "jumper"?
- B: It was just a little old jacket you wore, you know.
- M: Oh, you slipped out of the jacket and got away. (laughter) When she whipped you, was it with her hand or with a stick?

- B: Most of the time it was with a hickory about that long.
- M: Oh, about five or six feet long, huh?
- B: Yeah.
- M: A hickory stick?
- B: Yeah, that always was a pretty good switch.
- M: What about your brothers and sisters. Did you find that you were a pretty good unit by yourselves?
- B: Yeah.
- M: You didn't have to depend on other kids for company?
- B: No.
- M: Halloween is a big thing in the cities. As a country boy did you ever celebrate Halloween?
- B: Well, I don't believe we ever did much about Halloween. At Christmastime they used to go serenading, you know, just a great crowd serenading around the house.
- M: You'd go out singing?
- B: Yeah, we'd just go along, some would have old plows and bells, you know, and slip up. And if they, whoever's house you was going to serenade, if he beat you, if he shot a gun first, he didn't have to go. But say like you was serenading here, when they got through, if I didn't beat them, I'd have to go with them. Sometimes they'd go five or six miles walking and serenading.
- M: I don't quite understand. If they came to your house and you weren't with the group, how would they get you to go with them?
- B: Well, they'd serenade around this house.
- M: You mean they'd walk around the house singing?
- B: Yeah, and rattling bells and shooting guns. Then when that was all over, I'd have to go with them and serenade somewheres else unless I beat them, you know.
- M: You beat them by shooting off a gun before they got done?
- B: You'd get out there and hide. You could hear them coming up the road. Then they got up pretty close, you'd just haul off and shoot straight up.
- M: Oh! If you didn't do that before they got to the house, then when

they had finished, you had to go along?

B: That's right.

M: Was this on Christmas Eve?

B: Yeah.

M: Did everybody always go along?

B: Yeah, nearly everyone, and sometimes two or three out of one family.

M: (laughter) That's fun! I've never heard of that.

B: If you didn't go, they had a pole; they'd put him on it a towed him a piece.

M: How would they put him on a pole?

B: They put him up straddle the pole.

M: They would?

B: Yeah!

M: Would they go into the house and get him?

B: Yeah, if he didn't come out, they would.

M: Really?

B: Yeah.

M: Was this just for the young people in the family?

B: Yeah. Well, no, they was old. Some of them were forty and fifty years old, some of the men was.

M: Was it always a man who had to go along?

B: Yeah.

M: Or did the woman sometimes go?

B: No, there didn't any women go. It was always men back then.

M: Not any young kids either?

B: No, no.

M: Was it always the young adult group and men?

B: Yeah, mostly. There might be a few along who were fourteen and fif-

teen years old, but most of them, two-thirds of them were grown.

M: And you remember that from the time you were a little boy?

B: Yeah.

M: What kinds of songs did they sing?

B: Just anything--hollar and sing and rattle bells and shoot guns.

M: Were they mostly Christmas carols?

B: Well, mostly.

M: And "Jingle Bells," I suppose.

B: Yeah, that's right.

M: Anything. . . .

B: To make a racket. (laughter)

M: Do you have any idea if your parents used to do that when they were young, too?

B: Yeah, I guess. I don't think my mother ever did, but I'm pretty sure my daddy went several times when he was young.

M: Do you know if your grandparents did it?

B: No, but I guess they did.

M: You think it goes back?

B: Yeah.

M: And they didn't call that "carolling," they called it "serenading"?

B: Yeah, and maybe. . . . See, if you had a wagon setting out there, or a buggy, probably some of them would take the wheels off of it and lay them out somewhere or other. And I have heard of them bending over a tree and tying it up there and turning the tree loose and let it go up. (laughter)

M: Oh! (laughter) You mean, they did that with the whole wagon? Would they swing the wagon up in the air or just the wheels?

B: Just the wheels, maybe.

M: How about the Fourth of July? What did you do then?

B: Us kids mostly went fishing on the Fourth of July, if we didn't go to a picnic. After I got up so big, they'd have a picnic somewhere around

over there a mile or closer. You'd go to that picnic and stay all day.

M: Who'd put that on? Was that a community thing or a church?

B: Just a community thing. Some feller, two or three or four of them, would put up a lemonade stand and sell lemonade, ice cream, and things like that.

M: Would they have fireworks?

B: Not at the picnic, much, no.

M: So on the Fourth, you didn't usually have fireworks.

B: No, but they shot a lot of firecrackers around the homes. And when they were serenading, a heap of them would shoot firecrackers.

M: You mean, at Christmastime when they were serenading, they would use firecrackers?

B: Some of them would, yeah.

M: How about New Year's? Did they use firecrackers then?

B: I don't believe they ever did.

M: So fireworks were used only around the houses on the Fourth of July and at Christmastime.

B: Yeah.

M: Did you have any celebration at Thanksgiving time?

B: Not hardly ever, no.

M: No special dinner? So Thanksgiving was like any other day when you were little?

B: Yeah, mostly.

M: What happened on your birthdays?

B: Well, I'll tell you what, way back then, a lot of times my birthday would pass and I'd forget it and never know it. But now people thinks of their birthday and have this and that.

M: Was that true generally, that the children's birthday wasn't celebrated?

B: Yeah, that's right. I can tell you one thing: me and my brother and sister all had the same birthday, two years to a day difference in our ages. My sister was four years older than I was, and I had a

brother two years older than I was. All three of our birthdays come on November 22.

M: Did your mother tell you anything about your birth? Were you born at home?

B: Yeah, I was born at home.

M: I suppose all the children were born at home.

B: Yeah.

M: Was your mother a strong woman?

B: Well, pretty well, yes. She was pretty strong; she worked in the fields. She hoed.

M: Did she have to have meals for your dad and you folks when you were working in the fields, too?

B: Yeah, she'd quit in time to come to the house to get dinner.

M: She had quite a lot of work to do, then.

B: Yeah.

M: How about in the house, was your dad pretty much in control of the decisions? I mean, when it came to deciding what to do, was he the boss?

B: Yeah, mostly. Of course, my mother done all the inside work in the house.

M: She pretty much decided what was to be done inside?

B: Yeah.

M: But when it came to asking for privileges, would you usually go to your mother or your dad?

B: Well, me, I'd mostly go to my daddy most of the time.

M: Do you recall any songs that your parents or grandparents may have sung to you?

B: I can think of one, I believe, about "Old Boots and Leggings."

M: Could you sing it for me?

B: No, I couldn't; I forgot it, but I recollect the name of it.

M: Uh-huh, "Old Boots and Leggings." You don't remember what it was about?

- B: No, that's all I remember.
- M: When you were a little boy, were there any black children in the community that you played with?
- B: Well, let's see. Back when we lived in Alabama there was black children. There was a family of niggers lived no further than from here to around the curve over there from where we lived. I played with them a whole lot.
- M: But after you came here, there weren't any around here?
- B: No, I never did play with any down here. But I've eat dinner, when I was just a kid, with them nigger kids when we lived up there in Alabama. If I was up there playing at dinnertime, I just went in, and if they had dinner, I'd just sit down and eat.
- M: Did you find that happened a lot when you were a kid? If you were off somewhere playing with somebody else, you'd just naturally eat with that family rather than go all the way home?
- B: Yeah.
- M: I suppose you did a lot of walking as a kid--things are far between around here.
- B: Yeah, I did a lot of walking then.
- M: If you wanted to go any distance, what kind of transportation did you use?
- B: Well, if the whole family went, we went in a wagon.
- M: That would be the same wagon your daddy would transport his cotton on?
- B: Yeah.
- M: An open wagon.
- B: Yeah. After us boys got up to a fairly good size, we'd ride a horse if we went someplace. A feller didn't think anything of going from here to Aberdeen on a horse.
- M: When you got to Aberdeen with the horse, what did you do with him?
- B: Carried him down to a cotton yard they had there. They had stalls built around in that. You just put him in there and feed him if he stayed all night. He'd stay there in that stall at the cotton yard.
- M: Did you have to pay for that service?
- B: No, you didn't have to pay for that cotton yard. Way back then,

everybody would haul cotton, they had to haul their cotton to Aberdeen or Amory and they'd carry their bale or two of cotton. Some would take two bales at a time from here to Aberdeen, some just one.

M: You didn't do that with just a horse, though.

B: You had to have a team of horses or mules.

M: But you could still use that cotton yard if you just went with one horse.

B: Yeah.

M: I see, so they just provided that service, then, for their customers.

B: Yeah, and they had a house built there. You could carry. . .you know, way back then, it would take them two days to go to Aberdeen to unload cotton. When you'd get over there, you'd put your horses up there and take you quilts and make a pallet and just sleep there at that cotton yard in Aberdeen.

M: Oh. Do you mean it took two days--one day to get there and one day to come home?

B: Yeah.

M: That's when you were a little boy, it took that long?

B: That's right.

M: Would you describe, then, why it took so long?

B: Well, they didn't have as good roads as they've got now, you know. I can remember the first time I ever went to Aberdeen, I believe I was about seven years old. I went with my daddy. We'd leave up there. . .

M: When you say "up there," what do you mean?

B: Up there, this side of Detroit, Alabama about two or three miles, and go way down. Maybe we wouldn't get into Aberdeen that day, but if we did, most of the time we'd go on, but if we didn't we'd just camp out. But if we'd go on to Aberdeen, it'd be dark then. We'd put up, they'd stop and feed, they carried their grub with them. Back then there wasn't staying all night much in a hotel, hardly. They carried their grub with them; they'd eat, make a pallet and go to bed.

M: If you had to camp along the way going there, did you sleep on your pallet out in the open?

B: Yeah.

M: No tent, or anything?

- B: Uh-huh.
- M: Coming from where you are now, when your daddy farmed here, did it still take a whold day to get to Aberdeen?
- B: No, after we moved down here, we could mostly go there and back in a day. We might have stayed over there a few times but not much after we moved here. Before then, I know we'd leave where we lived in Alabama and get down to Quincy down here about dinnertime and eat dinner, and then have to go on from there to Aberdeen. Of course, the roads was bad; you couldn't make no time.
- M: Even as a young boy, you sometimes went with them on that trip.
- B: Yeah. I was about seven years old before I'd ever seen a train.
- M: How old were you before you ever rode a train?
- B: Let's see. I went from here to Aberdeen one time on a train. I was near about grown then.
- M: Where could you get on it?
- B: At Greenwood Springs.
- M: Oh, the train went through there and stopped? Does it still do that?
- B: No, there ain't no passenger trains now, you know. It's all freights.
- M: But the freight train doesn't stop there either.
- B: No.
- M: But it used to in those days?
- B: Yeah.
- M: To your knowledge, did the farmers in the area use the train for transporting anything or for receiving any goods in this area?
- B: Well, if they'd ordered anything from someplace, you'd have to go to Gattman or Greenwood Springs to the depot station and pick it up there. They used to order a lot thataway.
- M: They used to have depots in Greenwood Springs and in Gattman, but they didn't used to ship cotton out of those stations?
- B: Sometimes I guess they'd ship some cotton from some of the places, but most all of them around here, they'd just haul it to Aberdeen or Amory and sell it there.
- M: I see. There wasn't any gin at Greenwood Springs or at Gattman?

- B: Yeah, there was a gin at Greenwood. I don't believe there ever was any gin at Gattman, but I don't know. But I know there was a gin at Greenwood.
- M: When your daddy took his cotton to Aberdeen, he'd use a gin at Aberdeen, I suppose, didn't he?
- B: No, he'd gin it at Greenwood and then pick it up there and carry it on to Aberdeen. Or he'd bring it back home from Greenwood, and then when he took a notion to go to Aberdeen, he'd just load up a load and pull out to Aberdeen.
- M: Oh, I see. So the man who ran the gin just processed it. He didn't do any marketing?
- B: No. He just rolled it out there, and you had to haul it away.
- M: Do you know if any of the gin owners ever took the cotton and processed it and then marketed it themselves? Or did the farmers always have to do it?
- B: The farmers always done it. They just ginned it at Greenwood.
- M: After it's ginned, is it baled?
- B: Yeah, they gin it and bale that, put ties around it, and roll it out. You've got to pick it up.
- M: When the cotton is carried to the gin, is it loose?
- B: It's loose in the wagon. You see, you drive up to the gin and they had a When you would haul down here at Greenwood, they had a suction on there. You just drove your wagon up and run that suction thing. It would suck it off up into the gin and it would gin it as it went off. You'd have a bale on, you see. When they got done, there was a man standing there to press. It didn't take but just a few minutes to press that bale of cotton and tie it out and roll it out.
- M: Was that suction device there when you were a little boy, or was that a development that came later?
- B: Well, I guess I was fifteen or sixteen years old before ever I seen one of them suctions that set over the wagon. You used to have to load it in the basket and pour it up there. But then you just run that suction and it would suck it all.
- M: I want to ask you about houses. In the area where we're doing most of our research, a lot of the houses are what are called dogtrot houses. Did you ever hear of a dogtrot house?
- B: Dogtrot?
- M: Yes.

- B: No, I don't believe I have.
- M: Maybe you've seen one, but you call it by a different name. It's a double house with a hallway between that's open on both ends. Have you seen one of those kind?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Would you call that a double house?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Is that what your name for it would be?
- B: It would be a double house, yeah.
- M: Were a lot of those around when you were a little boy?
- B: Yeah, a good many of them.
- M: Do you think there were more of those kind than any other?
- B: Yeah, I believe you'd find more of them with a hall between them than any other kind. You don't see as many houses built in this day and time with a hall in them.
- M: No. Did anybody ever tell you why they were built that way?
- B: No. They just built them.
- M: Did you ever know of any family where, say, the grandparents would be on one side and the younger people on the other side?
- B: Yeah, sometimes thataway.
- M: Did you ever know of a family to board those ends up and make it enclosed?
- B: Yes.
- M: Do you know of any old houses around now that are like that, closed up?
- B: Well, in a way, we have this one. The hall used to go clear through. It had a back porch there and a hall here. But we closed up the end of it and made kind of a room out of it.
- M: Was it open on the other end, too?
- B: It used to be, yes.
- M: Is this the house your daddy bought?

- B: Uh-huh.
- M: Was the hall open when he bought it?
- B: Yes.
- M: Who closed it up?
- B: I did.
- M: When you were little, did your whole family occupy sides of the house?
- B: Yeah. When we moved here, there wasn't any door there. This was just a bedroom. (Interview was conducted in the present living room.) If you went to the dining room and kitchen, you had to go out this door, down that way, and then back in there.
- M: Oh, so your entrances were off the central hall, then?
- B: Yeah. See, I put that door there from the living room to the kitchen. I done that after me and Pearl married.
- M: Do you know why they put all the doors on the central hall?
- B: No.
- M: When your folks lived, were all the bedrooms on one side and the living area on the other sides?
- B: No, we had a bedroom here and a bedroom yonder across the way, and we had a sideroom over there back then, and we had a bed or two in it.
- M: In those days I suppose you had an outhouse for your bathroom.
- B: Yeah, the bathroom was outside.
- M: How did you take a bath?
- B: With a tub?
- M: A round washtub?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Did your mother and father use it too?
- B: Yeah. Most of the time they'd draw the water up in the morning and set it out in the sun. It would set there all day and be pretty warm to take a bath in at night.
- M: Would you take your bath outside, then?

- B: We'd bring the tub inside. Two would carry it in.
- M: So, you'd use the sun to heat your water in the summertime. In the wintertime, would you heat it on the woodstove?
- B: We had to.
- M: Was that a Saturday night ritual?
- B: Most of the time, yes.
- M: All the kids had a bath on Saturday night, huh?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Did you ever bathe two to a tub? Of course, you were eleven when you came there, so I guess you didn't then.
- B: No.
- M: How did your folks get their grocery supplies when you were a youngster?
- B: We'd go to town in a wagon.
- M: What was "town"--Aberdeen?
- B: We bought most of our groceries at Sulligent. It's about eight and a half mile up there. Back when I was a kid, when we sold cotton, my daddy would always buy two barrels of flour and I don't know how much sugar and coffee. We brought it home, and we didn't go to town very often, not like we do now, you know. Oh, we might go to some little store and buy some little something there. But away back then, when I was a boy, you could buy a dollar or a dollar and a half's worth of coffee and get a poke that wide and that high full of coffee and grind it yourself.
- M: That's about a foot and a half by a foot and a half size, huh?
- B: Yeah. It would do nearly until you got done laying by a crop. You got two barrels of flour. I never did know nothing about seeing a sack of flour bought. Back when I was a kid, we bought it in barrels.
- M: I suppose you'd take the barrel back each time and get it refilled.
- B: No, we'd just get a new barrel. It came in barrels. I believe there was 196 pounds of flour to the barrel.
- M: Would you buy meal in the barrel, too?
- B: No, we'd go to mill. We'd raise our corn, you know, and shell us a bushel and carry it to the mill. They had a water mill up the road here about a mile and a half or two miles.

M: What else besides flour did you get in a barrel?

B: I don't believe we got anything.

M: How did you buy sugar?

B: We'd always buy it in big sacks.

M: Did you ever buy barrels of crackers?

B: No. We hardly ever bought any crackers.

M: Your mother baked your bread?

B: Yeah. I can tell you one thing. I told you I was seven years old when I first went to Aberdeen. I was seven years old before I ever seen a banana. That's the truth.

M: Is that right? How about oranges?

B: Oh, yeah, we were used to eating oranges.

M: Where did you see your first banana?

B: Well, me and my daddy was going along the road, and there was a nigger or two in a wagon we met, and there was a nigger woman eating a banana. I said to my father, "What in the world was that nigger eating? A cob?" (laughter) I thought it looked like a corncob, you know.

M: (laughter) It would.

B: I know when he'd buy. . .sometimes he'd buy a whole stalk of bananas and bring it home to mother. He'd do that when he'd go over there in the fall every year.

M: Did your mother have one day of a week to do her baking?

B: No, she baked three meals a day.

M: But I mean baking bread. Did she just bake when you needed it?

B: Just as we needed it. She knowed just about how much bread we'd eat and she'd cook that much.

M: Did she let you eat the bread almost as soon as it was out of the oven, or did she let it set for awhile?

B: She'd get it all on the table and then call us to dinner.

M: I wonder about these houses that set up on pillars or piers. Your house sets on the ground, doesn't it?

B: No, my house, see, I've got. . . . It was off of the. . . . Well, on the back side of the house out there, you could go out there now. I've got it underpinned now, but when we moved here, it was just setting on pillars, and you could walk under that house, back yonder. Of course, it's not that high here in the front. But it's underpinned now.

M: So you can't see those pillars now, can you?

B: No, see it's underpinned all around.

M: Do you have any idea how old this house is?

B: Well, let's see. My daddy bought this from old man Elihu Pickle. He told my daddy that he built this house when his oldest girl was a baby. If she was living now, she would be two or three years older than my oldest brother. This house is ninety years old, or more, a little over ninety.

M: So we know that they were building houses on piers in this area at least ninety years ago.

B: Yeah.

M: But quite a lot of houses seem to be built right on the ground.

B: Yeah, nearly all of them are now.

M: Do you know when they started building houses around here on piers? Are a lot of the old, old houses on piers?

B: Yeah, lots of them. My Granddaddy Rhea built that chimney there. But we don't use it, you see. And he built one to the other end of the house, but it sort of fell down, and I had it tore down and had it rebuilt. But this one has been built over ninety years.

M: So in a double house, did they usually put a chimney on both sides?

B: On both ends, they used to. Now a lot of them in this day and time have a chimney, say, like in the middle here, have a fireplace and then in that other room another fireplace to the same chimney.

M: When your fireplaces were built, presumably that was the main heat for the house, except the woodstove in the kitchen, huh?

B: That's all, yeah.

M: Do you know why they used to build houses on piers or pillars?

B: No, I don't.

M: Which do you call them, pillars or piers?

- B: Pillars.
- M: You don't know why they put houses up on pillars?
- B: I don't know; that was just a rule back in them days, I reckon, to have them up off of the ground, you know. But now they build them right flat on the ground.
- M: In old houses around here, you never see a basement, do you?
- B: No, not in real old houses. You hardly ever see a basement.
- M: Do they make them now with basements?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Do you suppose it had something to do with the moisture in the ground?
- B: I just don't know. My oldest boy lives at Alabaster below Birmingham, Alabama, and he had a full basement under his house. He's got a pretty large house.
- M: It seems that it would be harder to construct a house that has to be on pillars. Have you ever helped build a house that was on pillars?
- B: Yeah. Say you start to build this house here, start laying your sills for the house, well, you see you'd get it up so high like you wanted it, and then you had a level, and you just made it level around there and you start there. See that's got to be higher and higher down there to the rear. They just built the pillars up and made it level, and set the sill on top of that pillar.
- M: How would they suspend the floor? The floor has to be up off the ground, right? Would you have to have special. . . .
- B: Sleepers, they called it, about so wide apart, you know.
- M: Do you mean, they were cross pieces?
- B: Yeah. The sleepers in this house runs across this way. They put them on top of their sill.
- M: When you say "sill," you're talking about what's laying on the pillars?
- B: Yeah, what's setting on the pillars. That sill's laying that way. Well, these sleepers goes across over there and over yonder, and you put your floor on them.
- M: You just have a pillar at each corner, don't you?
- B: Uh-hum, and some in the middle. I believe there's two or three in the whole length of this house that way.

- M: That's across the longest way of your house, you have two or three?
- B: Yeah.
- M: And then across the shortest side, are they just at the corners?
- B: No, not altogether. Like in this house, they started the pillar right there.
- M: In the corner.
- B: Then they come to this chimney and they had another pillar there and then one down yonder, maybe about two more pillars.
- M: How would they know that all those pillars were level? Would you have a board that ran from one pillar to another to put your level onto?
- B: Yeah, you could put the level on there and see that you had it started right.
- M: You have to be very sure you have a board that's not warped, don't you?
- B: Oh, yeah, you have to have a straight board.
- M: So, you've actually helped build them?
- B: I have helped build a few.
- M: What sort of skills did your daddy teach you? Was it mostly just farming things?
- B: Mostly just farming was all he ever done.
- M: You don't know anything about stagecoaches through this area, do you?
- B: Uh-uh.
- M: Do you know anything about brickmaking in the area?
- B: Well, no. When these brick. . .when this chimney was built here, several of them neighbors went in together, and they had a brick kiln up the road here just about a half or three-quarters of a mile, and everybody around in here that wanted to made their bricks up there. Several of them went in together. That house over there, the brick was burned up there and two or three down the road here.
- M: Do you mean that people did it like a cooperative thing?
- B: Yeah.
- M: It wasn't a brick company?

B: No, they done it theirselves back then.

M: Where did they get the clay for the bricks?

B: They'd get it out of somewhere and haul it in there and grind it up.

M: Would they get it down along the riverbank?

B: Yeah, or maybe they'd find a good place, like this road here.

M: Oh, really? There are good places for clay for brick along here?

B: Yeah.

M: Did they have to find a special place, or could they take any of this soil around here?

B: Well, they couldn't make brick out of any of this soil. Some of it would be too sandy. They'd have to find a spot with clay.

M: Would they just have the kiln for that purpose, then, and when they were finished they wouldn't use it anymore?

B: No, I don't reckon.

M: Well, I think we've covered most of the things I planned to ask you about. You haven't thought of any songs yet, have you?

B: No. (laughter)

M: Do you recall anything specific that your dad or mother or grandparents told you that would pertain to their way of life?

B: No, not too much. My mammy. . . .

M: When you say your "mammy," you're talking about your mother?

B: My mother, yeah. She had a loom. I was fourteen or fifteen years old before I ever wore a bought pair of overalls or anything. She made our clothes at a loom, you know. She made that cloth.

M: What about the thread that she used?

B: She bought some of it, and she spun the thread that she wove cloth with. She spun it on a spinning wheel.

M: Would that be cotton that she spun?

B: Yeah. She made all our clothes.

M: You don't have any of that cloth left, that your mother made, do you?

B: No, I don't believe there's anything here. We've still got the old

loom, though. It's out in the old smokehouse. When she died she had a piece of cloth in there. It was about that long and about that wide, I guess.

M: About three feet wide, huh?

B: Yeah. She had it wove out to here, and she quit. After she died, that oldest boy of mine and my brother's boy would just go in there and cut a piece of string off when they'd want a string.

M: They'd unravel it, huh?

B: Yeah, they had it all tore up, so it's out there now. But it'd still been in there if they had let it alone. If I'd a knowed then what I know now, I'd a had to lock the door to keep those boys out of it, I guess.

M: Did your clothes wear pretty good?

B: Yeah, they wore.

M: Would she dye the things, too?

B: Yeah, she'd dye them some way or another. I don't know how she did it, now. I forgot. But they'd have a stripe in them.

M: Up and down your pants you'd have stripes?

B: Yeah, some of them would have a stripe.

M: I suppose that was your everyday clothes.

B: Yeah.

M: Did she have a Sunday dress that she would buy?

B: Yeah, she'd buy Sunday clothes--her dress, and for us boys they'd buy Sunday clothes. But she made our everyday clothes. I was about fourteen year old before I ever. . .oh, man, I thought I was dressed up, the first pair of overalls ever I got.

M: Were the things that she made for you overall-type things? When she made you pants, were they an overall type?

B: No, they were just pants.

M: Were they always long pants?

B: Yeah, most of them was long pants.

M: Didn't you have to wear short pants until you were a certain age?

B: Yeah, on a Sunday.

M: Oh, on Sundays you wore the short pants.

B: Yeah.

M: But for working, you wore long pants.

B: Yeah, most all she made was long pants.

M: How old were you before you started wearing long pants on Sundays?

B: Oh, I guess I was twelve or thirteen years old.

M: Hmm, so that was special to wear short pants.

B: Yeah.

M: Was your family a churchgoing family?

B: Yes.

M: Always on Sundays?

B: Always went to church.

M: Was it close?

B: It was about two and a half miles up there where we went to church.

M: Would you take the wagon for that?

B: Yeah.

M: The whole family would always go in the wagon?

B: Yeah. By the time you'd get up there, you'd have a wagonbed full of folks, you know.

M: Oh, you'd pick up people along the way?

B: You'd pick up people along the way. Some of them would walk.

M: I've heard of what is called "sings" around here. Do you know what I mean by a "sing"?

B: No.

M: Like a special program in the church where people would sing notes. Do you know what I'm talking about?

B: No.

- M: I've never seen it, but I've heard that some people have a tradition of a certain style of singing. But you don't know anything about that?
- B: No, just quartets and such as that is all I know about.
- M: But when you went to church, did you sing hymns?
- B: Uh-hum.
- M: Did you have an organ?
- B: Yes.
- M: Was there Sunday school, too?
- B: Yeah. Now we have preaching every Sunday up here, and every Wednesday night we have prayer service.
- M: What about when you were little?
- B: We didn't have none on Wednesday night, only on Sunday and Sunday night when I was little.
- M: Oh, you went to both?
- B: Yeah, we'd have preaching at eleven o'clock on Sunday, come back home and have dinner, and go back and have preaching that night.
- M: Was that every Sunday?
- B: No, not every Sunday. Back then, I believe until I was grown, we didn't have preaching but just once a month. But now we have it every Sunday, and every Sunday night we have Sunday school.
- M: So the preacher would come once a month, and the other Sundays he'd be somewhere else.
- B: Uh-hum.
- M: What denomination is that?
- B: Baptist, up here. Free Will Baptist, and Methodist, too. In fact, not too many years back they had a church up here at Center Point. It was a Methodist and Baptist, too.
- M: Both in the same building?
- B: I believe the Baptists had their preaching the third Sunday night, and the Methodists maybe was the first or fourth Sunday. But it was in the same building. Now they've got it separated.
- M: Were you little when you were in the same building?

- B: Yeah.
- M: Did you ever have to give any presentation in a Sunday school program?
- B: Back then, not very much, but I can remember when they had preaching up here just way back when I was growing up, the preacher come from Hamilton, Alabama. It's about twenty miles up further, up there twenty miles at least, or more, and he either rode a horse or come in a buggy. And he come down Saturday, get down here about late Saturday, and he'd have to go back on Sunday. He would have the service on Sunday night. I'll bet the church didn't pay him more than fifteen or twenty dollars for the whole year's preaching. And now the preacher gets three times more than that for one Sunday.
- M: When Christmastime came when you were a boy, would there be a program in the church?
- B: Sometimes they put on a Christmas program, yeah.
- M: Even when you were little?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Would you have to say a piece?
- B: Yeah. They had one this year up here--a Christmas program. They have it every year.
- M: Would the Sunday school have a little gift for the children for Christmas, when you were little?
- B: Not when I was little, but they do now.
- M: Did you have to do much memorizing in regular school?
- B: Yeah.
- M: Did you have to learn poetry?
- B: Yeah, a whole lot of it. They'd make you get up and say a piece of poetry, have it memorized by heart.
- M: You'd have to get up before your regular class and say the poem you'd learned?
- B: Not every day, but every once in a while, yeah.
- M: Did they ever invite the parents in to school, and you'd have to say something before the parents?
- B: Yeah, you'd get up and say some piece you'd memorized.

M: Would they call it "open house," or "parents' day," or "children's day"?

B: Children's Day, yeah.

M: Then parents would come to school?

B: Uh-hum.

M: I think we've pretty well covered what I planned. Can you think of anything else we ought to talk about?

B: Well, I can't.

M: I do want to thank you, Mr. Brown, for letting me interview you, on behalf of the Project and myself. I certainly appreciate it.

B: You're perfectly welcome. I'll be glad to help you any way I can.

M: That's very nice, thank you.

THTP - Oral History Interview OH 113
An interview with
Lamar Lomax Adair

conducted and edited by
Betty E. Mitson



Lamar Adair was born near Gattman, Mississippi on October 1, 1908. He is the son of a farmer, and most of his interview deals with lifeways in a rural setting. The many detailed accounts on such topics as childhood recreation, farming techniques, milling, ginning of cotton, transportation and marketing of crops, and local architectural styles add to a picture of rural life in the opening decades of this century.

The interview with Mr. Adair was conducted in his home on January 17, 1980 by Betty E. Mitson. Also present at the interview session was Mrs. Addie Adair.

M: This is an interview with Lamar Lomax Adair. Most people call him "Mac." The interview is for the Tombigbee Historic Townsites Project on January 17, 1980. It is being held at Mr. Adair's home which is Route #2, Hamilton, Mississippi 39746. His telephone number is 343-8978. The interviewer is Betty E. Mitson.

Mr. Adair, would you tell me where and when you were born?

A: I was born on a rural route out from Gattman, Mississippi on October 1, 1908. I lived in that house until I married. We were married and set up housekeeping very temporarily because we knew that we weren't going to stay there but a year. Then we moved to where we are now. So really and truly I moved out of the paternal house to here.

M: How far is Gattman from where we are now?

A: Twenty miles.

M: So you lived within twenty miles of your birthplace most of your life?

A: Really, yes, except for when I was away at school, and I spent three years in military service.

M: In the Second World War?

A: No, before World War II. I was in the regular Army at Fort Benning, Georgia from 1935 to 1938.

M: Is Gattman on the Buttahatchie River?

A: Yes, it is. It's within a half mile of the river.

M: Were you born within about a half mile of the river?

A: Oh, no, I was on a rural route out from Gattman. Where I was born and grew up was about six miles south of Gattman and about two and a half miles east of the Buttahatchie River at that point.

M: In this location where you've been since you married, about how far would you say you are from the Buttahatchie?

A: About a mile.

M: So you know the Buttahatchie in two different spots.

A: Yes. Well, I know more about it where I grew up than I do since I've been down here.

M: Do you recall that when you were growing up you ever saw any boat, raft, or barge transportation on the Buttahatchie?

A: Not on the Buttahatchie, but I do in the Buttahatchie.

M: Please make the distinction.

A: When I was a boy, from the time I can remember until I became a man, we would go to a certain area on the Buttahatchie River to swim. In our swimming hole, was a sunken ferry. We could feel the outline of the sides of it when we were in the water, if we'd go down deep enough. And there was a part of it, I don't know what part it was, that was above the water and that was designated as the "snag." Anybody that could swim to the snag and back was ready to be safe in the water. At that particular time, during my boyhood days, that area was known as Nail's Ford. There was a road which was a public road that forded the river at that point. Unless there was a flood situation, it was fordable most all the time.

M: Do you mean you could drive across it?

A: Yes, drive across with the vehicles. Of course, in my early days when that was a ford, there were no motorized vehicles. It was all animal power.

M: So the wheels were high enough above the water to get across?

A: Yes. I remember going across there with my family. We had a bird dog, a beautiful white long-haired bird dog named Fannie, that followed us, and we had so much fun watching Fannie swim along beside the wagon as we crossed the river.

M: Where is that spot located in relationship to the closest community?

A: It's almost due west from the present community center at Bartahatchie.¹

M: About how far due west?

A: It would be a mile to the river, I guess. Hardly a mile, but almost, from the community road through Bartahatchie.

M: At the time, did you know anything about the history of the sunken ferry?

A: No, I never heard anything mentioned about when the ferry was in operation or how long it had been in the water, but it was referred to as the "sunken ferryboat."

M: Could you tell if it was decaying; was it covered with slime?

A: Oh, most of it was covered with silt and gravel and whatever. With our feet, we could feel the outline of the sides of it, but that was

¹Due to an error by the U. S. Post Office when the community was founded the spelling differs from the Buttahatchie River.

all we could feel when we were in the water.

M: Are you pretty sure it was a ferry and not a small boat or a barge?

A: Well, it may have been a barge.

M: But it was referred to as a ferry?

A: Yes, but it would seem unlikely that they would have had a ferry at a point where the river could be forded, and this was close there. The sunken boat was two hundred yards, or something like that, above the road where the people used to ford the river.

M: When you say "above," what do you mean?

A: Upstream.

M: Could you tell how long the boat was?

A: No, I really couldn't. I'm not positive that we could feel the full outline, the four sides of it. I'd say, there was a four-inch wall that we could stand on, on one side.

M: About how far under the water level were they?

A: I would say that the water at that point, at the ordinary stage of the river, would be five feet deep.

M: So what you were standing on was about five feet below the surface of the water?

A: Yes.

M: Do you remember any other feature of it? For instance, was there anything in the middle that stuck up?

A: Somewhere from some part of it--I don't know if it was from the middle--but there was a beam that came plumb out of the top, plumb up out of the water. That was the snag that I referred to earlier. We called it "the snag." It stayed there for many years.

M: Just one beam?

A: Yes.

M: You don't know how that was attached underneath the water?

A: No, I really don't. People just weren't curious about it.

M: It appears to you, then, that there must have been a large enough river vehicle to have done some kind of commercial transportation down there, don't you think?

A: It was either a ferry, or it was a barge.

M: It would seem it must have been there a long time if it had silted up that much.

A: I guess it had. My parents had moved to that area in 1900.

M: From where?

A: From Lamar County, Alabama. Of course, things could have happened there a few years earlier that they didn't know about.

M: So, as far as actually seeing anything on the river, in your time, there was no transport, but there is this evidence that in earlier times there must have been, at least at that point.

A: Yes, and again in thinking about it, I hadn't thought about it ever before, I guess, there is an unlikelihood of there being a ferry at a fordable place in the river.

M: Maybe the silt had just come in over a period of years. This is the main thing we are trying to find out: if there was ever any transport on the Buttahatchie. And that is the first evidence I've personally heard that it's possible.

A: Well, as a growing boy I never heard any indication that there had ever been any transportation that far up the river.

M: Well, we have reason to think that there may have been, so this is very interesting. Your father moved here from Alabama, you say. Did he ever tell you why he came over here?

A: I can tell you, yes; it's a little story. My father grew up in Paulding County, Georgia. It was a big family, a big bunch of boys and one girl in that family. My father was born in 1864, and he had an older brother that used to come to our house and I used to enjoy hearing him talk. He said that, as a little boy he used to go down to Sherman's camp, when Sherman was on his march through Georgia, and scrounge food to carry back to the family. The families were destitute; they didn't have anything to eat, so as a little boy he would do this. My father was born under those conditions and they left there. I don't know why they moved to Lamar County, Alabama. My grandfather is buried in the cemetery in Lamar County, Alabama. And then this homestead, a farm that my father and mother moved to in 1900 was a part of a family plantation.

My mother's grandmother was a girl on that plantation, and, of course, later on it was divided up and sold into family-size farms. And my father bought this farm from my mother's uncle.

M: This one here in Mississippi?

A: Yes. That's the one over near Gattman. Out of that household is where I had my experience on the Buttahatchie River.

M: Did he buy that when he got married?

A: Not immediately. He had two children, my oldest brother and oldest sister, who were already in the family when he came to that community.

M: It seems to me that quite a number of people that we've talked to have moved from Alabama to Mississippi around that time. Do you know if there were farming problems in Alabama that caused people to move? Or if it was just happenstance.

A: I don't think so; I don't think it altogether just happened. You remember that Horace Greeley used to say "Go west young man, go west," and even coming out of Alabama into Mississippi was still that movement west. Later, some of my father's brothers went on into the Mississippi Delta and crossed into Arkansas. They continued to go west.

M: Was going down to the Buttahatchie to swim a regular thing with you? Did you go down to swim quite often in the summertime?

A: Yes, we did. It was a community swimming hole.

M: Had any improvements been made, like cleaning it out for the purpose of swimming?

A: No, it didn't need any. It was clear, completely clear, except for that old sunken boat out there. It had a gravel bottom, and many times I've gone down, dived there. We called it "dive down," but we didn't dive, we just went under and went down to the bottom and searched with our hands until we'd find a mussel and bring it out. There were quite a number of mussels in that area at that time, but there were never any harvested for commercial use. I don't know whether anywhere they were used for commercial use. You know what a mussel is, don't you?

M: Yes. Did you bring them home and cook them?

A: No.

M: You tell me what a mussel is, anyway.

A: I don't know, really. To me it looks just like an oyster.

M: Yeah, and you didn't bring them home and cook them?

A: No, we didn't. We didn't find enough to really cook. They weren't that plentiful, but anytime you searched a bit you could find one.

M: What about fish or frogs?

A: A lot of fish in there. My father used to fish down there. Let me say this, it was a pretty good walk from where we lived to the river, but it wasn't out of range. My father would fish with a trout line

and also with a "throat" net. He kept a net in the river at certain times of the year.

M: What did he catch?

A: He would catch catfish, buffalo, drum--primarily those types of fish.

M: I asked one other fellow, when he went swimming, did he go skinny dipping. Do you know what I mean by that?

A: Sure do! That was the only way we went.

M: Really?

A: It was.

M: Even in the community swimming area?

A: Oh, sure. We would go there sometimes on the weekend, and there would be maybe thirty or forty people in there swimming and diving.

M: Was this all ages and all sexes?

A: No, there were no women. It was just all men and boys.

M: Oh, women didn't go swimming in those days?

A: No, they didn't.

M: Really? (laughter)

A: No, and I've thought about it. It has been real amusing to me to think about it in later years. I grew up on a family-size farm, and we worked with mule power altogether, and in the dust. We would work from sunup till sundown in the fields. We'd bathe off slightly before we would eat and before going to bed. At least we would wash our hands and feet. In those days, we went barefooted. I mean the boys did; the adults didn't go barefooted. By Saturday at noon--well, we would probably work till the middle of the afternoon--we would go to the river to get our weekly bath. We didn't take time to walk; we'd run almost all the way to the river.

M: Did you have any girls in your family?

A: Yes, in our family there was four boys and four girls.

M: Where did the girls get their baths?

A: In a foot tub.

M: Oh, a wash tub?

A: Yes. We didn't have any running water in the house. We did have

a little creek. I guess I was exaggerating about going to the river for our bath. We did have a small creek called Neely Creek where we were. Further down, as it approached the Buttahatchie River, it became Alsop's Mill Creek. This creek ran through our farm right behind the barn, and we would go there and take our baths. But somehow or other our sisters never did do that. They always took a bath in the house.

You said you didn't want anything above our young childhood days, but let me say this: after I finished high school, during the Depression time, we were pretty well stranded over there. We didn't get out too much. I would take my dip in that little creek everyday during the summer and fall. One fall, I decided I would just see how long I could keep going in the cold running water of the creek. For four years, unless I was otherwise hindered, I took a skinny dip in that creek, winter and summer. You'd be amazed how you can get used to it and it doesn't bother you. During that entire period, I don't think I ever had a cold. I just felt wonderful, but I was quite a bit younger than I am now.

M: Talking about colds, what did your mother do for you when you caught a cold when you were a kid?

A: The main thing I remember she would do for us would be to put a flannel cloth on our chest and put some medication on it.

M: Did she call it a mustard plaster?

A: She may have, but I don't believe she used a mustard plaster for colds. Later on, as I grew a little older, Vicks Vaporub salve became available, and that's what we used to a great extent. I do remember that every little child in the family had croup. It seemed to me like they had croup half of the winter. The houses were not tight; there was no way to keep the cold air out. It was heated by fireplaces. We had two chimneys in our house and four fireplaces, but most of the time we all lived in one room. I don't mean we all slept in one room.

M: No, but you stayed there because that's where the heat was?

A: That's where we kept a fire in one fireplace.

M: Was that house that you lived in over there a house that your dad built? Or did he buy a house that already existed?

A: Well, there was a house there when he moved there, but he built that house. He was a carpenter as well as a farmer, and he cut the timber that was on the place that he bought and every piece of timber that was in that house. It's still standing and still in a good and livable condition now.

M: He cut all that?

A: He cut the timber on the place, had it sawed into lumber, and hauled the rough lumber to Gattman to have it dressed to build a house. At the time it was built, it was perhaps the nicest house in the community.

M: Did he build a double house? Do you know what I mean?

A: A two-story house?

M: No, I meant the kind that has a section on one side and a section on the other with a hall down the middle. Is that the kind you had?

A: Yes, it had a big hall. Incidentally, over the years the interior of it changed. I have two sisters who never married and are living in that house now. They have converted half of that hall into their living room.

M: So it's all closed in now.

A: Uh-huh.

M: Was it built on pillars, too?

A: Yes, it was built on pillars. My father went out into the woods and field and gathered rock, just great big rock, for the pillars.

M: Do you have any idea why they built houses on pillars?

A: They had to get them off the ground.

M: Why?

A: To keep the foundation from rotting.

M: Because the ground is so moist?

A: In that day, there wasn't any. . . . I guess there was cement, but rural people didn't know much about it. I never heard my father say, but I doubt if he spent out-of-pocket money more than a hundred dollars building that house. He bought the windows and doors, but that was all.

M: That kind of construction seems to be peculiar to this area.

A: Now they're mostly built on the ground here.

M: They put them on cement slabs, I take it.

A: Yes, but in those days they didn't do that. This house we're living in here was built on brick piers. It's about thirty inches off the ground.

M: Do you have any cellar or any basement under it?

A: No, but a great many houses in this area--maybe not as much now as there once were--have what people refer to as a storm cellar under the house. People were very much afraid of tornados, and if it came up a bad cloud, the whole family went into the cellar.

M: Are those houses built on pillars, too?

- A: Yes. Until recent times, in this area, they were all built on pillars.
- M: What about those huge plantation houses you see in places? Were they on pillars, too?
- A: Yes, they were all off the ground.
- M: So this type of construction, the pillar construction, goes back a long, long time?
- A: Oh, I'd think it'd go back as. . . .
- M: As far as housing in Mississippi goes back, other than the Indians?
- A: I would think so.
- M: Really? I thought it may have changed from ground construction to pillars when people found out that their houses were rotting, but as far as you know all the houses that you have seen have been pillar construction.
- A: That's right, all the old houses. Even today with the modern construction, almost as many of them are built up off the ground as they are down flat.
- M: Is it not common in Mississippi to see a house with a basement?
- A: No, it's not common. They're becoming more common now, but until recent years they just didn't have them.
- M: Is that just because the ground is too wet and the water table too high for a basement?
- A: Perhaps not, because they do have bonding agents now they can put into concrete walls to keep all the water out.
- M: But do you think that is probably the reason for a lot of them not being built that way in the past?
- A: I guess perhaps so. Now most of the houses that are built with any part in the ground are split-level houses. Because I would think the construction cost of building a room under the house would be greater than it would be building a one level.
- M: Yes, it would add to the cost. But, you don't have a place to put a furnace, then. How do you heat your house today? Do you have a furnace?
- A: No, we heat our house with space heaters.
- M: Do you have several in the house?
- A: One in each room.

M: Since you don't have a basement and most people in the area do not have basements, where do you store your things, like trunks or things like that?

A: We store them in the barn and other buildings that we once used for the farm operation. When I was a boy growing up, we had a special building for that. Just a rough building out in the barn area that we stored stuff in.

M: Would you store other things besides farm implements, such as old things from the house, like old clothes?

A: I guess we didn't store any old clothes. I don't think we had any. We had so many ages of children till they all got wore out pretty well.

M: But what about any extra things your mother might have put away that she didn't need to use right then? What about furniture that you weren't using or something like that?

A: We would do some of that. We'd just put it into a dry building.

M: The same sort of things you would put into an attic, if you had one.

A: Right.

M: And did you have one at this house, too?

A: Oh, yeah. We still do that now. We have enough furniture out in the barn to start housekeeping again. (laughter) It's not in too well-kept condition, but it could be used. We have given away sets to needy people in the last few years.

M: I think you were telling me something about a trunk. What was that?

A: Oh, well you mentioned trunks. We kept a trunk when I was a boy. As I said, we all stayed in the same room after we had supper at night until bedtime. We would study our school lessons and whatever the family wanted to do. After we got through studying, we'd play our family games. We kept a bucket of water, good cold, fresh well water with one dipper on the trunk in that room. When anybody wanted a drink of water, we didn't have to go out into the cold hall or the cold kitchen for it. We'd empty that ten-quart bucket by bedtime. Back in those days, bedtime came at seven o'clock in the wintertime.

M: Was that bedtime for everyone in the family?

A: Well, what hadn't already slipped off the bed earlier.

M: So, bedtime was pretty much when the sun went down?

A: Well, in the wintertime it takes a long time after dark for seven o'clock to come, you know. Of course, in the summertime bedtime didn't come that early because we'd still, probably, be in the field

at seven o'clock. We'd stay as long as the sun was shining.

M: How far away from the house was the well, and what was it like? Did you have a pump well?

A: No, we drew the water out of a bucket. I remember the most familiar bucket we had was the old oaken bucket. Our well was about twenty feet deep. We had a pulley fastened up over the center of the well with a rope through the pulley, with one end fastened to the well bucket and the other end to the windlass, we called it, to crank the water up out of the well. We had, what we called, a well box. It was a wooden box made to set over the well about breast high, just a good convenient height to draw a bucket of water and set it on top and pour the water into the bucket to carry into the house. Many times when I was a teenager, I'd wake up at night just burning up and so thirsty I couldn't hardly swallow. I'd get up and go to the well and draw a bucket of good fresh water. There hasn't been any water yet that tasted quite as good as that did.

M: When you were a boy and your daddy was a farmer, was it mainly cotton farming?

A: That was the cash crop. Of course, we grew everything to eat that we could and the feed for all of the livestock on the farm. I guess we spent more time producing feed crops than we did the cotton crop because we had to feed our milk cows, and our beef cows, and our poultry, and our pork. It just took a lot of feed. Then besides, our staple bread was made out of cornmeal. We'd grow our corn for that and carry it to mill. I don't guess you ever heard that expression "going to mill"?

M: No.

A: Well there were so few people. Maybe, in a ten-mile radius, there would be just one mill in that area that ground corn. We'd carry corn there and everybody else did. We weren't different from anybody else. We carried corn there and the miller would grind it for us. He would take part of the corn we carried for his pay for operating his mill. They called it "toll."

M: Toll?

A: Toll, T-O-L-L. If you carried a bushel of corn there, they'd take out a gallon of it and put it over in their barrel.

M: Was the toll his only pay?

A: For the milling, yes. It hasn't been more than two months since I carried some corn to mill this year.

M: Where is your mill now?

A: It's up above Old Hamilton, about six miles up there, I guess.

M: So that's still going on?

A: That's the only one that I know of anywhere. People don't eat corn-bread as much as they used to. What is used is bought out of the grocery store. We had some surplus out of our garden that got dry and hard, so I shelled it and carried it to mill.

M: Would a man who ran a mill like that be a farmer, and he'd sort of do this on the side?

A: Right.

M: He couldn't make a living that way, could he?

A: No, he didn't grind but one day a week; they had a designated day for people to bring their corn in, and he'd grind corn.

M: What about the cottonseed that came after your father took cotton in? Would he use the cottonseed to feed the cattle?

A: Yes, for a great while. But later on they began to swap the cottonseed products, cottonseed meal. There was a great deal of waste to feeding the raw cottonseed to cattle because they couldn't use it all. Even today cottonseed is almost as valuable a product as cotton is.

M: Is that right?

A: Because they have huge mills that crush the cottonseed and extract the oil, and what is left is a meal that is packed together and then ground into very fine cattle feed. But in my early years I can remember my father would always bring the cottonseed back. We had a special house that they were unloaded in; we called it the cottonseed house. We fed cows those cottonseed, and then in the springtime when we quit feeding the cows cottonseed, sometimes there'd be quite a pile of cottonseed left over, and people would use that for fertilizer. They would put those cottonseed in the ground, just a big roll of it, and as that decomposed it made a great fertilizer.

M: Would they use that in their flower gardens, or would they put it back into the cotton field?

A: Put it back into the field.

M: You had enough to do that?

A: No, we couldn't fertilize the whole crop, but we would put out some like that.

M: Do you remember when the changeover was when they started to use the cottonseed for other purposes than as cow feed?

A: I would guess probably that was about in the early teens. It was 1915 or a little earlier in our area when people began to leave their cotton-

seed at the gin and bring back cotton seed meal. The gins that ginned the cotton and took the seed out of the lint began to deal with oil mills, and they would buy the seed, pay for them, or swap it for cottonseed meal.

M: Back then, was the man who ran the gin compensated with money or was he compensated with part of the cotton?

A: I really don't know. I couldn't answer about back then, but I would think it was very much like it is now. Today when the farmer carries his cotton to the gin, he pays for his ginning with the seed that come out of it, depending on how much weight is ginned. His ginning is put on a scale, and then he's paid the market value for the seed. Most of the time the farmer will have some money left out of the seed out of a bale of cotton after he pays all of the ginning cost.

M: Oh, he'll get some money back? In other words, he sells the seed?

A: That's what he does. And whatever is over after he pays the ginning cost is paid to him. I worked as a bookkeeper at the local gin for several years, a few years back, and there was a period that the seed was not very valuable, and they'd just swap even. You'd carry your cotton to the gin, and they would gin it for the seed. But it was only two or three years that the seed were that cheap.

M: I want to ask you if, when you were a little boy, people were pretty superstitious, everybody?

A: Not, everybody. There were some families in the community that was real superstitious, but I don't think my father had one superstitious bone in his body. We in our family didn't grow up with any superstition, but there was a lot of people that were.

M: Since I've been here, I've heard the word "hant" used. Was that a pretty popular word back in those days?

A: Oh, we were told those ghost stories, and it was always referred to as hants instead of ghosts. But there was always a lot of levity in it, and we, in our house, understood from the beginning that it was a story. It wasn't something to be afraid of, wasn't something to believe.

M: But you do think that some people took those stories seriously?

A: Oh, I'm sure there were. I've known people that would. . . . I can hardly express what I'm trying to say. But they believed intently that they saw hants. And I've known a family that would leave a homestead because they thought it was hanted, that hants were abiding there.

M: Do you think that persists to a certain extent?

A: I don't think so. I don't hear of it anymore, but it might be because I'm not as active as I was and out among the people like I was at that time.

M: Do you remember any particular places or any particular incidents in connection with that?

A: I remember when I was a little boy a certain house was about a mile from our house. A man lived there, and he got scared. He moved his family away as quick as he could because he was unloading a load of cottonseed into his cottonseed house, and every time he would throw a scoop of cottonseed, he said, he could see a turkey fly out and he knew there were no turkeys around there, and he thought that place was hanted. That was the word he used, and as soon as he could he got away from there. (laughter) He moved his family away. That was a very rare instance, but I guess there may be somebody that is superstitious yet.

We weren't superstitious about a black cat crossing the road or walking under a ladder, or anything like that.

M: Was yours a churchgoing family when you were little?

A: Yes.

M: Was it regularly on Sunday?

A: Very regularly.

M: Was it a church where they had a regular minister?

A: Oh, yes, we had a regular minister. We were Methodists, and we would have a charge. The Methodist minister would have his home he lived in, and he would have seven or eight churches he would serve. He would go to two churches on one Sunday. Fortunately, the church I grew up in we had our services one Sunday a month, and it was sufficient.

M: So he was serving other churches on the other Sundays of the month?

A: Yes.

M: When you went to church back in those days, you wore short pants until you were a certain age, didn't you?

A: Yes, I guess I wore short pants until I was in the eighth grade in school, and we were having a concert at the end of school. I guess it was to celebrate the end of school, but anyhow it was a custom; we always had it. I got big enough to have a leading part in the play, and I was still in short pants. I borrowed a pair of long pants to wear for the play, and that same spring my father bought me a pair of long pants. The first time I went to church after I put on my long pants, I still went barefooted.

M: Went to church?

A: I went to church barefooted with my long pants on.

M: (laughter) Did your mother ever weave your clothes or weave the cloth

for your clothes?

A: No, but my mother knew how to weave. We didn't have a loom, but when I was growing up, we had a spinningwheel and a thread reel that she had inherited from her mother.

Those were in the "old" house. We called it the old house; it was the house my father and mother moved into when they came to that place. We children just tore them up playing with them. They would have been very high-priced antiques, heirlooms, today but at that time nobody put any value on them. But mama has spun thread out of cotton and made ropes.

M: Oh, you remember her doing this?

A: Oh, yes, I've seen that done a lot of times. She'd make a calf rope. I guess you don't know what a calf rope is.

M: Is it something to lasso the calf with?

A: No, it was something to put on the calf, to tie him away from the cow while we was milking. All the milking was done by hand. The cows and calves was kept separated during the day. When we brought them in, we'd let the calves to the cows suck for just a short while. Then we would slip that halter made from the rope over his head and pull him off and tie him while we finished milking. My mama has made calves' ropes out of thread she had spun.

M: Would the rope be several ply, or would it be just one?

A: No, it would be several strands of it. She would spin out a long strand and just keep doubling it back and twisting it some more on the wheel, and it would twist those strands into a tight rope.

M: Where did your father market his cotton?

A: In Aberdeen. In the early part of this century, Aberdeen, was the best cotton market in north Mississippi. Everybody carried their cotton to Aberdeen. There were several cotton buyers, several cotton warehouses.

M: Was there a good road from your area to Aberdeen?

A: No, we didn't need a good road because we had mules, or horses, to a wagon. It counted twenty miles from where I grew up to Aberdeen. My mother and father used to go to Aberdeen twice a year to buy seasonal clothes for the family. They'd go in the spring and they'd go again in the fall and buy clothes for the entire family.

M: Would they take you along?

A: After I got sort of big they did, but many times as a child our parents

would go to town without us. We had a telephone even that far back.

M: You had a telephone?

A: We had a rural line.

M: Do you remember how young you were?

A: No, I can't remember.

M: You mean you had one so far back that you can't remember when you got it?

A: We had telephones when I first could remember. We had a telephone on the wall, a big cabinet like. I guess it was eighteen inches wide and two feet high, and inside the cabinet was two dry-cell batteries for the power. You turned a crank to ring the telephone, and everybody on the line had a different ring. If you wanted to call Aunt Sally, you'd ring two shorts and a long; if you wanted to call Miss Mitt, it might be a long and a short and a long. And that was the way the people knew that they were being called.

But when my parents would go to town, they'd leave way before daylight and be much after dark getting back home. We'd start calling somebody down the road. We'd think they had time to be down to George Owens, so we'd call and ask, "Have our parents come past there?" "Yeah, they came by a few minutes ago." We knew in thirty minutes about how much they would have traveled; then we'd call somebody else. And we kept pretty well up with them until we could hear the wagon coming. We could hear the wagon when it got about half a mile of home here. It would be bumping over the roads and ruts. We had a wonderful day, a wonderful occasion, when we got our new shoes that fall.

AA: Tell her how they got the right size of the shoes.

A: Well, when Mama was getting ready to go to town, she would have all of the children to stand up on one foot, out on the floor, and she would mark from the toe to the heel. She had a piece of newspaper that she would then make a notch in for each child, and that's the way she knew how long to get their shoes. They always fit; we never did get a shoe that didn't fit.

M: Along the edge of that newspaper every child was notched-off?

A: That's right.

M: (laughter) Talking about newspapers, did you have a daily newspaper?

A: We did, but most of the time. . . . I can remember when we didn't have a daily paper. We always took the Monroe County News. Then there used to be a weekly newspaper that came out of Memphis, the Memphis Commercial Appeal. Then we had The Progressive Farmer which was a farm journal and, incidentally, it's still in publication. That was most of the newspapers that we got.

M: I'd like to ask you about your father's affluence. He had a telephone and that was pretty early to have a telephone. Was your father pretty prosperous as a farmer?

A: On a scale of one to ten, I would say he would have been six.

M: Did he ever use hands, besides family people?

A: Yes. Most of the time he would have tenant farmers, always white tenants, that he would furnish everything except the labor. They would furnish the labor, and then the harvest would be halved.

M: He had a pretty good-size farm, then--how many acres?

A: We had three hundred sixty acres.

M: This tenant farming situation, was that from the time he first came there? Over what period of time did that go on?

A: Well, I could say, with the exception of maybe some years, that it was continuously from all the while up until. . . . After all the boys left, he began to sell off some land. But he kept tenants there--sharecroppers, I guess was what they were called--on through the 1940s up until the 1950s, I guess, when he commenced to selling off his land. He got to where he wasn't able to see after it and take care of it like he thought it ought to be.

He lived to be ninety-four years old and was very active up until he was ninety. When he was ninety years old, he had a circulation problem and had to have one leg amputated. He lived four years in a wheelchair.

M: That was quite an advanced age to have a operation.

A: Well, we were told that he had to have that or he would have died then. He never tried an artificial limb; we discouraged it. He wanted to, but we discouraged it.

M: Was just one leg amputated?

A: Yeah, just one leg.

M: Did he keep his faculties even after the operation?

A: Oh, yes, except it just broke his spirit. He was always very active. He just wanted to be always doing something, and after he got into that condition and he couldn't do it, it just broke his spirit. He existed. But his mind was good right up until just a short time before he died.

M: Do you know anything about railroads through this area? Could you give me some idea where there might have been one in relationship, say, to the river?

A: Right now?

M: No, back when you were a boy, was there a railroad through the area where you were?

A: The only railroad then in that area, is the same as it is now, the Frisco Line from Birmingham to Memphis. It went through Gattman that I mentioned earlier. It was a east-west line.

When we bought this place where we're living now, our deed listed an exception for a railroad right-of-way through this little place that we're on here now. The Frisco Line comes down here on the west side of our place, but we don't know where, on this particular described land, there was a right-of-way granted to a railroad back in the early 1800s. It was never built, but the records still maintain that they've still got the title to that right-of-way.

M: In California, "Frisco" stands for San Francisco.

A: The same thing here. When this road was originally built--I've heard my mother speak of it, I guess it was in the 1880s or somewhere in that period of time--it was known as the Kansas City, Memphis, and Birmingham. That was the name of the route. Then later on--it became known as St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad. Then it was shortened to Frisco. And it's still known as the Frisco Railroad.

M: Is that officially or just what the local people call it?

A: No, that's officially. But now it has changed hands or merged with some other railroad within the last two or three years. But it's still known as the Frisco. All of the locomotives, and the boxcars on the track have "Frisco Line" on them.

M: What kind of traffic is on that line?

A: Every kind except passengers; there is no more passenger traffic on it.

M: But when you were a boy, was that line there then?

A: This line here was built in 1928, but the other east-west line from Memphis to Birmingham was built about 1880.

M: When you were a boy was that line used for passengers?

A: Yes.

M: Did you ever ride on it?

A: Yes, many times.

M: Oh!

A: Not, that many times.

M: But you've ridden on it?

A: Yes, I've ridden it. I'd like to give you a little story about the first time I ever rode on a train. My schoolboyhood friend and I were going to Mississippi State College--at the time, it was Agricultural and Mechanical College--to 4-H Club short courses. We were going to Aberdeen to catch the train to go to Starkville. Neither one of us have been on a train. We didn't want to show how ignorant we were, so we went to the depot perhaps two hours before time for the train to get our tickets and be ready. We went to the ticket window, and the man said, "I'm not selling tickets yet. I'll get your tickets in plenty of time." In a little while the train pulled up, and this buddy of mine began to knock on the door with great gusto. He wanted that man to sell us tickets. In fact he began to use some expletives. He said, "The train is here; we want a ticket." (laughter) He said, "Just calm down, Buddy. I'll sell you a ticket. That train is not going to leave for another hour yet."

But it was a lot of fun. I guess the greatest thrill I ever had as a boy was, maybe I was five or six years old, when my father would carry me to Gattman, and I could see the trains come through.

M: Like sometimes you take kids to the airport to watch the planes take off?

A: Oh, there's no kid that ever had as much thrill watching a plane take off as I did watching the trains come through. They had signals, block signals they call them, on the side of the track there at the middle of town. And when a train got perhaps within about a mile, this arm would come down indicating that there was a train approaching. When I saw that signal start coming down, I was just as thrilled as any kid could be. I'd get out and stand between the rails and watch until I could see a speck down the track, no more than just a speck. That's just as long as I could stand there. I couldn't stand any longer; I had to get way back out away from the track so that the train could come by. Most of them came through fast; we called them the "fast mail." When that train would come through there, it looked like it was going to be in Birmingham in ten minutes. (laughter)

I had just a lot of fun as a boy, and it still thrills me to see a train. Of course, the old locomotives that pulled the trains in those days were coal fired, and that smoke was something else that was thrilling. When I'd go to Gattman, I'd get close enough to smell that coal smoke, you know, and to hear a train whistle. It just didn't seem like I could wait to get on up there. (laughter) There was a lot of traffic on the line at that time; there would be trains coming through every few minutes. Sometimes one would have to pull off on the side at Gattman to let another one by. As a kid that meant a great deal to me.

M: Why was there so much traffic?

A: There was no highway traffic in those days. Everything, all of the freight, was hauled by rail back that early.

AA: And there were at least six passenger trains.

A: Well, it was the same thing. There was no highway traffic. That was the only way people had of traveling, the only way they had of transporting their freight.

M: Could you get on right at Gattman to make a trip somewhere?

A: Yeah, there were certain trains that always stopped there. That was the regular stop to Aberdeen. Some of them didn't stop at Gattman--that's the fast one that I mentioned.

M: Did you ever hitch a ride on a boxcar?

A: No, I never did.

M: Did you ever see any hoboes that did?

A: Oh, yes. You'd see trains coming through Gattman, and you'd see them sitting on the train. Somehow that never did appeal to me.

M: Do you think that your parents admonished you against it?

A: Oh, I'm sure they did. They were referred to as "tramps." We were taught that a tramp was somebody to be shunned.

M: You never heard of anybody being hurt on a train?

A: No, I never did.

M: Did your father do much hunting or fishing?

A: Yes, he did quite a bit of fishing and hunting. He was an avid quail hunter. He always kept a bunch of pointers and setters to hunt quail, but only one of his sons ever followed in that step. There were four boys in our family, and the youngest one was the only one that ever quail hunted. I took up his squirrel hunting; we used to squirrel hunt a lot.

M: I suppose you did it mainly for sport.

A: For sport and for food, but wild game was always something that was delectable; we enjoyed eating it.

M: What's a squirrel like? Is it like rabbit?

A: No, squirrel is smaller than a rabbit; it lives in trees.

M: I mean to eat.

A: Oh. It's delicious; it's much better than rabbit. The flesh is finer textured than a rabbit, and it doesn't have any wild-game taste whatever. It's just delicious.

M: These are squirrels that you find in the woods?

A: Oh, yes.

M: Quail is pretty good, too, I suppose.

A: Yes, quail is a delicacy.

M: When your folks bought their supplies, like flour and things that you needed, would it be in Aberdeen on those twice-a-year trips?

A: Yes, mostly, but Gattman was much closer, and we could buy most anything in the food line at Gattman that we needed. No household supplies or clothing or anything much could be had at Gattman, but groceries could be had. We could go to Gattman in an hour, almost, in a wagon or buggy.

My father bought the first car that we had in the family. He bought that in 1918, a T-model Ford.

M: Before your father bought that car, what did you depend on for transportation?

A: Wagon and buggy. We had two buggies and a wagon. When the family would go to Gattman, we'd go in the wagon. It'd take the wagon to haul all of the family. The buggy wouldn't carry but two people comfortably. I guess, three could have crowded in, but it would have been uncomfortable.

M: When you went to church, was it with the wagon?

A: Went in the wagon. Everybody went in wagons, or buggies, or horseback or walked. They hitched their animals to the trees around the churchyard. It seemed to me like just about time the preacher should have been quitting sometime and didn't quit on time that those mules and horses would start braying. (laughter)

M: Oh, they knew? (laughter)

A: It seemed like that. (laughter)

M: When we were talking about those towns Barton, and Colbert, and Vinton, I didn't ask you if you ever went to one of those towns?

A: I never went to a town, but I've been to what was Bartons Ferry. When I was there, there was no ferry and no sign of it, but it was known as this is Bartons Ferry. A bunch of boys back in the Depression time, we got together one summer and went down to the fork of the Tombigbee and Buttahatchie Rivers and camped out for about two or three days. Just to live naturally, fishing and squirrel hunting, and it was right in the area of Bartons Ferry.

M: You never actually saw the ferry itself?

A: Never saw the ferry. There was nothing there except just woods; there

was no sign of any roads on this side of the river. I started to say on "either side," but we were not on the Clay County side. On this side of the river, there was no sign of a road at this time.

M: Did you say this was in the 1940s?

A: No, it was in the early 1930s.

M: I understand that there was some ferrying going on there up into the 1950s and the 1960s, but where you were camped you didn't see a ferry?

A: (Shook head negatively.)

M: Do you suppose it's possible that farther on down there might have been one going across occasionally?

A: There was a ferry at Waverly that operated for many years later, which is on down the river from that. But as far as I know, Bartons Ferry discontinued long before the 1930s.

M: Where Bartons Ferry was, there used to be on each side of the river, I understand, some piers or something where there was a rope or a cable strung across that they would guide the ferry from. Do you remember seeing those piers?

A: No. I saw that at Waverly Ferry not many years ago.

M: Have you ever ridden on a ferry?

A: No, I never have. We went over to the Waverly Mansion a few years ago, and the ferry was not operating then. But the approaches to it were on both sides of the river.

M: I didn't ask you about what your folks might have told you. Do you remember any songs that your mother or dad ever sang?

A: Let me tell you this; it is so silly. We had a family doctor that we loved very much. I guess, he brought all of our family into the world. This old doctor said he didn't know but two songs, and one of them was "awful simple," and the other one was just "simply awful." (laughter) He said, "I'll sing you that awful simple one." Now, I'm not going to sing it, but I'll quote you the lyrics. He said, "The mother was chasing her boy around the room, and while she was chasing her boy around the room, she was chasing her boy around the room." He had a beautiful melody to that, but that was the lyrics. He never would sing his simply awful one.

M: (laughter) That was the awful simple one?

A: That awful simple one, the mother was chasing her boy around the room.

M: Did your mother ever sing to you when she was going around doing her chores?

- A: No, my mama never did sing a great deal. All the time, instead of singing, she'd be telling us some story or something of that nature. But she did used to sing that song that I mentioned when you first came in, but I can't remember now what it was.
- M: When you get the transcript back, if you remember it you can write it in.
- A: I'll sure do that. I repeated it just less than a week ago; it just came to me one morning, every word of it just as clear.
- M: How did you celebrate Christmas?
- A: With a great deal of joy and gusto, we'd look forward to Christmas. It seemed like it never would get here. We didn't have a lot of gifts, but we had a lot of love. We just had a real feast at Christmas dinner. Not to the degree, I guess, that families have now, but it was wonderful. We'd hang our stockings up, and I still think I always knew what was going to be in mine. It never varied from one year to the other.
- M: Was it your regular stocking that you hung up, the one that you wore?
- A: Well, no, really and truly we didn't hang up a stocking; we'd put a little box or something, set it around for Santa Claus to leave his gifts in. We'd hear of other people hanging up a stocking, but we didn't do it.
- M: What did you usually get in your box?
- A: Well, it seems like I always got an apple and an orange and two sticks of candy. I think that was about the extent of it.
- M: Was there a Christmas tree?
- A: Sometimes they'd have a community Christmas tree.
- M: Where would that be?
- A: It was either at the schoolhouse or at the church. I remember us going to Christmas trees at both places. One at the church one time, or maybe more than once, and sometimes the schoolhouse.
- M: Would there be a program at church?
- A: No, just a Christmas tree.
- M: And would it be decorated?
- A: Decorated with the prettiest decorations you ever saw, popcorn strung on a long string and just festooned all over the tree. Occasionally, a candle, but they decided candles were too dangerous. They would catch the things on fire too easily. Mostly popcorn and a few colored balls hanged. I believe, the way I remember it as a little child, they would hang the gifts on the tree, too. They didn't pile them under the tree, like they do now. They would hang them on the tree.

M: That was at church or the community tree?

A: Yes.

M: Were they gifts from the church?

A: No, just parents would bring gifts in for their children, and maybe if you had someone you wanted to give a gift to, you'd hang it on the tree.

M: So, there would be a community gathering for Christmas?

A: Yes.

M: When would that be--Christmas day?

A: Christmas Eve.

M: Oh, would there be a church service along with it?

A: I don't remember a service; I don't believe they had a service.

M: Would there be anybody dressed as Santa Claus?

A: Yes, we'd have a Santy Claus and usually have a Santy Claus helper that wasn't dressed for the part. He was just one particular boy that I remember was Santy Claus helper quite a number of times. He was a real comic, and he, Santa Claus, would like for him to help.

M: Someone told me about some serenading that was done on Christmas Eve. Did that happen around your place?

A: Yes, we used to do that. That was one of the highlights of Christmas, after I got big enough to enter into the serenading. We'd get together; maybe there would be twenty or thirty, maybe more than that, in the group. Every kind of noisemaker that we could carry, we carried it. We didn't serenade, in the sense that people do now, go up and sing Christmas carols and things like that. We'd just go make noise, fire-crackers, bells, horns or anything that would make a noise. It was more like Halloween.

M: Oh, this was Christmas Eve?

A: Christmas Eve.

AA: Tell about putting the buggy up on the house.

A: That didn't happen with me.

M: Did it happen with some people?

A: I've heard that they went to a man's house and took his buggy wheels off and set it upon the ridge of his house and put the wheels back on, and the next morning he found his buggy straddling the ridge of his house.

M: (laughter)

AA: He first got his gun and tried to run them off because they were making noise. That's the way they reacted to it, so I've heard.

M: (laughter) That must have been quite a job to get it up there.

A: I imagine it would be.

M: You're not sure if this is just a rumor?

A: I think that was a story they told.

AA: (to Mr. A.) Your mama vouched for it.

M: Could it have been in your mother's time?

A: It may have been.

M: Before your time?

A: It may have been.

M: My father used to tell me about pranks that kids used to play, especially on Halloween celebrations?

A: No, we moved that up to Christmas Eve. In later years, after we grew up and moved to this area, then there were these pranks around Halloween time.

M: But in your boyhood, Halloween wasn't really celebrated?

A: We didn't even know that there was a Halloween when I was coming up.

M: I see. What about the Fourth of July?

A: We generally celebrated the Fourth of July, when I was a boy, by a community picnic. We would have barbeque and maybe go to a certain area; the men would go seine and catch a lot of fish and have a fish fry.

M: And would there be any fireworks?

A: No fireworks. We never knew anything about fireworks on the Fourth of July when I was growing up. We had ours at Christmas.

M: On Christmas morning, would there be any celebration at home with presents?

A: No, you'd just go and get what was in your box or your stocking.

M: And then have a dinner?

A: Yes.

- M: Would the dinner sometimes be at grandma and grandpa's house?
- A: No, unfortunately, I didn't have any grandmother and grandfather then. My mother's mother died in our home when, I guess, I was about five years old. She was the last one of my grandparents.
- M: Did that make a big impression on you as a five year old?
- A: Not much; it really didn't. I remember this thing happened. A cousin of mine that lived closeby was at our house. Of course, at a time like that, all of the family came in, and the neighbors. A cousin of mine was a couple of years older than me and we were out making us a seine to catch fish with. An older brother of mine came out there and told me, "You ought to be ashamed--grandma lying in yonder dead and you're out here making a seine." This cousin of mine said, "I don't care; it ain't none of my grandmammie." I remember that just as well, and it didn't impress me. I never felt a bit bad about it.
- M: Is that the same grandmother that you were talking about before?
- A: Yes. My other grandparents died long before that.
- M: So, you didn't really have a chance to learn directly from your grandparents anything about their childhood?
- A: No, nothing more than from my own parents. My father never did talk a great deal about his boyhood. In fact, he had a brother or two, and we still can't agree on their names. We knew he had nine brothers. But in our family that's left now, we can't name but nine of them, including our father.
- M: So, you've lost one of the names?
- A: We've lost his name. My mother used to tell a lot about her family, though, about when they were growing up.
- M: Was she one of several children?
- A: There was five in her family, three girls and two boys. One of the things, I guess, that impressed me more than anything else that I heard her tell, and it's not nice to talk about: She had two uncles; one of them was Uncle Jim and the other was Uncle Sagely. They were brothers-in-law, and they got into a fight one time. One of them--I disremember which--cut the other one real bad. He cut his abdomen and his intestines spilled out. My mama said that his wife picked those up and carried them along beside him in her apron while he was being carried into where they could take care of him. They washed him off right good and sewed him up. He got all right.
- M: This would have been before the turn of the century, I suppose.
- A: Oh, yeah, that would have been almost the mid-nineteenth century. That was before her. She didn't see it happen, but it was just something handed down from her parents about these two brothers-in-law getting into a fight.

M: And he recovered?

A: Oh, yes, it really didn't hurt him any except it just split his abdomen. It didn't do any internal injuries. That was very lucky I would think, that it would cut through but not injure the intestines.

But my mother was a jolly person. She enjoyed laughing, and when she was in a group of people, it wasn't long before she would have other people laughing. She enjoyed life. As my wife mentioned earlier, a lot of times that our remaining family--well, one brother died a month ago, but up to that time seven of the eight were still living--we had for two or three years been meeting at one or the other's houses once a month. And it was just great joy to reminisce about childhood days. We could always remember the joy that Mama had.

M: Did she used to try to fool you on April Fool's Day?

A: Yes, yes. She was always pulling some April Fool's trick on us. My father was just almost on the opposite pole. He was very stern. My father was ninety-four when he died, and he was a very stern man. Let me rephrase that. The older he got, the wiser he got in my estimation. After I was grown, I began to see what values he had and what he stood for, and the older I got the wiser he got. I learned to love him with all the intent that anybody could, even though as a child I never could. I never did understand him because he felt a greater responsibility, maybe than Mama did, I guess.

M: Do you also think that he mellowed with age?

A: No, I don't think that that was it at all.

M: You think you changed?

A: Yes, it was my understanding of his standards that changed.

M: So he gave you a good moral base on which to build your life?

A: Yes, he gave me a great heritage that I'm very proud of.

M: Do you have any specific recollections in what way he did that for you?

A: No, it was so intangible, during that change from the time I thought he was a martinet until I came to realize that he was an ideal father.

M: Do you remember in what ways he disciplined you?

A: I guess, if there was any one thing that would stand out was--I don't know how he brought us to that point--but we all knew that his word was law, and if he gave us an order it meant "now." It didn't mean "when it is convenient," or "later on," or something else; it just meant now. And he never had to repeat himself, and we knew not to test him. I don't know how we knew that. But we could get by with murder, almost, with Mama, before she would get serious with us.

M: Say, if you wanted to go somewhere with your friends, who would you ask, your mother or your father?

A: Either one.

M: Would it depend on what you were going to do?

A: That's right. If either one of them would give permission, that was sufficient, but sometimes, whatever we were going to do, maybe Mama wouldn't want to take the responsibility of saying yes or no, and we would have to go to our father. I remember one time that I was so in awe of him, I guess, I sat beside his chair for an hour one day trying to get up courage to ask him for permission to do something. Finally, I did, and without any hesitation he said, "Yes." So I had dreaded all of that for nothing.

M: Do you remember about how old you were then?

A: I guess I was an upper teenager. That condition existed as long as I was in school. I was almost grown before I'd do very much without his permission.

M: Do you think your mother felt as if she was a balancing factor for you?

A: I never have thought about whether or not they realized the part that each one of them was playing in bringing up the children. I think it was just the natural characteristics of each one of them. They were so different in that respect, yet the combination of the two made for an ideal situation. We were always very happy at home. Nobody at home never wanted to run away or get away from it.

M: You don't recall that her being light and gay hearted, and his more serious side ever clashed in the discipline of the children?

A: No, I never knew it to. If it ever did, they had it out in privacy.

M: Well, I think I've pretty much exhausted my questions. Can you think of anything you'd like to talk about?

A: No. (laughter)

M: Well, if when I come back you have some more things to talk about pertaining to that early period, I'd like to do it then. We could, maybe, spend another five or ten minutes; we don't have to do another long interview, but I certainly do appreciate your spending this time today.

A: Well, it's been my pleasure. Many times I think that I'm too retrospective; I think too much of the old days.

M: I think that's part of the fun of life, you know.

A: To me it is. But I don't know of anybody, hardly, that I have talked with to any extent who wants to go back and talk about those days. But I think a great deal about all of the different stages of growing up and

on down through the years. The older I get, the fonder those memories become.

M: That's marvelous, and it certainly helps me out a lot. I want to thank you on behalf of the project and myself for spending this time today. I'm sure it will be useful.

A: You're welcome, and I'll say again it's been my pleasure.

M: Well, that's great. Mr. Adair, your wife just started telling me something, and I want to get it on the tape. Could you tell me the same story that she was telling me?

A: People that live in this section would understand it, but I don't know if somebody from Michigan or California would.

M: Well, we can take it off later, if you don't want it recorded.

A: This happened to my oldest brother when he was two or three years old. When we were growing up, as I mentioned earlier, we raised everything on the farm that we could to eat. One of the staple foods was sorghum syrup, and they made the year's supply of syrup and put it in a fifty-five gallon oak barrel with a bung at the bottom. They would draw out what they would need as they needed it. My brother was playing out there, and he pulled the bung out and couldn't get it back in. He didn't tell anybody about it. When my father came in from work, he carried the mule down the hill to the branch to water the mule; he found the syrup done run to the creek. Every bit of the syrup run out of that barrel!

M: (laughter) Oh, I bet it wasn't funny at the time.

A: No, but I don't think he done anything to the little boy. He didn't deserve anything; he didn't know any better. (laughter) But it was a serious blow to the family, I know.

M: I'll bet.

AA: But it makes something funny now. Their sisters tell that all the time. (laughter) They have the best time when they get together.

M: Did you ever fall in the river when you were little?

A: No, but I fell into the creek one time. We had measles when we were little kids. I was about ten, I guess, and they told us after we had measles to be very careful and not get wet, or unduly wet. Some friends of ours and my brother were fishing on the creek. I started to cross a footlog. Do you know what a footlog is? That's a dead tree that has fallen across the creek, and you walk from one bank to the other on that. I started to cross that with a string of fish in my hand. I slipped off, and I caught onto the log with my arms and held myself. But I was scared to drop into the stream because I didn't want to get

my feet wet. My friend said, "Well, drop on down into the water." And I said, "I just had the measles, and I'll get my feet wet." He said, "Well, you wash them every night, don't you?" (laughter) I said, "Why, yes." I just dropped on down. It wasn't much over ankle deep. I was frightened because I wasn't supposed to get my feet wet. (laughter)

AA: I thought you fell into the creek off the bridge.

A: Oh, that was when I was a year old.

M: What happened then?

A: We had a creek that went through our pasture and there was a bridge over it. Well, the road went just above the fence, I say three feet above the net-wire fence. A big rain had come and the water was rolling under the bridge. I gathered up an armful of pinecones, and would drop them in at the upper side of the bridge, and I would rush to the lower side to watch them come out from under the bridge. One time, I didn't stop quick enough, and I just went off into the water. It was deep, just rolling.

M: Was that the Buttahatchie?

A: No, that was a little creek. It drained into the Buttahatchie River. I went under the net-wire fence when I went in. I don't know how my mama got over that fence. She told this; I don't remember it. I came up down in the pasture, but she got down there and drug me out, wrapped me up in a sack and dried me off.

M: How did she know you were there?

A: She saw me; she was with me. We were just walking down the road when this happened. We were going over to the old house to get some potatoes or peas or something. She had a sack.

M: Did you ever see the river or the creeks frozen over?

A: Not completely. I don't remember as a boy ever seeing those little creeks frozen over completely.

AA: His brother John has a picture that was made in 1940, of a car setting out on the ice, when the Tombigbee River froze over.

M: Oh, so that would have been a very unusual thing?

A: Oh, yes, it was so unusual that everything was just frozen up. People's canned fruits and vegetables froze and bursted, and at all the local stores, you couldn't even get a jar of mayonnaise. Everything was frozen; it was fifteen degrees below zero, I believe, which is most unusual for this area.

M: But in your boyhood were you never able to go out and skate on the ponds?

A: Oh, yes, on the ponds. The ponds would freeze over. It seems to me, looking from this point back to that time, that every winter the ponds would freeze over, and we could skate on them.

M: But not the streams?

A: Not the running streams. The flowing streams couldn't freeze over. But I've skated on the ponds lots of times. I got to be pretty proficient at skating. I didn't have any skates, just old regular shoes, but I could skate.

M: Do you mean you would slide around on your shoes, or did you have skates that clamped to your shoes?

A: No, just had shoes. We didn't have any skates; we'd just slide on our shoes.

M: Oh, you called that "skating"?

A: Yeah, that was skating.

M: (laughter)

AA: Well, they'd slide all the way across the pond on them.

A: We'd have a few times, as a boy, that we had sleet. It would freeze over, and that was like solid ice all over the whole world. You could skate anywhere you wanted to, but those ponds where we were skating on the ice was kind of limited. They weren't too big.

M: I suppose you'd get a long streak where you could just skid across.

A: Oh, yeah, we'd take a run. We'd start on the dry land and come over to that water and just stand still. The momentum would carry us thirty or forty feet across the pond, you know.

M: Do you have such things as beavers or opossums around here in the ponds?

A: Quite a number of beavers in the area. In fact, they have become a pest in this area. The game and fish commissioners have been trying to thin them out in some areas. A few years ago they imported some alligators and put them into a creek where the beavers had dammed up, which was ruining a lot of timber. They thought the alligators might thin out the beaver population, but if they did, nobody ever could tell it.

M: What about when you were a boy, did you see beavers then?

A: There wasn't any beavers when I was a boy. None in this part of Mississippi and I don't guess in any part until perhaps in the 1940s.

AA: There were possums, though, way back.

M: You'd see opossums?

A: Oh, yes, I used to, as a boy, enjoy possum hunting. Get the dog and go out at night and tree them.

M: Were they used as food, too?

A: Well, yes, some people would eat them, but they were mostly used for fur. They would skin them and sell the pelts.

M: Did you ever do that?

A: At times. When I was a little bitty boy--I don't guess I was ten years old--I had an uncle that never married that lived in the home with us all of my life until I left home. He was just another member of the family. In fact, a friend of my youngest brother cried one day and went home and told his mama, "John's got two daddys, I just got one." (laughter) He did a lot of trapping. I set a trap one day and caught a possum, and he skinned it for me, carried the pelt to Gattman, and sold it. I thought I was getting about as big as he was. There have always been a lot of possums in this area.

M: Was that uncle your dad's brother?

A: Yes.

M: Did he work the farm along with your father?

A: Yes. He had his crop. He had his horse and he made his own crop, but he just lived in the house with us.

M: So, he was not really a second father to you, in the sense that you didn't turn to him?

A: No, didn't turn to him for guidance and inspiration, but if I needed some sympathy, I'd turn to him.

M: He was a pretty good uncle then?

A: Yeah, he was a great uncle.

AA: Tell her about going to Gattman and what you'd eat.

A: We used to go to Gattman--I keep mentioning that little town of Gattman. Me and my youngest brother, we were little boys maybe eight years old. He'd carry us to Gattman to a grocery store and buy our lunch. He'd buy a can of salmon, and we three would eat that. The storekeeper would furnish bowls and pepper sauce and cracker barrel crackers from a barrel and all that to eat raw salmon out of. He'd pay a dime for a can and feed three of us all that we could eat. And that was a great something to look forward to when we'd go to Gattman with "Unkie," because we always knew that we was going to get some salmon to eat.

M: It was a treat?

A: It was a treat.

M: Did you ever have ice cream as a treat?

A: Homemade ice cream. I don't guess that I had any manufactured ice cream till I was grown.

M: Did everybody have to take a turn on the cranking?

A: Not too much. It was a privilege to turn it. It got to be work, but it was a privilege. When we were going to have ice cream, we would telephone the ice plant in Aberdeen. They would take a chunk of ice and pack it in shavings in a crocker sack, a burlap sack, and put it on a train. We'd go to Gattman to pick it up and bring it home and make ice cream.

M: So, you'd have to order it special?

A: Yes.

M: Do you know if they got that ice out of the Tombigbee River in the wintertime?

A: No, at that time, they manufactured the ice.

M: I've seen the ice place at Waverly. I understand that Waverly plantation used to store ice. That's why I wondered. But Aberdeen manufactured ice even when you were a little boy?

A: Oh, yeah, they had the ice plant as far back as I can remember, and they kept in operation until after World War II. I don't exactly know how late it was when they went out of business. But many times after we'd been living here, before we had electricity here, we'd go and get ice.

M: There's another question that I didn't ask you before. Was your father ever involved in politics, either local or state politics?

A: No, he never was. He was very much interested in politics. He kept up closely with local, state, and national politics, but he never was directly involved. He never was a candidate.

M: But he would talk at home about different people who were running for political office?

A: Oh, yes. And I, looking down through the history of my lifetime now realize how astute he was in knowing who was the best, who was the politician and who was the statesman. He could spot a mountebank as soon as he heard him talk.

M: "Mountebank"--that's a new one to me. What does that mean?

A: Well, as Harry Truman would say, "He's a counterfeit."

M: Oh. (laughter) Mr. Adair, you said something about Camargo. What's that?

A: Camargo was a shipping point in the extreme northeast corner of Monroe

County. If I remember correctly, it was a shipping point for cotton, down the Town Creek into the Tombigbee River. It is well documented. I don't understand why you didn't get some information on that at the library.

M: Well, maybe others have because we have other people going into the archives. I'm concentrating more on interviewing, and I'm quite sure we have some information that I don't know about. But was this shipment on barges, do you think?

A: Well, I don't know if they used barges in that day. But steamboats went all the way up the Town Creek to Camargo.

M: Oh, really? Camargo was the name of a town?

A: It was; it is no more.

M: Do you have an idea what period that was?

A: I'm talking, I think it is the middle 1800s.

M: So steamships went way up there?

A: They went as far up as to Camargo.

M: Do you know how long that went on? Did it go to the turn of the century?

A: No, it was before the turn of the century. I read not too long ago, I believe in one of those historical society bulletins² about Camargo, and it was a fine little town at one time. It didn't last long, just maybe twenty years, or something like that.

M: But at that time the people that grew cotton in that area took it to Camargo to send it down the Tombigbee River?

A: Yes. I think that was the primary reason for the establishment of the town there, was the shipment of cotton.

M: Did you learn about Camargo through the journal article?

A: No, I guess I've been hearing about Camargo all of my life. But it really was just brought to me more vividly by reading that article in the historical journal.

²The Journal of Monroe County History.

THTP - Oral History Interview OH 114
An interview with
Leonard Andrew Stewart

conducted and edited by
Betty E. Mitson



Leonard Stewart was born in the community of Hamilton, Mississippi in 1905. He has resided in the same community all of his life. The farm on which he was raised was large and was worked by sharecroppers. He discusses aspects of sharecropping such as "furnishing", farm equipment, and the crops that they grew. Among the accounts of particular interest in this transcript are stories of his family's role in the Civil War and of the water-run mills along the Buttahatchie River.

The interview with Mr. Stewart was conducted in his home on January 21, 1980 by Betty E. Mitson. Also present at the session was Mrs. Corinne W. Stewart.

M: This is an interview with Leonard Andrew Stewart for the Tombigbee Historic Twonsites Project by Betty E. Mitson. The interview is taking place in Mr. Stewart's home. His address is Route 2, Box 101, Hamilton, Mississippi 39746. His telephone number is 343-8843, and the date is January 21, 1980.

Mr. Stewart, I'd like to ask when and where you were born.

S: I was born in 1905 in the Hamilton community, about half a mile from where we are talking now.

M: Were your parents also born in this area?

S: Yes, ma'am, they were both born right here close.

M: May I ask how close?

S: One of them was born within a mile of here, and the other one within a mile and a half of here.

M: When you were born, were your parents living in the house we're in now?

S: No, ma'am.

M: Would you explain to me where they lived when you were born?

S: I was born in a two-story house, a half a mile east of where we are now. The old building is still there.

M: Is it still in the family?

S: Yes ma'am, my brother lives there.

M: Were either of your parents born in that house?

S: No, ma'am, they weren't born in that house. My father was born on the hill right above it about a quarter of a mile. But, my mother was born back over toward the river.

M: Had they been schoolmates?

S: Yes, they were schoolmates. She moved over here right close when she was about two years old, and they were schoolmates together. My father was nine years older than my mother, but they knew one another in school.

M: Do you know if your grandparents on either side were born in this area?

- S: No, my grandparents weren't born in this community.
- M: Did you know your grandparents?
- S: Three of my grandparents were dead before I was born. My grandmother on my mother's side was living and lived a long time. The fact of the business was, she was ninety-four years old when she died.
- M: Were you, as a child, closely related with your grandmother?
- S: I certainly was.
- M: Was she in the household?
- S: No. She had a home up half a mile from us. She was widowed very young in life.
- M: So she had to raise her family?
- S: She had to raise her family.
- M: Do you know where your grandparents on both sides came from?
- S: No, there's quite a bit of history in the first beginning. We're descendants of people from South Carolina or North Carolina. I don't remember which, but I could find it.
- M: Is that your father's side?
- S: That's my mother's side. On my father's side, as well as I remember, we're descendants of people right up north of here; I would say five or six miles north of here.
- M: Do you think he was born five or six miles north of here?
- S: I think he was. We have some history of it; I'd have to look that up.
- M: So, on your father's side, you are at least third generation in this area, then?
- S: We're the third generation in this community.
- M: I would like to ask you first of all, if you know anything about Colbert, which is a town that once existed along the Tombigbee River in Clay County. Is the name Colbert familiar to you?
- S: No, I don't know anything about it.
- M: Now, I'll ask the same question about Vinton.
- S: No, I believe I've heard the name Vinton, but it didn't mean anything at all to me. I don't know a thing about it.
- M: Now, the third town is Bartons Ferry.

S: I crossed at Bartons Ferry a time or two when I was real young, but I don't know anything about it in later years. I've heard of it.

M: Do you have any idea how young you were?

S: I would say I was in my teens.

M: Do you have a recollection at all about anything in connection with that trip, for instance, a description of the ferry itself, or the ferry landings and its surroundings, anything at all.

S: Well, it was amusing to me because the ferry came up to the bank that was concrete, and there was a Negro man that managed it with a pole and a rope. There was a big cable across that he pulled it with. You drove your vehicle on it, and then he pulled you across and it went off. It did quite a bit of swaying. I didn't like it much because I heard my father say, one time, that he and another man carried two loads of hogs across it, and the team to the front wagon liked to push the back wagon out over the railing. I didn't like the idea of that ferry, so it didn't interest me much. It looked dangerous to me.

M: Were there no sides to it?

S: I believe there were sides to it, but they had to put a railing up behind. You see, after you drove on it, then they put a railing on. But this railing just wasn't too heavy. When this front team reared and shoved back into the second team, the second team then shoved back, and the railing began to give way, and they like to have gone into the river, so my father said.

M: Now, when they put hogs on, would they be carried in the wagon?

S: They were loaded in wagons. They were hauling the hogs to West Point to slaughter.

M: Were you there when that happened?

S: I wasn't there when that happened, but my father told me about the incident on that ferry. When I saw the ferry--I had never seen the ferry--and when I saw the ferry, I didn't like the looks of it and didn't care to cross it, but we crossed it.

M: That was your only choice, I guess.

S: Yes, that was the only time we crossed on that ferry.

M: When you rode across, you'd just be standing up, I suppose.

S: We just crossed in a wagon.

M: When you entered the ferry and when you got across, did you feel that you were in a country situation or was there settlement on either side?

S: There wasn't any settlement there. Right over on the opposite bank,

there was a house when I crossed it where the fellow that managed the ferry lived. When you went to this side, you hollered; he was over on the far bank, and we went in from this way. When we went to it, we hollered, and he came down and carried us across on the ferry.

M: And how many times do you think you might have gone across?

S: I don't think I crossed it but one time; I don't remember but just that one crossing. I didn't care for anymore times. (laughter)

M: Do you remember where you were going?

S: I think that I was just crossing because I wanted to cross on it one time. I wanted to see how it was. I came on around, came on up, and crossed the river on a bridge way up on above the ferry and came home. (laughter)

M: Had you planned to come back by ferry, but then decided that it was too scary to come back that way?

S: No, I think it was an adventure. As I remember now, it was an adventure; I just wanted to go around and see.

M: Just wanted to do it once, huh?

S: Yes.

M: One other question I have is about the Buttahatchie River. We're interested in knowing anything about activities on the Buttahatchie River, either in the way of commerce, or anything else.

S: The Buttahatchie River hasn't meant anything to me; in other words, it is called a "creek." My father's land bounded the Buttahatchie River for nearly two miles. He swapped the land that he had on the other side of the river to the man that owned on the other side for the land that he had on this side, and they made the river the boundary between them. My father did that because he was a stock raiser, and he used that river for a fence. He fenced to the river below on his property, and pastured to the river. They didn't use that river for any commerce at all.

M: As far as you know, from discussions with your father, was it used for that purpose in his lifetime?

S: No.

M: You could be fairly certain of that?

S: I could be fairly certain, yes.

M: Do you think he would have told you if that had been the case?

S: I know he would have told me, yes.

M: You wouldn't venture a guess about its use in your grandfather's lifetime, would you? Your grandfather wasn't close to that river, was he?

S: Back in my father's time, my grandfathers were both living in this section, but they were deceased before I was born. I never heard any information from them. Now, there was a wheat mill on it. There was a water mill, a wheat mill, on the river.

M: Is that right? Whereabouts?

S: It was up above where the Lawrence Bridge was. The Lawrence Bridge was about a mile above my father's property and was a connection between this community and Caledonia.

M: When you say "this community," do you mean Hamilton?

S: Yes, the Hamilton community and the Caledonia community. That bridge went in, I'd say, about twenty years ago. They're rebuilding that bridge now.

M: What relationship did you say the bridge was to this wheat mill?

S: The wheat mill was just about half a mile on up the river above the bridge. We crossed the bridge and went up on the other side to the wheat mill.

M: Would a wheat mill grind just wheat, or would they handle corn and meal as well?

S: No, this mill was specifically for grinding wheat. I don't know whether it could have ground corn or not.

M: That's interesting. I didn't know that wheat was grown in this area.

S: There was quite a bit of wheat grown for home purposes. People would have a small crop of wheat. You see, we had quite a few plantations in here, and a lot of black people. They appreciated the wheat that we had here. We had to have mills. That was the trouble; we didn't have mills to grind it. But they had this big wheat mill up there on the river. It was a water mill and that's why it was on the river. They ground this wheat.

M: Was wheat flour part of the black diet, more than for the white people?

S: The wheat mill was for white people; it was owned by a man named Moss Thomas. He owned that mill, and I went with my father to carry wheat to it. It was interesting to me because it was on the river and the floor of the building was out on the edge of the river. Part of the floor was floating, and it was interesting to me. I didn't make but one trip there, but I enjoyed it. They ground quite a bit of that wheat on that water mill.

M: Did the part that overhung the river have posts down in the water?

S: Well, of course, they had some because the water mill was made of a big. . . . Well, at this time I don't guess I could explain it. But anyway, you see, there was a big waterwheel, and it had a big troughlike thing that brought all that water in, to pour over it. The water would come through it, and that gave it the power, and they ground the meal that way.

M: That wheat was strictly for home use, you say?

S: That was strictly for home use. It was like we had our corn mills. We had corn gristmills that ground every Saturday afternoon all through the community, because that was the bread of life to us--meal and wheat. There were so many black people in this section, the population was so thick with black people, and they weren't able to afford buying flour. When we grew our wheat and had it ground, we had wheat bread.

M: Would the wheat mill just run periodically?

S: Well, you could keep your wheat just like you could your corn. And you could take so much wheat to the mill, just about what you wanted to use for a certain length of time. With corn, we always had to go to mill once a week.

M: I was wondering about the man that ran the wheat mill, was he a full-time miller, or was milling over and above his farming operation?

S: He worked about his farming, and if you had some wheat you wanted ground, you'd go there and take it, and he would grind it, because all he had to do was turn his water through. That was the advantage of the water mill over the steam mill. Now, I've been to quite a few gristmills that were pulled by steam engines, and of course, you had to get up the heat and make your steam. That's why you had to do quite a bit of firing of wood. But there was a beauty, an advantage, of the old water mill because the water was there, and you just turned it through kind of like electricity. You could just start to grinding anytime anybody brought you some corn or wheat to grind.

M: Do you have any idea from how far away people came to the mill? For instance, would it be possible that people came from the other side of the Tombigbee to the wheat mill?

S: Oh, I would say that they went as far as that. People all through this section used the wheat mill. I don't know whether there were any more. Now, I can tell you this: something happened to this old mill, and they quit operating it. My father was lost as to what he was going to do. He heard that they had another mill, a steam mill, over at Steens, Mississippi; that's in Lowndes County. So I went with him, on the wagon; he carried two wagonloads of wheat. He had a black man to drive the other team, and he carried two loads of wheat over there to Steens, and they ground that over there. Well, that mill operated three or four years, and then it went out of business, and then I went with him with two or three loads to Columbus, Mississippi. They had a

wheat mill down there, and we carried wheat to that mill.

M: If anyone wanted to find the location of that old wheat mill, do you suppose that you'd be able to show them?

S: You're talking about the one on the Buttahatchie River?

M: Yes.

S: No. I don't think I could, because I don't think there would be any signs left of it anywhere, and I don't believe there would be anybody over there that could tell me anything about it. I have the same problem down here on our farm, on my father's farm. I was just thinking the other day; I don't know a single person that worked down there in the bottom when I was a little boy that's living today not one.

M: Do you suppose that you would be able to tell within a mile of where that wheat mill was?

S: I think I would be completely lost when I got over in that section because the road that I went to it on was just a little dirt road winding about. I wouldn't be able, when I came to somebody's house in that section, to ask them about it.

M: Oh, I see. Well, just to know that it was in existence is useful to know because we do want to know where the people along the Tombigbee River, in those towns that I spoke of, got the services that they had. So I'm very glad to have the information. Do you know anything else about the Tombigbee that might be of interest?

S: Well, I don't know but one other thing, now that was. . . .

M: I meant the Buttahatchie; I didn't mean the Tombigbee.

S: Well, that wheat mill that I told you about up there. And then one time I heard my father say--I didn't know this but one time I heard my father tell about the Swedes hauling. . . . These people were from Sweden; they were big blond people. I've heard him talking about it. He went down there and watched them cutting those logs and throwing them into the Buttahatchie River. He said they were floating them down the river to where the Buttahatchie enters the Tombigbee, then down Tombigbee to Mobile, and then they were loading them on ships and sending them across the water.

M: To Sweden, presumably?

S: Yes, they were taking them to Sweden; they wanted the timber. They bought that timber. Well, it was very cheap here then, and it was mighty good timber, those big virgin pines, hard pine.

M: Were they people who had come from Sweden particularly to do that?

S: Yes, people that had come from Sweden. I don't know anything about the business transactions, but the people in this community knew that

they came in here. I guess they bought the option after they got over here, but they were getting timber from here and taking it back to Sweden.

M: Was this being done along the Buttahatchie?

S: This was being done down here on the Buttahatchie River, I would say five miles up the river from where it empties into the Tombigbee. They floated them down the Buttahatchie. I can tell you one thing about the Buttahatchie River: it is a very swift river. It is real swift; it has so much fall to it. And I've heard my father say that a fellow by the name of Mr. Louis Booth, that lived up on the Buttahatchie River and had mills, was mechanical-minded. He wanted to channel the Buttahatchie River down the McKinley Creek into Tombigbee.

M: I don't quite follow that.

S: He lived up on the mouth of the Buttahatchie River. And they had quite a few gristmills, water mills, and different mills up and down this here McKinley Creek, and the Ross Creek, and the Hutchinson Creek, those creeks up through there. He had studied that and he wanted to change the river. He thought he could take teams and equipment and cut it out up there and turn the Buttahatchie River into these creeks; to where all these creeks through here would have the advantage of the water that went down Buttahatchie River to power their mills.

M: Would that have changed the spot that the Buttahatchie came into the Tombigbee?

S: Yes, that would have changed where it went in, but it would have put it through. It had so much fall. This way it's down through the bottom. But his way, he planned to bring it through the hill country to where they would get the advantage of this waterpower. It was a small Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway venture. (laughter)

M: Was it strictly in the mind, or did he actually start to do it?

S: He didn't start to do it. He didn't do it but he studied about it and looked about it. He just didn't have quite enough money, and he couldn't get his neighbors interested enough in it to help him do it. But I heard my father say it was logical. That just shows how bad people wanted this waterpower. He wanted this waterpower for all these mills up and down these creeks. You see in the summertime these creeks were dry to where they didn't have the water all through the summer and they just used them in the winter. I can tell you another thing about the Buttahatchie; there are springs all up and down that Buttahatchie River. There's quite a bit of spring water.

M: I wonder if that's true of the Tombigbee.

S: I don't know about the Tombigbee, but I don't think it is.

M: I bet you can tell about the Buttahatchie because you went swimming

there a lot?

S: Oh, yes ma'am. After we married, I carried my wife down there and a few friends. She can tell you one thing: that was the coldest water she said she had ever tried swimming in. (laughter) It was cold because, where we were swimming there's springs all in the bottom there.

M: Tell me about where you went swimming and how you went swimming when you were a boy?

S: Well, we just went down there in what we called a lake--a little bypass of the river. Of course, I went into the river a few times. But it was harder to get to, and most of that Buttahatchie River bottom is gravel. There's some of the prettiest gravel knolls, that you just wade in and go on out just as deep as you want to go. It's a mighty pretty river, but as I said awhile ago, it's very swift. When it's not raining much, it's the prettiest water, just pretty and clear. But when it rains, it's as muddy as it can be because it's so swift and it washes off those hills back up in Alabama and up in northeast Mississippi. It washes and brings the mud down, and causes a heap of erosion.

M: So, presumably, it could silt up pretty fast?

S: Yes ma'am. It does; it fills up pretty fast.

M: When you'd go swimming in the creeks, would there usually be a bunch of boys and no bathing suits?

S: Most of the time.

M: So, it was always boys. No girls?

S: Yes, it was boys.

M: Did men ever go with you, or was it always young people?

S: Well, we boys were so many different ages. (laughter)

M: All up to adulthood, I suppose?

S: It was quite different in my time to what it is now, because when we would get together, there would be boys maybe eighteen years old and ten years old. You didn't have the problems then of the ten-year-old boy being led off by the eighteen-year-old boy. The eighteen-year-old boy would be like a father to the ten-year-old boy. That's the way it was with us when we were boys.

M: In the summertime, was swimming pretty much a daily occurrence?

S: No, we didn't have time daily. The only time we had was when we were working pretty close to a stream, then we could go out and take a swim. But, we had to work.

M: Was the swimming often after work was over? A way of getting washed up?

S: Well, a lot of the time swimming was during the noon hour. We'd be working and we'd take a swim during the noon hour. We'd be working close to some of those swim places and swim awhile during noon hour. But Papa never did let us swim long; when one o'clock came he called us. You see, I worked. My father had quite a bit of land, and he had a lot of pretty fields right down there on the bank of the river, and we farmed. Of course, at that time it was farming with mules. We farmed with them, and we'd stop at twelve o'clock. We'd eat our lunch and run off down there and go swimming awhile. At one o'clock he'd call us, and we'd go back to work.

M: How many youngsters were in your family?

S: In my family it was just four, one girl and three boys. But my older brother never did care anything about farm life. All he wanted to do was read; he made a preacher. He preached for forty-three years, I believe it was. It was good in one way, and in one way it was bad I reckon. If he was good enough to preach for forty-three years there in our home church, it would have been nice if he could have preached somewhere else awhile. (laughter)

M: When he was young and didn't want to farm, would your father indulge him? I mean, would he let him read instead of working out in the farm?

S: Yes, ma'am. One of the black people who worked with my father, that was a little older, well I'd say he was ten years older than I was, told me something one day after my father had passed away. I just told him, "I don't understand why Papa never did think that work wouldn't hurt me." I've heard him say, "Drewcy, work don't hurt you." When I say "Drewcy," that's my nickname. And he said that Papa told him that my brother, Charles Franklin Stewart, just enjoyed reading so well and wanted an education and didn't like farming that he hated to call him and ask him to do anything. That's the way life went. I like farming; I just went to school until I finished high school in 1924. I had one teacher that just begged me to go to college. I loved the lady; she was a mighty sweet woman. I told her that I was just waiting for the day to go to farming.

M: Was your other brother a farmer, too?

S: My other brother is younger. Today is his birthday, and he is six years younger than I am. He lives over in the old homeplace by himself; he never married. Neither one of my brothers married.

M: I'd like to go back now and talk about where you went to school? Where did you go when you were just a little fellow?

S: My first five years in school was at a one-teacher school, Cave Springs. I never liked to go to school; I didn't want to start school. I remember that first day at school just as well as if it was yesterday.

M: What happened?

S: Mama wouldn't start my older brother to school until I got big enough to go to school. He was two years older than I am. I started at six and he started at eight, the same day. Papa told us that morning, "Well, I'm gonna take you to school today." And I hated it so bad I didn't know what to do because I was out just playing and having a big time. He said, "Just as soon as I take the clothes over to this laundry lady and come back, your mother will have you ready to go to school." So he carried us up there to school, and carried us in and sat us down on the bench, and he sat down behind us. We sat there for awhile and I happened to look around a little, and Papa was gone. He sat down on a bench behind us, and he slipped out and left us. Well, that was a terrible day for me. It was just a one-teacher school, and I would say that she had about twelve or fifteen students, from my age, on up to twenty years. Some of the older students were twenty years of age.

I remember, one time at that school, we went up and sat down. We just had an old wood heater and would sit down around it. Then there was a girl about twenty years old going to school there, and another little boy about my age. We loved to go up and sit down by each side of her. One day she had a book there, and it had a picture of a skeleton in it. This little boy on the other side just put his finger over that skeleton to touch it, and when he did she slapped the book up that away. When she did, it scared him and he went to jerk his finger back, and I laughed out. The teacher called me and asked me which I'd rather do, take five demerits or stay in after school? I said, "I'll take five demerits." So, she gave me five demerits. Had I gotten fifteen demerits in a month, I would have gotten a whipping for punishment. But I knew that I could take the five demerits. I wasn't going to get anymore; I was going to be careful. (laughter)

M: You must have been pretty little then, weren't you?

S: Yes, ma'am.

M: How far was that for you to have to go to school?

S: One mile.

M: Was it walking distance?

S: Yes, ma'am. We walked to school all the time. We didn't have anything of value in that school. We had sage grass for our broom. I don't know whether you've ever seen a sage grass broom or not.

M: No.

S: You've seen all this tall sage grass. Well, you'd pull it off and you stem the straw off at the bottom and put it in a big wad, and then you'd take a string and tie it up. That's what we swept the floor of our school building with--a sage broom. We had a water bucket and a dipper, and all dipped that dipper in the water bucket

and took a drink and set the dipper back into the water bucket.
(laughter)

M: Would everybody have a cold in the wintertime?

S: Yes, ma'am. That's the way it was.

M: So colds went around the whole class, I suppose?

S: That's the way it went. And we didn't have any water at the school building. We'd take the bucket and go to the nearest neighbor, which was nearly a quarter of a mile, and get a bucket of water. In the fall of the year when it was cool, we didn't drink any water, hardly. That bucket sat there. Maybe we wouldn't get any water for three days, and it just sat there open. (laughter)

M: Whose responsibility was it to get the water?

S: The one that was most willing to go after it.

M: How was the place heated?

S: It was heated with a wood heater, and we cut most of the wood.

M: The students?

S: The students. My wife asked me what I was going to tell you about our restroom facilities and I tried to think of the joke about a path and "something." I guess you've heard it?

M: No, I don't think I have, let's hear it. (laughter)

S: This one was, we just had the path. (laughter) We just had the path.

M: Oh! That tells it pretty good! So, that's the way it was at that school?

S: That's the way it was. And the last year that I went to that school, we had to have seven students to keep the school going. Papa had three, my younger brother wasn't old enough to go. My older brother, and my sister, and I were three. Another man and his wife had three children and that gave us six. They wanted to have the school there that year, but they wouldn't give them a school there without seven students. So, Papa got one of his sisters to let her youngest daughter go to school there that year, and stayed with her aunt, so we could have seven students and get a teacher.

M: Oh, my! Do you have any idea about what year that might have been?

S: Yes, ma'am, that was in 1915.

M: How many months did you go to school?

S: Five months of school, five months through the winter. They wanted a

school because it was pretty far for us to walk to Hamilton, and that little school was closer.

M: That school was a mile away, was it?

S: That school was a mile away, and the Hamilton School then was up there at Old Hamilton which is two and a half miles. That was the last year that we had it because the next year this girl didn't want to go back. She wanted to go to Hamilton with her sisters, and they closed the school.

M: Permanently?

S: Yes, ma'am, completely, and we went to Hamilton from then on.

M: How did you get there?

S: We walked. The first two or three years we walked, and whenever it was raining Papa would send a Negro after us in a surrey. We were rich and had a surrey. (laughter)

M: Oh, my!

S: Most people went in wagons, but we had a surrey.

M: Oh, that was for church going, I suppose.

S: Yes, ma'am.

M: Were there sharecroppers on your father's property?

S: Yes, our farmers worked altogether with sharecroppers and wage hands.

M: And what? Wage hands?

S: Wage hands.

M: How big a piece of property did he have?

S: He had something over two thousand acres.

M: Do you have any idea what the size of the labor force would have been when you were a little boy?

S: Well, when I was a little boy, we worked on the individual farm there; we worked between twenty and thirty mules. Well, I'd say we worked twenty mules. I had a lot of fun on the farm, but I never did think that Papa gave me what I should have. There was one thing that I wanted all the time and that was a bicycle. He wouldn't get me a bicycle because he said that it was the most foolish thing he'd ever seen. You were just sitting upon a wheel walking. He said I'd do just as well to walk on the ground, and that was that.

He had mules and brood mares. He wouldn't have horses, because he

could raise colts from brood mares and work them, too. They were dual-purpose animals and, of course, you couldn't ride those mares off and leave the colts very satisfactory. I would want a horse, and I didn't get a horse. I was on a farm but I couldn't have a horse until I got big enough. One day I had a neighbor up here that had a little old horse he wanted to sell. He said he'd take thirty-five dollars for it and I just kept scraping around until I got thirty-five dollars and went and got that little horse. I had the time of my life with that horse; I rode him to school then.

M: Oh.

S: I rode that horse to school some.

M: So, as long as you could pay for it your dad would let you have a horse.

S: As long as I could pay for it, he let me have it. I heard my father say once that he could say about his children, that they never begged him to go anywhere. If they wanted to go somewhere, and they asked him if they could go and he said, "No, you can't go." he said we never did beg him like some of the other children would. I say Papa didn't understand it like I did, because we knew that there wasn't any need. When he said "No," that was it. He loved his children very dearly but he meant for us to obey. And when he said, "No," you didn't beg. The decision was already made with him, and when you asked there was no use in begging.

M: Was he consistent?

S: Yes, ma'am.

M: Was your mother pretty consistent, too?

S: Well, my mother never whipped me; she never gave me a whipping. My father whipped me several times. My mother didn't whip me, but she hurt me worse than the punishment that my father gave me did. I didn't mind the whipping. They hardly ever hurt any longer than when he was putting them on. If I did something wrong, my mother would say, "Drewcy, do you know how bad you've hurt me?" And sometimes tears would come into her eyes. I'd heap rather had the whipping. (laughter)

M: Where did that name Drewcy come from?

S: It's from Andrew. People that don't understand it can't get it but, you see, it comes from A-N-D-R-E-W, and I had an Uncle Andrew who I was named after. They called him Drew. And of course, they called me Drewcy. (laughter)

M: You were the little fellow.

S: I was the little fellow.

M: Did your father keep a commissary for the people on the farm?

S: No, he didn't have a commissary, but he kept all the little items that they might need, like snuff, and tobacco, and soap, and matches, and all those little things. Of course, my father was a grain and stock farmer; he didn't like cotton.

He stored nearly everything you could think of. We had meat from one year to another. He killed hogs; he just had the world of hogs. He would butcher hogs and pack them in the smokehouse, would pack them down in salt and then hang them. We had hams the year round; we even had sausage. We'd grind the meat and sack it and hang it up in the top of this big smokehouse. It would seal over in cold weather. You'd have to do it in cold weather, of course. It sealed over in cold weather, and that preserved it through the year.

M: What do you mean "It sealed over in cold weather"?

S: The grease in the meat would come out. We'd put it in sacks, pack it tight in those sacks, about so large, and then while it was cold the grease would come out through that sack. Then a little mold would come over the outside of the sack, and that would preserve it. You could hang that through the hottest, driest summer and fall. Even after Christmas of the next year, you could take one of those sacks down, tie it back, cut those sausages, eat them, and they were just fine.

M: Would that be storage just for your family, then, or was there some sharing with the sharecroppers? I'm really curious to know how the people, other than you family, on that farm got their supplies?

S: Oh, the black people on that farm was just part of the family, in a way. As long as the farm had it, they had it too. In other words, the nigras could come there and get meat anytime they wanted. Of course, we had those big middlings of side meat that came out of those hogs. We didn't have enough ham for them to eat all of the time, but we had enough of that midlen meat that they got meat anytime they wanted it. If they come up tonight and told Papa, "I'm out of meat" I need some more meat," they just went to the smokehouse and got it. If they wanted some molasses . . . they ran a sorghum mill there all fall making up syrup.

M: When you say "they," who do you mean?

S: My father would move a mill in and a man that had a mill who did custom work. There were quite a few black people up there in the hills that had those mills. They'd just move it in and make custom syrup over the year for part of the molasses, part of the syrup. And he put it up in buckets, in jugs, in barrels. I've seen them with four, five, six great big fifty-gallon barrels full of syrup. Anytime they wanted a gallon of syrup they got it. We raised sweet potatoes and brought them around and put them in what we called . . . We had a big old potato house, curing potato house. Anytime they wanted a bushel of potatoes, they got them. We had peanuts there and everytime it rained, those wage hands just picked off peanuts to have something to do.

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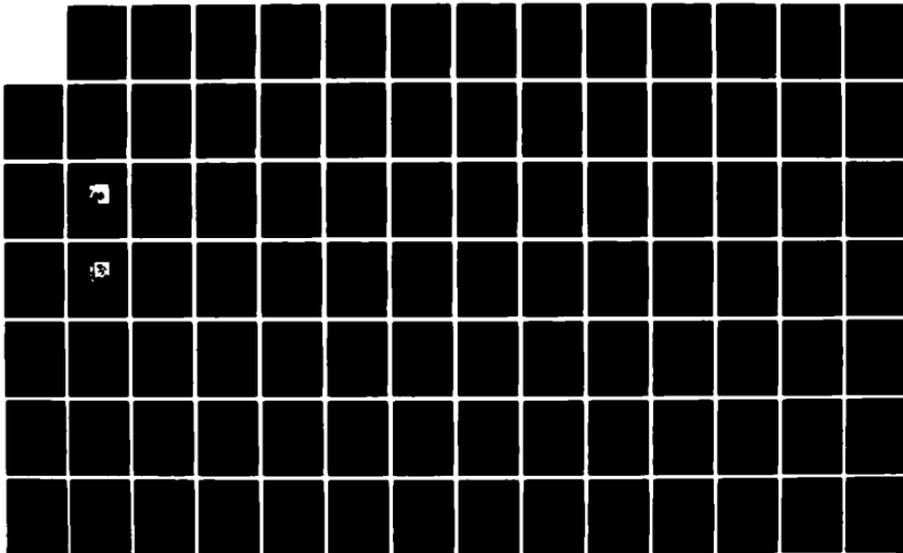
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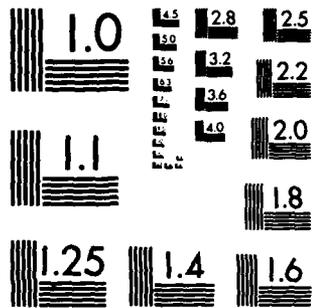
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I talked to one of the Negro boys that I just thought so much of--he was ten years older than I, and he died about two or three years ago. I reckon one reason that I liked him so well was because when I was about four or five years old, he'd let me drive the team when he was hauling different things on the farm. He'd let me go with him, and let me drive the team. I just thought the world of him. I went to see him in the hospital just before he died, and the last thing I said to him, I said, "Well, Doc, I guess you know that I love you." He said, "I've always known that you loved me." And the next day or two I heard that he was dead. Now, that was the kind of feeling that I had for black people.

M: I appreciate your telling me that. That man remained in this area, then, all of his life?

S: Yes, ma'am, he almost always lived here; he worked for my father for wages for two years. This is what I started to tell it for--I got off the subject--he worked for my father for two years. When I went up there that time to talk to him, he said, "Did you know that in those two years I only lost two days?" See, he was working from sun-up to sundown, six days a week. Well, back then Saturday was just another workday. Of course, he didn't work on Sunday. But he said, "In those two years I worked down there, I lost two days." Do you know what he was getting a month? He was getting ten dollars a month and feed. He ate three meals a day out in the kitchen of our home. He ate there in the kitchen; we ate in the dining room right there, and the door was open. All three of those Negro wage hands ate in the kitchen there right nextdoor to us. On that kitchen table they had gingerbread, baked potatoes, and peanuts in the oven. As I was telling you awhile ago, we grew all that produce and they could all get it. They could go to the crib and get corn anytime they wanted to, and they could go to the crib there where we put that wheat flour that I was telling you about awhile ago and get it.

But the funny part was, I had those people that I liked and those that I didn't like. You see, they kept me busy when I was a little boy. I wanted to follow my father and be about and around. The biggest thing that I had to do was run to the house for tobacco and snuff. They all used tobacco and snuff. (laughter) The plug of tobacco was a dime, but they wanted a nickle's worth of tobacco. They used it everyday and every night; it was another nickle's worth of tobacco. I'd have to run up there to that place and get a plug of tobacco and cut it half in two and give them the nickle's worth of tobacco. Sometimes I wouldn't want to go, and they'd say something that would kind of aggravate me. So I wouldn't like them. I'd go and cut that plug--cut them about a third of it off and give it to them. (laughter) They'd look at it, "That's not a nickle's worth of tobacco." I said, "Well, if you don't like it, get somebody else to go after it." (laughter) I'd put the rest of the plug back then, and the Negroes that I liked would get two-thirds of the plug for a nickle. (laughter)

M: Did you have to do some bookkeeping on all of this? You'd have to write it down each time, wouldn't you?

S: No, ma'am, I didn't keep it, because when Papa came in that night he'd remember the different ones that got a nickle's worth of tobacco. He'd put it all down. It would all be down there, what they got and everything. When you'd turn the snuff bottle over, it had from one to seven dots on the bottom. The seven dot was stronger snuff and the one dot was milder. They'd all want that seven dot. (laughter) When I turned one up and it had seven dots, I'd stick it back over there for my friends. The ones I didn't like, I'd give him the one with one dot. (laughter)

I got along with one of those black people alright. He was two years older than my father. But he saw how I'd do and everything. He worked with my grandfather on the gin, and they had to feed the gin with their hands. He caught his arm in there, and that arm was terrible. It was just cut all to pieces up through there. It healed terrible, but he was a working little nut, small and hard. He was one-eyed; he'd lost one of his eyes.

M: Was it has right arm that you were talking about?

S: Yes, ma'am, it was his right arm. It went in there, and they had to stop the gin and it just cut . . . you see, the gin saws, I don't know whether you know how a gin is made or not?

N: No.

S: A gin is made with a lot of gin saws in there, that sawed the lint from the seed. He caught it and it went into those gin saws. It just sawed it all up in there, but he saved it. He used to say when I was a little boy, "That's gonna be the meanest white man that ever lived. I wouldn't work with him for nothing when he gets grown." (laughter) I'd hear him say that, and I'd just laugh and go on. After I got grown, Papa quit farming much. He was an old man. He moved over here with me.

M: He did?

S: He died right over there. I had a house right over there in front of my daughter's house. He died right there in that house. But he lived with me. I loved him, and he loved me then.

M: Do you mean he lived right in the same household with you, or near you? When you say "lived with you," what do you mean?

S: I mean he lived here the farm. He came to live with me.

Back at that time you could get all the black people, tenants, you wanted to. One old man came down there one evening and told Papa, "I want to move back home." Papa said, "I just don't have any place for you." He said, "if you let me move back home, I'll go in that old house up there." Papa said, "Well, now let me tell you something, I'll let you come back and go in that house, but I can't furnish you the farm." Because he just knew that he couldn't manage, and he'd just rather not do it. And he said, "All right, if you just let me

move back here." That old Negro knew that if he got back there that he was safe. He hadn't much more than moved in until one evening he came down home and said, "Captain Charlie,"--my father's name was Charlie--"I'm hungry." Papa told him, "Well go to the crib and get you some corn." He went to the smokehouse and got him some meat, and that old Negro started dying. He ran up an account of three or four hundred dollars, which was a heap of money at that time, and he couldn't pay it.

One of his sons started to work there to work it out. So he was one of the wage hands, and he worked it out. That son married, and he took a notion that he wanted to leave to go to another place. His wife wanted to go to another place, but he didn't much want to leave. He begged Papa for two or three days to promise him that, if the going got bad, he'd let him come home. Papa said, "Now, Willie, I can't promise you that. If I can use you, I'll use you." So he went off and got in debt for three, four, five hundred dollars and came back to Papa. Papa said, "Well Willie, I can't pay your debt out; I just can't pay for you." So he went on and went on, and he finally let him come home. He reared a big family of children. I've known him to have cotton over there, and he had a family that could pick three bales of cotton a day, hand pick you know, and he made a big farmer.

M: You mentioned feeding the cotton gin by hand. Do you remember when they switched over from hand feeding to the blower feeding system?

S: No, ma'am, I don't, but it was somewhere in the teens.

M: Did your father operate a cotton gin, too?

S: Yes, ma'am, and I have seen a horse gin. There's an old building over there where my brother lives now at my old homeplace, that, when I was a little boy and first remember the old horse gin, was intact. The little gin stand was setting upstairs there, but Papa tore it out and made a big cattle barn out of it, a barn and feedbin all up above. But it was there when I first remember, and I wish to goodness I'd kept that. That would be an antique now, I don't mean maybe.

M: I guess so! We were talking about a gin and you mentioned it being a horse-drawn. Would that be the same as a mule-drawn gin?

S: Yes, ma'am.

M: Did you really mean mules, or was it sometimes horses?

S: Well, it worked with either one of them, either mules or horses to it. You see, down below it had two big cross beams, and you'd hitch one team to each one of them. That took four teams, and they went around and around under there, like the sorghum mill. That's the power that ginned the cotton--the horses and mules walking around pulling it. That was one of the first gins that they had--horse power. And that old building is over there. It's just about rotted down now, but that building was put up with pegs.

M: Could you show someone where that is if they wanted to know?

S: Well, I could show it to them, but it's just almost falling down now. It's all fallen in and everything, but it was made out of big hewn-out timbers. The rafters were skinned poles, and they were pegged together. Even the rafters, in the place of being nailed, were brought up this way and put this way and a hole was bored through them. A peg was put through them. They pegged them together.

M: So, they were crossed over?

S: Yes, crossed over and pegged together. You've heard of a building being put together with pegs?

M: Yes.

S: Well, this old horse gin was put together with pegs.

M: Where did you say that's located?

S: That's right across over here on my old homeplace, where the two-story house is.

M: Right on this property?

S: Yes, ma'am, right across here, where my brother lives.

M: Someone described one of those to me before, and I think they said three sets of mules. Do you think they might have been mistaken? Was it four sets of mules?

S: Yes, ma'am, it was four sets because of the crossbeams, you see. Of course, they could use three; they could have left one off a beam. They didn't have to use four sets, but they had the crossbeams to where four could walk around there.

M: Would there be eight mules altogether?

S: Yes, ma'am, they pulled it with eight. Of course, you could do it like sorghum mills. It was just owing to how you fed your "feed" to it. Some of the sorghum mills that they used here when I was a boy would use two mules or two horses pulling it, and some would just use one and not feed it as heavy. One horse to a lever could walk around better than two horses.

M: With the sorghum, would it be also four sets or would it just be one set?

S: Just one. It just had one big lever that came around. You hitched them to this, and they pulled it around and around. Just one team or one single horse.

M: When the cotton gins used four sets of mules, did they need a driver for each set?

- S: No, ma'am, they didn't have drivers. But sometimes the mules would lag on them and wouldn't work good, so they'd let a little boy tend the animal. I've heard my father say that he'd sit on that thing. The boys that were down there were good friends of his, and he'd go down there and ride that thing all day. There was a big old beam thing that they would hitch to him, and he'd go and sit down on the beam behind the animal. They would have little switches, he said, and if the mules wouldn't go on up and do their part, they'd switch them some to make them go. Papa said he'd ridden it a lot.
- M: That's something your dad told you about, but have you actually seen that sort of operation yourself?
- S: I never saw it in operation, but when I first remember, this old gin was setting up on top. This little gin stand was sitting there, and the gin stands in these gins that you see on the road now are about five times as large as that little gin stand. They have eight, ten, and twelve gin stands in place of that one little gin stand. That one little gin stand wasn't much larger than that television. Cotton went into it, and it took all day to gin a bale of cotton. The fellow just fed that cotton back and forth a few lots at a time, and it took all day to gin one bale of cotton with those horses pulling around.
- M: Well, was that faster than separating by hand?
- S: That was faster, yes ma'am. You couldn't pick the seed out that fast. I never saw it operate, but my father said he did because he rode the thing while they were pulling it. I saw the gin stand and the belts. The pulley on that gin stand was a little bitty pulley, just a six-inch pulley, about that large in circumference, and the big wheel that fed it was a big wooden wheel that was sixteen feet in diameter. So everytime that big wheel rolled about a foot it turned that. Whenever that thing went around it had that little wheel a flying!
(laughter)
- M: When your dad rode it, was it when his father operated it?
- S: No, it wasn't his father. As I said, these boys were friends of his. It was some of their people that were operating it. They were operating it before my father owned a farm. He lived up here above and then bought the farm that this gin was on, but he didn't operate it any. After he bought it he didn't operate it at all. It was too slow.
- M: Would you describe the house you lived in when you were a youngster?
- S: The house that I lived in when I was a youngster was one of three houses that one man had built in this section. He was a real good carpenter, and he dressed all the lumber by hand with a hand plane. The house that I later was born in and lived in took him two years to build. He built it by himself. Even the boards he put on the roof were hand-drawn boards, cypress shingles. It was a two-story house with a hall in between the two front rooms, two rooms overhead,

and then an ell back with two rooms back the other way. It was a six-room house.

M: So there was a middle hall through the house, but was it closed in?

S: Yes.

M: Had your folks lived in an earlier house on the same property before you were born?

S: The house was built when my father was real young. I've heard him say he didn't think he was but four or five years old when they built the house.

M: The one that you just described?

S: Yes, ma'am. He married when he was thirty-one years old. The second year after he married he bought the farm down there that this house was on. The farm that he was reared on was right about it, back in behind it. The land went to the river behind it. He moved into this house, on this particular farm, the second year after he married. That house had been used, I would say, for about twenty-five or thirty years before he got it. It was built for a fellow by the name of Reese.

M: Was that built within twenty years after the Civil War was over?

S: Yes, ma'am, it sure was.

M: Was it a good-sized place?

S: Yes, ma'am.

M: Was it built on pillars?

S: Yes, ma'am.

M: Is the house we're in today on pillars?

S: Yes, ma'am.

M: It is?

S: Yes, ma'am.

M: But there is no opening under the house that you can see, is there?

S: No, ma'am.

M: You don't have a basement though?

S: No, ma'am.

M: How have you closed it in around, I didn't notice that it was sitting on pillars?

S: This house, this particular house?

M: Yes.

S: You see, this is a brick house, and it is closed in all the way around, with ventilators. Brick houses are not built on pillars. All the way around the edge of this house is a solid foundation with ventilation, but there are pillars under the house.

M: Oh, I see what you mean. Is that the way the house was that you described to me?

S: The house over there, the two-story house, had pillars all the way around it and under it.

M: Oh, and under it as well.

S: It had pillars around it and had open spaces.

M: Now, did the rooms that you entered from the central hall have doors only to the central hall, or did they have doors from one to another as well?

S: The way the house was built, there were two rooms downstairs and the hall was between them. An ell ran back off one of them. This room on the ell side had a door through there to the ell, but the other one didn't have any. It just had the door that went in from the hall. Of course, that's all it was then. The stairs went to the second floor and into those two rooms up there. There were two rooms back in the ell. They were the kitchen and the dining room.

M: How did your folks heat the place?

S: Well, we had a fireplace to every room. We had a big stack chimney between the kitchen and the dining room. Every one of the rooms were sixteen feet by sixteen feet. At the end of the house there was a big brick chimney that had a fireplace in the bottom story and a fireplace on the upper story. Of course, in later years, they put in gas heat. But when I was a boy it was heated with wood, and we had a fireplace to every room.

M: Did you have a tendency to just heat one room most of the time?

S: No, we didn't use them. I laugh and tell my wife a lot of times about it. I slept upstairs; my brothers and I did. After my younger brother got older, all three of us brothers slept upstairs in the right-hand room. We wouldn't build no fire up there; we'd just go on up there undress and get into bed. If you had a glass of water in there, sometimes it would freeze solid and burst the glass. It would be cold up there with that wind coming all across in that building which was open up there. It was the coldest place in the winter and the hottest place in the summer. (laughter)

M: Then did the whole family have a tendency to gather downstairs in

the kitchen in the evening.

S: Well, we all gathered in my mother's and daddy's bedroom. You see, we didn't have living rooms like we have today. We had what we called the spare bedroom, Mama and Papa's room, a dining room, the kitchen, our room upstairs, and then the room over upstairs that my sister took later on. The spare room was used kinda like a living room. But when we were all together, we were in my mother's and father's room. Of course, it was a big sixteen by sixteen room. They had their double bed over against the wall, and we'd all sit around there. We'd sit in that room until we got ready to go to bed at night. We did all of our studying in that room.

M: Were your parents in there at the same time?

S: Yes, ma'am. The whole family would stay in there together in the wintertime. We'd sit there till bedtime.

M: And you'd have a fire in the fireplace, then?

S: Yes, we always kept a fire in there and in the dining room and the kitchen. In those three rooms was where we lived. All three of them were sixteen by sixteen. We always had a big Home Comfort range in the kitchen. It would burn the wood; I don't mean maybe! No, the first one we had was a Majestic range, and it had a copper reservoir. Of course you know, we didn't have any running water. It had a copper reservoir, and I don't care how cold it got, after Mama did all of her cooking at dinner and if she heated up anything for supper, we'd have all of the hot water we wanted for baths. We had all the hot bath water we wanted because there was a big, old copper reservoir.

M: Did you use a laundry tub for the bathtub?

S: Yes, ma'am. In the summertime, we'd put out those old big laundry tubs that we did our laundry with and let them get warm in the sunshine. We always had a lot of them. We had warm water that way, and most of the time we boys would take our bath in the kitchen. We'd just bring them in and take our bath. We'd have our clean clothes and everything there, and then we just rolled up our dirty clothes and carried them to the place back where we kept them. Monday morning was always washday on the farm. We had black women that always wanted to do it. They enjoyed doing it because there were things that they could get. They never paid them any money for it. They always did that for some of the extra things that they wanted.

M: Was that usually a once-a-month affair, or was it weekly?

S: Weekly. It was always on Monday if the weather was fit. If the weather wasn't fit, then it was Tuesday, then Wednesday, et cetera.

M: Where would the water come from?

S: We just had a well there, a deep well that we used two buckets on. We didn't use a pump; a pump was too slow. We had a big well with a big pulley up above it. As one bucket went down, the other bucket came up. It kind of rotated them. You'd go this way and pull that

bucket up and turn it over. Where you turned it over, we had a big place there where you watered the horses, and you poured that water. . . . In between the horse trough and the well, we had a milk trough. The water came up out of the well, you'd turn that bucket right over, and the water poured right down through the milk trough into the horse trough. Most of the time, we watered all of those horses that worked there in that horse trough because that water was so cold. The water going through the milk trough with the milk, butter and all in there was just cold. We carried water for everything around the house there.

You must remember, we didn't have much on the farm back then. We didn't have ice more than three or four times through the summer. We'd beg Papa when he went to town--and he hardly ever went more than once a month--to bring back a hundred pounds of ice. It would be hot. Of course, he'd take a sack and put the hundred pounds of ice in it, and then they'd put sawdust around it and pack it. One time he bought a hundred pounds of ice, and it was a hot, sultry day. Two or three showers came up on him coming home. When he got home, he didn't have a chunk of ice much larger than my head, just a little chunk of ice. He didn't like to fool with it because it melted so.

M: When you say milk trough, would they put ten-gallon or twenty-gallon cans right in the trough?

S: Yes, ma'am, put them in there and weight them down. The water came in at one end, and it had a place where it would come out the other so that it would never get high enough to go into anything. We had a lot of buckets that weren't any higher than that. You'd put your milk in there and put a big weight, like a big heavy brickbat, a big piece of solid iron or something, on top of it to hold it down, so it couldn't float out. That water just went around it like an overflowing well. You just kept pouring it in there. The buckets that we drew the water with--it wasn't hard. You could just draw the water there and pour it in the trough so much faster. A lot of people had pumps, but pumping those pumps, sucking that water out, was hard work. But with these buckets, you draw one bucket up and let the other bucket down; as one came up the other went down. You could draw the water in a hurry and pour it there.

M: Was it anybody's specific duty to take care of the water?

S: Well, all of our work on the farm was kinda like "family." We were all willing to work, even I as a little child. You never heard one of those black people say, "Well, now that's your job," or "I've worked harder than you." Whenever they had an opportunity, everybody just went ahead. After I got to be ten years old, I could draw water like everything with those two buckets. I didn't mind it one bit; there were just so many jobs that I liked to do.

There were some jobs on the farm that I didn't like, and one of those jobs was sheering sheep. See, we had sheep, and every time it rained in the summer and would get too wet to plow, Papa would come to those stairs earlier than ever, and I'd hear him say, "Drewcy, wake up. We've got to sheer those sheep today." I knew that I wasn't going to

eat any dinner because the smell of that grease in the wool would make me sick. I had to get those old sheep up and get them in there, and they'd run you all over the pasture before you'd ever get them in. When one sheep goes and jumps they all followed him, you know. We would have a time and run ourselves down getting those sheep up there. Sometimes it would take us two days, and we had to keep them over to the next day.

M: Wouldn't you have dogs to help you?

S: No, we didn't have any dogs to help us with the sheep. You'd have to have a regular sheep dog, because if you don't, the ordinary dogs that we had, just a cow dog, would just catch a sheep, and he'd just fall over and sull. You know how they sull, don't you?

M: No.

S: The last sheep that we had were attacked by one of our neighbor's dogs--one had a collie and one had a bulldog. We went out there that morning--that wasn't too long before I married--and there were sheep dead everywhere. That collie dog and that bulldog had just killed them. That bulldog just cut their throats. All that they hadn't killed were crippled, and we had to kill them. They had killed nearly every one of that bunch of sheep.

M: Is that what you mean when you say "sull"?

S: Sull, in other words, whenever a dog touches the sheep, he doesn't say a word; he just falls over and lets them attack. They can just eat him, practically, and he won't say a word, but a goat will bleat. We had goats, but every time the dogs would get into the goats, you'd hear them holler. They just go "Baa, baa, baa," holler and cry, but sheep won't. Don't you know in the Bible where it says a sheep can be led to slaughter and won't open his mouth?

M: Oh, yeah.

S: The sheep doesn't say a word. If anything gets ahold of a sheep he just doesn't say a word. I just didn't like sheep.

M: I suppose that when you were finished shearing, your hands were all greasy.

S: Yes, ma'am. They were just as greasy as they could be, and that smell of that grease! Your face was greasy and all of your clothes were just slick with grease.

M: That's what we call lanolin, I guess. (laughter)

S: I didn't like that, and the other thing that I didn't like was that we had lots of cattle, and Papa always wanted his corn shucked. I used to ask him about that. Most of the people just fed their hogs an ear of corn with the shuck on it, and he'd say the shucks was worth the time of shucking them to feed the cattle with.

Of course, we had a big corncrib, and we just grew acres and acres and thousand of bushels of corn, and they'd shuck it down there. When it would rain, Papa said, "Now, we are going to have to move the shucks out to the cowloft." He had a cowloft there, and he wanted all these shucks to go in it for his milk cows. I could walk under the roof of it, but later I'd grown tall so I couldn't. The roof was a little too low because the loft is up high over where the cattle stood. But it was high enough for me to walk under it pretty well, and we'd put the shucks in at the front and push it back. He'd give me the job of pushing it back because I could walk under it. The dust in those corn shucks was bad; it was rough. Of course, I couldn't say anything because Papa didn't allow you to say anything; you could think all you wanted to. (laughter) So I'd think, "Well, if I ever get grown, this is one thing I'm not gonna do. I'm not going to move shucks!" (laughter)

M: I don't blame you! (laughter)

S: I love to plow, and I worried my daddy nearly to death. I just couldn't get enough of plowing.

M: Was this mechanical plowing, or was it done with a horse-drawn plow?

S: Horse plowing. I didn't care about mechanical plowing. I'd just like to get me one of these big old busters and start down through the field, and it'd be throwing dirt. You'd have a good place to walk and a good stepping pair of horses or mules. I just loved to plow. I enjoyed plowing just as well as these fellows playing golf. It was just fun to me, plowing up one row and another row and another row. I just like to plow!

M: How young were you when you were allowed to plow?

S: Oh, I was plowing when I was six years old.

M: Really?

S: Yes, ma'am. I was plowing when I had to reach up this way (motions) to get the handles. Now you're not going to believe this: I started milking before I was four years old.

M: Wow! (laughter)

S: From the time that I first could remember, I just followed my daddy every step he made. I always drove the cows in for him, drove the calves around for him, and just did all the little old things. I remember it just as well. One evening he was milking, and it was just before I was four years old. Papa said, "Drewcy, get that other bucket there and go turn that cow into a calf and milk some of the milk from her." Well, I know now, it didn't make no difference about that; he was just giving me something to do. I got that bucket and I went in there. The old cow was just as jealous as she could be, but he was going to let the calf have all of the milk. He knew that I wasn't going to get many streams, but I went in there and milked

about two cupfuls from her. That was my milk; I was just as proud of it. So for a good while there, I would go and do it.

I have a daughter that wanted to learn to milk so bad that she didn't know what to do because her daddy milked. We milked the cow and saved the milk here at the house when she was little. But she could not learn to milk. I would take her hand in mine and put her hand over the cow's udder and squeeze down and get milk. She could not milk to save her life. She could play the piano, but she couldn't milk that cow. (laughter)

M: Earlier when we discussed your father's farming, I think you said he farmed wheat.

S: He had some wheat, yes ma'am.

M: And I forget what else, but you didn't mention cotton. And yet he had a cotton gin. I wonder if you'd explain what he really farmed and, also, what his connection was with cotton production?

S: He had a gin, but his brother-in-law took over the gin up there, and my father didn't do anything about any ginning or any gin connection, individual farming. He didn't care about cotton, and he didn't grow much cotton. He just grew enough cotton to take care of the wants of the tenant families that he had. But he went, altogether, for grain and livestock. Some of the tenants that were old black people, that had been with him all of their lives, when they wanted some cotton, he would let them have some.

M: Do you mean "grow" some?

S: He'd let them grow some cotton themselves. They grew it on the "halvers," on shares, just like the others. He'd let them have some cotton if they wanted some cotton. He didn't care for cotton, and he'd rather not have a stalk of cotton on his farm.

M: Do you know why?

S: Well, he just liked livestock and he just liked grain and they didn't go too well together with cotton. He had to be careful where they'd put the cotton because if they didn't get it picked and get it harvested early enough, he couldn't turn his stock in the field.

You see, all these grain fields, his hay fields and his wheat fields and all, he would pasture them after he got the crop off. And in the bottom, it would be interesting to you if you haven't heard of it, he grew all of his corn in six-foot rows. And all of the farm people, now, put it in three or three-and-a-half-foot rows. But he put his corn in six-foot rows and put a row of cowpeas in between the corn when the corn got up about knee-high. That row of cowpeas would get up this high and just be covered with peas. I've seen after Christmas where the cow would have been on there for over a month and there'd just be peas galore; they couldn't eat them all. He'd let them harvest those peas; that was grain for his livestock. Next year

he would rotate that; put the row of corn where the row of peas was the year before. He didn't use any fertilizer, and he made corn.

He used a variety of corn that had been in the family every since he could remember. He didn't even know the name of it, but eighty ears of that corn would make a bushel. They were big, long ears. He hand picked his seed corn and he'd had it to where, I would say, ninety-five percent of it would have two ears. He didn't want it with three. After I got big enough, I've helped him hand pick some corn. I'd say, "Papa, here's a stalk with three ears on it." "I don't want them; don't you touch them. Don't you get them." He wanted two good ears of corn. He could make anywhere from seventy-five to a hundred bushels of corn to the acre, in six-foot rows and not use any fertilizer. At that time that was good. Today they make two and three hundred bushels on some. They use a lot of fertilizer, and they use it in different ways. But he could make seventy-five to a hundred bushels of his corn to the acre. We had a corn sheller there, and we shelled a lot of corn. I don't know how many hundred bushels of corn he sold a fellow one year.

He had a bolting outfit to sell bolted meal; he had a patent on it--had whatever you call it. He had the right; he had a name on his corn. I forget what the name was that he sold it under. But Issac Henderson kept a Negro and a wagon busy hauling corn from Papa's to grind, bolt and sell. He sold it as bolted meal.

M: What does "bolted" mean? Is that a trade name?

S: It means that it is processed in a certain way. In other words, when I was young we had to sift our meal, and it had a certain amount of bran in it. Bolted meal had already been processed to where there was no bran at all in it. That was back after the First World War, between the First and Second World War. Papa kept this old corn sheller running all the time shelling corn. And he kept barrels, they hauled it in flour barrels. Flour used to come in barrels. I've seen those great, big old stores in Aberdeen, they'd start and put a barrel here and another one there and there and block it out yonder and put them plumb up to the ceiling of the store--hundreds and hundreds of flour barrels. I've seen Papa send a wagon to town and they'd just load it full of flour barrels, full of flour.

M: To market in Aberdeen?

S: Yes, ma'am. Of course, like I said, Papa could raise his wheat, have his own and save that. I've heard my father say lots of times, when I was a boy, that he never went to town and bought and brought home more produce than he had carried and sold.

M: He never brought home more than he took, in other words?

S: Yes, ma'am. In other words, to one extent, it was a barter system. He carried something over there of value that he could sell or trade

in, exchange for what they had, to where he never had to put out any money. That's what I was telling you awhile ago about what I liked in cotton. Even during the Depression--I guess that was before your day.

M: Oh, no! (laughter) I remember it well.

S: Even in the Depression, I could make a little money with cotton. I could raise my mules, and I could trade. I had a setup. I liked working with sharecroppers, black people, and mules, growing cotton because I could raise enough hay and corn on the wetter land. I could give them some work that I could pay them for, so they could have an income coming in.

I could get enough equipment from the big scrap dealer in Aberdeen to buy my secondhand tools. I was a pretty good mechanic. I enjoyed doing it then; I hate to do it now. In one particular instance, there was a fellow who had a cultivator, and he came to me one day. He said, "I want you to buy me another cultivator." I said, "What's the matter with the one you have?" "Oh, cap'n, it's worn out. It's just no good. I want you to buy me a new one." I said, "All right I'll buy you a new one, but I'm going to give you scrap iron prices, and you bring me your old one down here." "Yes, sir, all right." So he brought me his old cultivator down here, and I put about two and a half dollars worth of parts on it, and I let the tenant farmers use it. That's just one instance of a lot of them like that I did. This was a black man that I was talking about. One day he says, "Have you got a cultivator you can lend me?" I says, "Yeah, I've got one I can lend you." It happened to be this particular one. He took it and plowed with it for two or three days up there. He said, "That's the best running cultivator I've ever run. Would you consider trading it to me for mine?" I said, "No, I won't trade with you." He said, "Well, I'd love to trade you for it." I said, "Do you know what cultivator that is?" "No, sir." I said, "That's the cultivator you gave me." (laughter)

My neighbors and my friends used to laugh at me and said, "If you want to catch Drewcy in Aberdeen, go around to that scrap dealer." I could trade him enough scraps for cultivators that people brought in there that they had bought and just never used any grease on them and had worn the spindles out, boxing out the spindles. They never tightened them up, and let them get loose. All I had to do was just rework them and make a good one. So, you see, that way my equipment didn't cost me much.

Then for my mules, I never bought a matched pair of mules in my life. I've seen people that would buy them, and then when they got them out there, one would be fast and one would be slow, and one this way and one that way. I had some friends over there that sold mules, Jim Dalton, Dr. Brown at Pickle, out there in that prairie section on the other side of town.

M: When you say "town" are you still talking about Aberdeen?

S: Yes, Ma'am. They'd buy those mules for those black people out there, just what they wanted. They'd come in there and get those three- and four-year-old mules, take them out and work them one year; they wouldn't climb up the hill. They'd work them down, and they'd give out. They'd just completely go down. They'd bring them back in there in the fall and trade them for some more. The mule trader wouldn't allow much for them, and they'd let me have them as a bargain. I could bring them out here, and by spring in my sandy land I could use them. So that way my mules didn't cost me so much. I could use them three or four or five years. If I didn't happen to lose them, I used them that long and they were worth a heap more money. I'd sell them somewhere around here and then go and get some more.

M: This period you're talking about is mainly through the Depression era. That's the way you managed to keep things going?

S: Yes, that's the way I managed to keep things going. We didn't have much expense. When you came in here, I was going to tell you that I didn't know whether I could talk to you or not. I was so aggravated. The man brought gas out here awhile ago and filled up my tank, and I paid a little over a dollar and ten cents a gallon. He told my wife that the next time he brings gas, he knows the price will be ten cents higher because they had already talked to him today. They said it's already up ten more cents. That'll be a dollar and twenty cents.

M: How much do you get at a time?

S: Well, different amounts. We have two tanks out there and it didn't take as much today to fill them up. I wanted to take advantage of that price. But he said it's going to be two dollars a gallon.

M: Oh, I've heard that too. Before I go, I'd like to ask you some questions about holidays. Most city kids celebrate Halloween. When you were a little boy in the country, did you celebrate Halloween?

S: No, we didn't go out for celebrating Halloween very much. After I was grown, they celebrated it some, but when I was a child, we didn't celebrate it.

M: Do you remember if you knew there was a holiday called Halloween?

S: Oh, yes, we knew about the holiday, but we just didn't celebrate it. We grew pumpkins; sometimes we'd celebrate it a little, but we didn't go out much for celebrating on Halloween.

M: Did you ever make jack-o'-lanterns with your pumpkins?

S: No, I don't believe I remember us ever making any. My sister made a few of them and put candles in them. You see, we didn't have electricity to fix them up. Sometimes she'd make one, fix it up and make some little things out of paper. She'd go out a little for it, but as far as having parties and costumes and all, going out and fooling people, no we didn't go into that.

M: What happened at Christmastime?

S: Oh, at Christmastime, it was a big time. We didn't get anything, but it was a big time with the family getting together on Christmas. I remember one Christmas down there Mama had over fifty that she fed. She had all of her family and Papa's family. They were both large families and all came down there. I was talking to my wife the other night about it, I don't see how they all got into the house. (laughter) There was over fifty in those two families because they were both big families. One of his sisters had, I believe it was, eleven children. All of the children would come, even the boys after they got about grown. We little children would be out playing, and the large ones who were in what we called courting age, they'd all be in there. We had an old "graphophone" that played those cylinder records that looked like a drinking glass with the bottom cut out of it. And that old "graphophone" had a big old amplifying horn to it, and the young people around eighteen and twenty years old just stayed there and played that thing all day. I don't know how many tables they used. It took until after three o'clock, for all of them to get the meal.

M: Where did the kids eat?

S: The kids would eat in the kitchen, but back then the kids generally waited until last. I don't see how we did. The kids waiting until last, and they just kept on feeding them. Mama furnished it all. Of course, they had a plenty.

We raised turkeys, and we had a gobbler once that dressed over forty pounds. Sometimes you would have to put them up; they would go to fighting. Those old gobblers would go to fighting, and when they did you just had to put them up.

M: What do you mean by "put them up"?

S: You'd have to put them somewhere to confine them. See, they were allowed to run about. Our turkeys went three miles nearly everyday throught the summer. In the morning, they'd start up through our bottom, and ran nearly three miles up the Buttahatchie River, back on up through the big fields all along there on this side of it. The cattle pasture was back over here that went plumb on up through there. Those turkeys would get up in the morning and go all the way up through the pasture. You should have seen them running grasshoppers! They would just run those grasshoppers in that pasture and catch them. They'd go way on up throught the bottom. They would come back in the evening and roost there at the house.

M: Would they just be going just to find food along the way? There was nothing at the far end of the bottom that was attracting them?

S: Well, that was just their range. Everyday they'd make that range, just like the cattle in the pasture. The cattle went all that far. You could tell most anytime of the day where to go to catch those cattle; they'd start and go around, and go up through this way, and

graze on through, and they'd get way up at the end of the pasture, at the big pond. They'd lie down through the hour or two of hot weather, through the day. Then they'd get up; they'd come all the way around. All of the cattle came back to the lot at night and laid there in the lot. The hogs were the same way. Papa had a fence on the upper side and, as I said, he used that river for the back line. All of his hogs came home at night, and if one was missing, the next morning he'd have some of them go see about why his hog was missing, or why cows were missing or anything. Everything came home.

M: Would the hogs have a tendency to go quite a distance, too?

S: They'd go all over the whole bottom. They'd eat hickory nuts, and acorns and all of that. It didn't take much feed for them. Those turkeys just went up all through there, you see, and they just got food. Then, after the peas made, they'd go through the pea fields in the fall and eat all of the peas they wanted. We had all kinds of turkeys there; they just grew like everything. Then in the fall, Papa would start fattening that old turkey gobbler for Christmas. He'd always pick out one that he was going to have on Christmas day, and he'd feed him five or six ears of corn a day. I don't see how that thing could eat that much. (laughter) He'd just start to feeding. But we just had worlds of corn. That old big thing, his breast would be way out like that, you know. Of course, we had ducks, geese, guineas, chickens, and all kinds of pork meat.

M: I want to ask you some more about Christmas. When you say you didn't get anything, did you ever hang up your stocking?

S: Oh, yes, ma'am. I hung up my stocking a long time after I knew there wasn't any Santa Claus.

M: Oh, you had believed in Santa Claus?

S: No, ma'am. I didn't believe in it. But you see, all of the children in our section were taught that there was a Santa Claus, and you had to believe it. In other words, I began to see whether Santa Claus was going to bring me anything before Christmas, because Papa went to town in the wagon and got it. One night he got it, and he brought it in. Of course, he knew he had to watch because I was going to be right at the wagon when he got home. He slipped it in there; that night he took it in the kitchen and put it behind the safe cabinet and I saw it. Of course, I couldn't see what was in it. The next morning I was going to see what he had, but before I got there he had slipped it off. Of course, with the children at school and all, the ones that knew it told, so we knew there wasn't any Santa Claus. But we knew if we let Papa and Mama know it, we wouldn't get anything.

M: (laughter) You'd get a present, but you'd also have a stocking, I guess.

S: Well, you had to hang up your stocking, then you got the present.

If it was too big to go into the stocking, then they'd set it down somewhere.

M: Oh, but you didn't get oranges and things like that in your stocking?

S: Oh, yeah that's what we got in our stocking; we'd get an orange, and an apple, and a banana, and some nuts, and a little bit of candy--not much of any one thing.

M: Would you hang your stocking on a chair, or did you have a mantle to hang it on?

S: Well, we didn't have any particular place, maybe like this chair here. We'd just hang it there. They'd get it that night, and if it was too heavy, they'd stick it over somewhere else, and we'd find it. It was all make-believe. That's what it was. (laughter)

M: Was there a Christmas tree?

S: No, we never did have a Christmas tree. My mama didn't go for a Christmas tree at all, so we never did have a Christmas tree. At that one-teacher school that I was talking about, they took a notion to have a Christmas tree. They went down there in the pasture and cut the prettiest Christmas tree. Oh, they had to get up on step-ladders to trim it. In that big, old building that tree reached from the floor plumb up to the ceiling. We had popcorn by the bushels. That's another thing we grew, just lots of popcorn. With a popcorn popper, you could pop corn over the fire any night you wanted to. We carried those little popcorn poppers up there to school, and this old heater we had was the finest thing of all. We'd get it full of coals and just open the door, and it popped the biggest old white grains. Then we took a needle and a thread and strung those things, and we just had them all over that tree. Everybody in that Hamilton community came down to see our school Christmas tree. Even the students from the school in Hamilton marched down there to see our Christmas tree.

M: The word got around, huh?

S: It really got around. It was just the talk of the community for a long time--what a beautiful tree that was and how pleasant everything was, and the friendship, and the fellowship and everything.

M: Someone in the area told me about Christmas Eve celebrating, and I just wondered if you had any experience like it. They talked about "serenading." Do you know what that means?

S: Yes, ma'am, I know.

M: Would you explain it to me?

S: There were two kinds, one was carol singing. You go around and sing, and I enjoy that. We went to different places where there would be

old people. They'd come out and it was very depressing to watch it, in a way. They were old and all, but you could tell that they enjoyed it. Another way was to serenade. That was to take pans and everything to beat on and make a lot of racket, and sometimes people didn't appreciate that. (laughter) They didn't like to be serenaded.

M: Would this sometimes be with this same group who would do one or the other, depending on what house they were at?

S: Not too much.

M: It would be two different groups doing one or the other?

S: Well, maybe some of the church groups would get together and go carol singing. Then this little group here would get together and go serenading. That generally happened in small groups. As I said, you had to be careful because a lot of people didn't like anything like that. Some appreciated it and some didn't.

I heard my father talking about it, though, that back in his time they carried those things too far. He said he knew one night that a group of the boys got together and took a man's wagon and carried it and put it up on top of his barn. He had a big barn, way up high, but he had cypress boards. They took the wheels off and axles off and everything and carried that up and put it right up over the top of the house. He said that man was so mad that he didn't know what do to. (laughter) Of course, he had to get help to get it down.

M: I heard that story from another person. Do you think your father actually knew of the happening?

S: He knew of one of those happenings. That might be told at different places, but my father said that it happened over there. There was kind of a little bit of feelings between this fellow and these others. It's just like joking anybody. If you joke anybody when they know there's no feelings it's all right, but if I should joke you about something that you know I'm trying to hint that you are wrong about it, you wouldn't like it.

M: So, apparently this story is true. The person who told me didn't have any connection with someone who had seen it. He just thought that he had heard about it. But your father told you as though he had personally known about the situation?

S: Yeah, my father called the names of the ones that did it, and he knew the fellows. They really did it; they just took his wagon down and carried it up piece by piece. I was little when he was talking about it, and I said, "Well, how did he get it up there?" He said, "They took it apart, and took it up there, and put it back together, way up on the top of that barn right across the roof." I asked him, "How would it stay up there?" He said, "Well, they got right at the very cove of the house, and put it right over it. There it was setting there." (laughter)

- M: One other fellow who talked about it said that when they'd come serenading, if the fellow in the house shot off his shotgun before they got there, he didn't have to go along. You don't know about this sort of practice in your lifetime, do you?
- S: No, I don't know about any of that, but I just know that people didn't appreciate those things. If you went around beating some pans all about them, they didn't like it.
- M: I'm trying to figure out whether some of this was done when you were a little boy. Do you remember some of the serenading?
- S: I remember some serenading when they would take some pans and different things like that and just go around making a little racket with people you knew wasn't going to harm you, was going to be satisfied and laugh about it or something like that. We didn't have many white people in this area. Back when I was a boy, the white people were very thinly settled through here, and we didn't go with the black people and the black children. We played with the black children some in the daytime around home, but we didn't go anywhere together or anything like that. Just before I was born and when I was young, most of this country was in plantations. All of this from right here where I am back down through here, between the Buttahatchie River and the Tombigbee River was one plantation which belonged to old Colonel Walter W. Troup. He had every bit of that land in the whole country through there. Then in my time, it was divided between his five children, and each one of those children got about three thousand acres apiece, and now I am seeing that divided up into still smaller places. So you see, those places were about seven to eight thousand acres belonging to one man and with all black tenants on it and an overseer over it. So, you see, there weren't many white children in here.
- M: What were you saying before about transportation?
- S: Well, you couldn't go very far with the transportation then. We didn't have automobiles to where you could just run from one place to another to gather up people and get together. It took quite awhile. In other words, Memphis is as close to me now as Aberdeen was then because I can get into the car and go to Memphis now quicker than I could go to Aberdeen then.
- M: Was it an all-day trip when you were little?
- S: Yes, Ma'am, it was literally an all-day trip to Aberdeen.
- M: Did the family celebrate Thanksgiving when you were little?
- S: They celebrated it sometimes. A few times they had a service at the church. They didn't celebrate it any other way, but sometimes they would have a service at the church on Thanksgiving.
- M: Did people celebrate birthdays much when you were little?

S: Not much, No, ma'am. If it was in busy time of the year, that was just another day.

M: Maybe sometimes they'd forget it, do you suppose?

S: Yes, ma'am. Well, they just didn't take time to celebrate it. I had a grandmother--as I told you, my other grandparents were all deceased before I was born--but this grandmother lived to be ninety-four years old, I believe. She had to break her housekeeping in 1925, and she passed away in nineteen fifty-something. After she was so old, the family gave her a birthday here. Then it got to where she didn't have anymore. It was kind of sad: she said that she outlived her birthdays. She sure enjoyed her birthdays. When we had her birthday here, all the family came, and we put a table up. This was a screened-in porch then, and we put a table up. I made a table that reached from here to yonder, and we all sat around that table.

M: Do you remember what birthday that was?

S: She was in her eighties.

M: Do you remember if your grandmother ever sang any old songs to you?

S: My grandmother didn't sing much. I can't remember hearing her sing. My mother did a lot of singing in my home: my mother sang about her work and she'd sing such songs as "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder," and "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," and what's that old song. We sang it the other day at church.

CS: "I Would be Like Jesus"?

S: I'm sorry, I'm old now and I can't think--the song that everybody sings.

CS: "Amazing Grace"?

S: "Amazing Grace"! Yes, She would sing "Amazing Grace." I knew one old Negro who came there one night to get some money or some clothing or something, and he was all down and out. He was sitting there at the back doorsteps while Papa was getting through, to come and talk to him and let him have it or something. I came by and this old Negro said to me, "Oh, how I wish I was happy as the mistress is." Mama was just singing away in that kitchen getting the supper ready.

M: Usually when she sang was it something she had heard at church?

S: Oh, she was singing church songs.

M: Did she ever sing any little children's songs?

S: Well, when we were children she'd sing to us. She'd sing us lullabys and all such things as that. And my father could sing pretty good.

He had a pretty good voice and knew quite a bit about music. He could play most any kind of little old instrument a little. I used to love to hear him blow a French harp. He could really blow a French harp, and he did a lot of that before he lost his teeth and had to get false teeth. That's what I'm going to have to do. After he got false teeth, he couldn't blow a French harp. (laughter)

M: Did he play any string instruments?

S: He could play a violin and a guitar. He could play an organ and a piano.

M: Oh, really? Did he do this at public functions?

S: Oh, no, he just did it at home.

M: Do you know how he learned it?

S: I don't know how he did; seems right funny to me. There was an old Negro here that was a great musician. He played for the dances.

M: Was this one of your tenants?

S: Well, he was on the place; he was one of Papa's tenants. He claimed that he was the son of Henry Clay. He was a light Negro and looked very much like Clay. Do you remember the picture of Henry Clay?

M: Yeah. He had a strong profile, didn't he?

S: Yes. This Negro man looked very much like Henry Clay, and he said that he was Henry Clay's son. I don't know. He was a great musician and, as I said, he played for dances. He told me one day, "You just look to me like you'd be a musician. I just know you are. Let me feel the back of your neck." He felt the back of my neck and said, "No, you don't have any music in you." (laughter)

M: Was that true?

S: Yeah, I think it was true because I asked my wife--she sings in the choir, so I asked my wife one day when I was singing a song, "I want you to tell me what note I missed." She said, "I can't tell you one you hit." (laughter) So, I don't guess that I have any music in me, but I do quite a bit of singing to myself when nobody can hear it. When I get off down in the bottom somewhere working, I sing some.

M: If you've got any old tunes that aren't well-known, I'd love to hear them sometime. I should have a hidden tape recorder down in the bottom. (laughter) Well, if you do think of any tunes or any sayings that you knew as a kid, the next time I come I'd like to tape record them, even if your voice isn't any good, (laughter) unless you can think of something right now.

S: No, I couldn't think of anything right now.

M: Well, I think we're probably coming to the end of today's interview. Is there anything right now, other than what we've discussed, that you would like to cover today?

S: No, ma'am. I don't believe that I know of anything, except that I could say this: you were talking about the Civil War awhile ago. I had quite a bit of association with some old slave Negroes. Some of the Negroes that I first remember were slave Negroes, and I enjoyed talking to them. They told me about how they used to have to carry water, how they had to do during slavery.

Quite a few of my old uncles were Confederate veterans. One of them, especially, he was shot through the hand in service. He loved to talk about the War and laugh about it. He told me that the best meals that he had all through the service was where one of the federal officers had fed his horse corn, and the horse had left grains of corn on the ground. He picked up all of those grains of corn, parched them, and ate them. He said that was the best meal that he had when he was in service in the Civil War.

And I've heard Papa say that my grandfather said that he went to sleep one night and he rolled up on his blanket. He was so cold for the first part of the night, and when he woke up in the morning, he was real warm. He didn't know what had happened until after he looked out, and saw that it had snowed about two feet of snow over him. He was covered under that snow and it kept the air out, so he was just warm.

This other old uncle said that they were all just lined up in a row, a row here and a row there, and a row there, sleeping on the ground in their blankets. He got up to go to my "path," as I was talking about before, and he said he was in a hurry. He was trying to step over them with these old boots on, and he said it was cold and he missed stepping. He just stepped on a fellow's head and he said he felt that boot when it went around that man's head. The next morning he saw them sewing that man's scalp back on. And he heard that fellow say that if he ever found the man that did it, he was going to kill him, if that was the last thing he did. (laughter)

M: Oh, wow! He really did some damage didn't he?

S: That's the kind of fellow he was. And he told of another incident. He said that whenever they went into camp they would dig a big trench. They'd put timbers across it and use that for the restroom. That was their restroom. They'd go out and squat on that timber. He said this old commanding officer was so bad on them that they just tried to figure out what to do. Of course, he had authority over them so they couldn't do anything. One of them came up with the idea that they'd take something and cut that piece of timber nearly in two from underneath. Then he'd break it and go in. (laughter)

M: Did it happen?

S: Yes, ma'am. He said it happened. (laughter)

M: That's some punishment! This meal that your relative ate, the droppings from the horse, it wasn't so much that it was such a good meal, it's just that by comparison with his regular meals that was a good meal. Is that what you are saying?

S: No, he said that he was so hungry because he hadn't had anything to eat for a long time. He just enjoyed it more; he was just so hungry that he was so proud of it. They didn't have good food, and lots of times they went so long without food. He said they came across there where the Union soldier had fed that horse, and the horse didn't clean up all the grains. He got the grains that the horse left there, and he just parched it.

M: Were some of the black people who you mentioned who had been slaves later under your father's jurisdiction?

S: Yes. Some of the ex-slaves go ahold of a little bit of land. Papa would sell land. He had quite a bit of land that he didn't care much about, and he sold quite a few black people land as low as a dollar and a half an acre. He'd sell them forty acres for sixty dollars and let them work it out, just give them credit for the work on it.

M: Talking about land, I've heard that some black people were to be given land after the war was over. Have you ever heard that they were actually given land?

S: Not any more than I've heard of some of plantation owners giving a few of them land. That's one reason that we had a few little white families in here later on. They gave Negroes land, and then they would sell it to the white people. Outside of that, there weren't many white people in here. They were little pieces of land that were taken off of these big plantations. Like the Willis' Plantation, I was telling about over there that they had over a hundred black families on it. Well, and another thing . . . if you don't mind me telling you?

M: Go ahead.

S: Lots of these people were children of those white people. I don't know whether you've heard that or not?

M: Yes, I have.

S: Quite a few of these people were children of these white people, and they'd make provision for them and give them a little bit of land.

M: I see, and then later on, most of them were eventually sold?

S: Yes, ma'am, most of them were sold.

M: So that accounts for small parcels that some white people have?

S: Yes, that's where they got a small parcel. Like down here that I was telling you about, all of this. But on the upper edge of it, there's

a few little farms on there with just a little bit of land. We didn't have too big a population of white people through this settlement.

M: By the time you came along, most of those small parcels had been re-sold, so there weren't many black people who actually owned the little parcels anymore?

S: No, ma'am, there's mighty few of them that own a little bit of land.

M: You don't remember anything specific that any old slave might have told you, do you?

S. No, I sure don't.

M: I don't expect you to remember everything.

S. We have a receipt somewhere, but I haven't seen it in a good while. We have a receipt where my great-grandfather bought a Negro slave for twelve hundred dollards. We have the receipt. I never could understand why a slave would have been worth that much, in that time because they had so many slave children, anyway.

M: Would the purchase have been when he resided in Mississippi?

S: Yes, that happened. I knew a daughter and a son of this slave man. This slave man that they bought was old Uncle Louis Stewart, and he had a daughter named Virginia. She was what they called my "black mammy." She was a Negro woman that helped Mama when her children were born. It was her daddy that was sold. He was just a boy, and he was latter freed. Well, he had a son that was a slave, so he was freed about, I would say, fifteen to eighteen years after he was sold.

M: Would he have had the name Stewart because he belonged to a man by the name of Stewart?

S: Because we bought him. I don't know what his name was before he was sold, but he was Louis Stewart. Stewarts bought him. He was old "Uncle" Louis Stewart. He had a son that was sold to a Kelly. His name was Jim, and he went by Jim Kelly. And then because he was owned by Stewart People--Kelly Stewart. He went by Kelly Stewart, Jim Kelly-Stewart.

M: That's interesting; I didn't know that. I think that you've really done very well to dredge up so much from your memory, and I do want to thank you on behalf of myself and the Project for spending so much time with me. It's been almost three hours, but it's been very good, and I appreciate it.

S: Well, I'm glad to help you in any way that I can. All of this oil doings in here we've been working up, one of the men that had to work it up. He almost lived here for awhile. He was by here nearly every-day getting information about what I knew about the bottom, what I knew about different acres of land, and what I knew about this fellow owning it and all. Of course, that's all I had to do. (facetiously)

Back when I was a child, you couldn't go anywhere much. As I say we were thinly settled here, and we didn't have transportation to go anywhere. Now, you see, I came to manhood along around the First World War. Now, the boys that were a little older than I was, before the First World War a few of them had horses and a buggy. They could go together, and they had quite a bit of parties, dances, "pound" suppers, and things like that. But after that generation went on and after I got larger, the World War was coming in, and that stopped everything. We didn't have transportation to get anywhere. I can tell you another thing that happened. In our Presbyterian church, we just had one service a month, on the fourth Sunday.

M: This was when you were little?

S: Yes, when I was little there weren't any other Presbyterian churches around in the community anywhere. The closest one was in Aberdeen. Well, at one time, they got the pastor from the Presbyterian church in West Point to come over here one Sunday out of the month to preach. He would have to catch the train in West Point and go up to Muldon on a Saturday, wait over there sometimes three or four hours, and catch the Doodlebug into Aberdeen. Then somebody out here would meet him at Aberdeen, bring him out here. He'd spend Saturday night, preached at the Presbyterian church in Hamilton on Sunday, and spend Sunday night here.

M: Where would he spend the night?

S: He'd spend the night with one of the elders of the church or one of the families of the church. They all wanted him. Nowadays he'd have a hard time finding a place to stay. But this fellow would say, "Well, I'll go get him." And he'd hitch his horse to the buggy. There have been times when the road was so bad that they'd meet him in a wagon. As I said, he would come out on a Saturday night and preach on Sunday, eat a meal with somebody Sunday, and then spend Sunday night. They'd take him to Aberdeen, he'd catch the Doodlebug, go to Muldon, change at Muldon and go down through Prairie. Wasn't that something? You see, they didn't think they could drive a horse to West Point. There wasn't any automobiles then, and there weren't any airplanes. So the only way he had to come was for someone to go over there to West Point in a buggy to get him and bring him all the way in a buggy. Well, that was too far to drive the horse, so he had to catch the train. Of course, the train went from West Point up to Memphis. You see, this Doodlebug Have you heard about the Doodlebug?

M: I don't even know what you're talking about.

S: (laughter) The Doodlebug was a small train, and they had no facilities to turn the train around in Aberdeen, no roundhouse. You see, the main line went right on northward through Muldon. This Doodlebug line was to connect that line with Aberdeen. So this branch line came from Muldon to Aberdeen, and the train couldn't be turned around. It was called a Doodlebug because it had to go there and then back. It had to run backwards all the way one trip because you couldn't get it turned around.

CS: It got its name from the doodlebug which goes backwards.

S: You know, a doodlebug backs. It's all been done away with: they don't have the Doodlebug train anymore. Have you gone from Aberdeen through Muldon and hit Highway 45, and gone south to West Point?

M: I've been from Aberdeen to West Point on Alternate 45, but I don't know if I went through Muldon.

S: Highway 25 from Aberdeen through Muldon is where the Doodlebug used to be. They took all the track down. We're losing nearly all of our trains now.

THTP - Oral History Interview OH 115
An interview with
Helen Crawford

conducted and edited by
Betty E. Mitson



Helen Crawford was born near Amory, Mississippi on August 5, 1926. She is a Monroe County historian whose home is on the site of old Hamilton. Her keen interest in the history of her home has lead her to spend a great deal of time researching its past. The interview opens with a genealogy of her family which gives the dates of their immigration to the area. This is followed by a discussion of Hamilton, the Willis plantation, and a short cultural history of the land near the Tombigbee and Buttahatchie rivers.

The interview was conducted with Mrs. Crawford in her home on January 22, 1980 by Betty E. Mitson.

M: This is an interview with Helen M. Crawford, Mrs. Sam W. Crawford, whose address is Route 2, Box 50, Hamilton, Mississippi 39746. Mrs. Crawford's telephone number is 343-8400. The interview is for the Tombigbee Historic Townsites Project, and the interviewer is Betty E. Mitson. The date is January 22, 1980.

Mrs. Crawford, I would like to ask you where and when you were born?

C: I was born August 5, 1926 at a place called Trace Road in Monroe County. It is north of Amory, between Amory and Smithville.

M: Had your parents been there a long time?

C: My mother was born in Monroe County; my daddy was born in Itawamba County at a place called New Salem. My grandparents had lived at Trace Road for a long time; so had my great-granddaddy. He was Isaac Franklin Smith, and his daughter, Roberta Clara, married Richard Goddard. They were my grandparents in whose home I was born on Trace Road.

M: Which side of your family was this?

C: That was my mother's side.

M: How many generations do each side of your family go back in Mississippi?

C: Well, I never have counted up just how many generations, but on my mother's side, the Bourlands and the Hudspeths came into the area near Cotton Gin Port in 1819, and Charles Hudspeth was the father of Mary who married James S. Bourland. James S. Bourland and his wife were the parents of Robert Hudspeth Bourland, whose daughter was Mary Elizabeth Bourland, who married Augustus Price Goddard. Their son was Richard, and his daughter was Ruth Goddard who married David Marshall Mattox who were my parents. How many generations is that? Did you count them? (laughter)

M: No. Do you know where the Hudspeths came from?

C: They were in Tennessee before they came to. . . . No, they were in Alabama, maybe. I'm not sure whether they started in Alabama or not. I know they had been in Tennessee, and before that they were. . . . I'm blank; I can't tell you.

M: Do you have any idea how far back your father's side of your family goes in Mississippi?

C: Well, the Fords came first in about 1840, from Lincoln County, Tennessee. George Ford's daughter, Sarah Ann Ford, had married David Mattox, and they didn't come to Mississippi until maybe in the 1850s; it was before the Civil War. I'm sure they came down here because

her daddy was already here. George Ford came first to Monroe County, and then he went up into Itawamba County. The Mattoxes settled in Itawamba County when they came down from Tennessee. David Mattox was born in 1815 in Chatham County, North Carolina. We haven't definitely gotten him any farther back, but we think he may be the grandson of "old David" who married Sarah Perkins, and goes on back into Virginia.

M: Do you know if they are descended from English immigrants?

C: The Mattoxes are supposed to be Welsh.

M: What about the Hudspeths?

C: I have some information on the Hudspeths, but I have forgotten. I think they're English, but I'm not positive about that. I just don't know.

M: In what way did you trace this?

C: I've been working on it forever.

M: Really?

C: Yes. (laughter)

M: What is your hobby?

C: Genealogy. I've been working on it since 1945.

M: In what kinds of records have you been searching to find this?

C: Anything I could get my hands on, from county records, on up and down. I've been to several courthouses in the different counties and the different states. I've been back to Lincoln County. I haven't gone back to Chatham County, but I have records from that place. You know, sometimes you can go back and find a lot, and sometimes you go back and not find anything. So a lot of looking is involved.

M: Did you have some training for this?

C: No, not any.

M: We are interviewing today in the general area of Hamilton community in Monroe County. How far are we from New Hamilton would you say?

C: It's about three miles.

M: How far was your birthplace from here?

C: We are something like thirty miles from Amory, and Trace Road would be something like five miles from there. So that's about thirty-five miles from here.

- M: Oh, I see. Has most of your life been spent within this general area?
- C: Within this general area, but I was raised in Aberdeen.
- M: What period were you actually in Aberdeen?
- C: From the time I was nine months old until I married in 1944.
- M: From the time that you were married until now, where have you been?
- C: We were at Camp LaJuene.
- M: Is it in Arkansas?
- C: No, we were first in North Carolina at a Marine base, and then we were in Virginia at Quantico. Then I was back in Aberdeen with my folks while my husband went overseas to Midway. He was over there on Midway Island twice, and he came back in 1946. By the time he got back in June, I think it was, May or June 1946, we had already moved to the country, to Hamilton. So you might say that from 1927 until 1946 Aberdeen was my home.
- M: Then in the post-Second World War period, have you remained at this home near Hamilton?
- C: Yes, right here.
- M: You have shown me quite a lot of clippings and material that you have collected. I wonder if you will tell me a little bit about what you are doing?
- C: (laughter) Well, I played around with it a little bit, and through genealogy I got off into history. We were just lucky in the fact that the place we bought for our home turned out to be an historical spot, here in Hamilton. It is the location of the first county seat, of the first county in Mississippi north of Vicksburg. It was formed in 1821, and Hamilton came into being shortly after the people in this area found out that they were in Mississippi rather than in Alabama. That's the reason Monroe County was formed. We had Indians on, you might say, three sides of us. One thing just led to another; the more you study and the more you find out, the more you want to know. Being full of curiosity anyway, I just eat it up. (laughter)
- M: So you have become a local historian.
- C: I guess I'd have to admit to that.
- M: You'd been involved in publication; will you tell me about that?
- C: Yes. I'm sure you're referring to Mother Monroe, the book that three ladies and I have just recently put out. It came out in August 1979. It's a republication of two series of articles that Dr. William Augustus Evans, Jr. published in the Aberdeen Examiner from 1936 through 1939.

He had collected as many as he could find of Mr. W. B. Wilkes's articles and had them printed. They are the earliest ones we have dealing with Monroe County, I guess. They had originally come out in the newspaper in 1877, 1878, and 1897, I think it was. Anyway, they never did find them all. The ones that they had at the courthouse in the chancery clerk's office in bound volumes of the newspapers are no longer in existence, they're gone. So if Dr. Evans had not had them reprinted, they would have been lost to us. Since he had them printed before his series of articles, we included them in our book. We indexed the book. Jo Miller, Patsy Pace, Brynda Wright, and I formed a publishing company for the specific purpose of publishing this book. It has been a lot of fun and a lot of hard work, too.

M: How long did it take you?

C: I guess we were involved in it for a couple of years in all, but we were delayed with our printing and had to change printers. But once we got going with Allmond, we just went right on with it. We've been real pleased with the reception that it's had and with the job that the printer did for us.

M: You might say you have a historian's relationship with Mr. John Rodabough I understand. Who is he?

C: John Ed is a very special person; he was born and raised in Aberdeen, and he has studied the area as much as anybody now living, I guess. He did a series of articles for the newspaper in the 1970s which are excellent.

M: What newspaper?

C: The Aberdeen Examiner. They dealt primarily with Aberdeen but also with the Tombigbee River. He has done a tremendous amount of research on Monroe County.

M: Aside from the newspaper office, where might copies of the articles be found?

C: Evans Memorial Library has a scrapbook of them, and of course, he had a scrapbook of them. I suppose there is a set at Mississippi State University, but I'm not sure.

M: I understand you have a collection. Do you have a complete set?

C: Oh, yes, I have all of them.

M: You mentioned that the property you live on now had been a county seat. Did you and your husband purchase this property?

C: Yes, in 1946.

M: Was there any trace of the county seat at that time?

C: No, there was nothing then, and there's nothing now. The only thing that we find is out there in the field; it's a cotton field now where Hamilton used to be. Right out here in front of the house there are pieces of bottles. There are areas where we find a whole lot of pieces of black glass bottles; we find tops and bottoms with the high kick-up bottoms. You're familiar with old bottles like that in the black glass? We have not found a whole bottle, but we have not done any digging. This is just what the discs and the plow bring up. We have found pieces of medicine bottles, and we have found gilt buttons. I have found one Spanish coin that has "Carollus the IIII," not the third, but the fourth with four IIIIs. It's not IV; it's four IIIIs on it. But I can't read the date; I would just love for somebody to tell me what the date should be on it. And we have found a presidential token for John Quincy Adams dated 1825; it's copper. I'll show those to you. We had a strap hinge about eighteen inches long? It just floated up out in the yard. You'd think, "Well, golly, how could an iron hinge float up?" Well, that's the only way I know how to say it because all of a sudden, one day after it rained, there it was.

M: Do you think the center part of town was actually on your property?

C: Yes. Dr. Evans did some research; so far as I know, he's the first one who did any research about that and did any writing about it. Others may have researched it, but if they wrote about it, I don't know it. He talked to Parker Alexander in the 1930s and to Fay Willis and I'm sure to others, but I don't know who else. They showed him where the town was and where the main street was out here in this cotton field of ours. We had one street that was mentioned in the deed records that was Washington Street, I believe. They showed him the road that was supposed to have gone down to Hamilton Landing. Now, we are still trying to find out where Hamilton Landing was. We don't know for sure. Some say one place, some say another.

M: That would have been on the Tombigbee River?

C: Yes.

M: How close is your house actually to the Tombigbee?

C: That's a good question. The Tombigbee comes up and makes a loop north of here. If they had gone to the side of that loop, they probably would have been closer than going straight back to the place we've been told might be down at Indian Ford. Anybody that's familiar with this area would know about that. But I don't really know how far it is.

M: Would you say maybe a mile?

C: Maybe a mile; maybe not that far. I don't know if it is a section wide or not. I'd just have to get a map and measure it, and I've never done that.

M: How close are you to the Buttahatchie River?

- C: We are three miles from the north gate of the Columbus Air Force Base, and the north gate of the base is just the other side of the Butta-hatchie. We must be something like two and a half miles. Maybe not; maybe a little further.
- M: Do you know anything about the people who might have owned this land before you, or anything about the history of this land other than the fact that it was the county seat?
- C: Yes. It was the only place that's shown on the map with an ownership before the government sold the land.
- M: The federal government, do you mean?
- C: Yes.
- M: Are you speaking of Indian ownership?
- C: No. There were several cleared fields that had been cleared by people squatting on them or maybe Indians living there. I don't know who they belonged to because they didn't have a name on them. But there was one piece of land that did have a name on it, and that was this location right here. The name is on the earliest map that we have, when the land was measured off by the government survey teams, I forget what they called them. But anyway, there's a particular map that was the first map after they surveyed it; it may have been Doxey.
- M: When you say "Doxey," what do you mean? The surveyer?
- C: Yes. I'll get it; I have a copy of it from the courthouse. It was the Henry Willis heirs'. For some reason, George Howell and the other writers had always thought that Henry Willis had squatted on this land, and that's how the heirs got it. But David Bowen's office did some research for me on this back during the Bicentennial in 1976. George had mentioned the fact that a lawsuit was involved, so I asked them to go back and find out what the lawsuit was about. What they found out was that Henry Willis had somehow claimed some land down in southern Alabama in one of the counties down there. It turned out that they were going to build a town on that location, so it couldn't be privately owned for some reason, some law. And so, they had him pick out some land in lieu of it. He got this land up here in lieu of that. I think it's really ironic that there turned out to be a town on it, too.
- M: But do you mean that the town existed at the time that he got it?
- C: No, it came later. I would say that's definitively so because they didn't begin to call it Hamilton in the records right away; they called it the Monroe Courthouse. And in our records it says that there is to be a county seat such and such a distance from John Smith's house, I believe, and he lived down where the. . . I want to say Willmore's, but it's Meeks's now--Aileen Willmore Meek's place. I think it later became the Alexander place, old Parker Alexander. not the one that Dr. Evans talked to, but two generations before that.

M: Do you know what the relationship was between the Henry Willis who had this land and the Willis plantation?

C: No, no. The Willises that I talked to didn't know. They didn't know if there was any connection, but I have a book¹ on the Willis family, and in it is mentioned a Henry Willis that they lost track of. I can't help but think, you know, that he could be the same one. We just don't know. I would love to find out more about the Henry Willis who owned this land here. He may not ever have come to Monroe County; we really don't know. Now there was a Henry Willis here in the census of 1820, but I'm not even sure that is the same Henry Willis. There's something peculiar about that whole situation because the people who later sold this land that had belonged to Henry Willis were the McCamases. They sold it to the people who cut it up and made a town out of it--Cox, Perrin, and Wright, I believe it was.

M: So they came after Henry?

C: Oh, yes. Henry was first.

M: Could you give me any idea as to where the Willis plantation was and how far it goes back?

C: All right. The Willis plantation came as far south as McKinley Creek. I don't really think they came past McKinley Creek, but I wouldn't say for positive about that. I have some information out of an abstract. You know, you can learn a whole lot by platting that out. I haven't platted it out, but that's the farthest south that I remember. Most of that land that they owned was north of McKinley Creek. Old Augustine Willis came in here. . . . I don't think he was in the 1820 census; I think he came in here a little bit after that. He bought land, but he never owned four thousand acres. It was in the time of Lafayette Willis, his son, when it got to be four thousand acres.

M: Would that have been in the antebellum period?

C: Lafayette spanned a long time. I don't remember his dates; I've got them, but I just don't remember offhand.

M: Was the Hutchinson plantation north of the Willises?

C: No, that's south.

M: I understand there was a Cox plantation, too. Do you know about that?

C: Around here?

M: I believe it was.

¹Maude Potter, The Willises of Virginia. Mars Hill, N.C. 1964, rev. 1968.

- C: Down around the air base?
- M: Probably. It was opposite Barton's Ferry.
- C: Yes, that's down around the air base.
- M: But you don't know anything about the Cox plantation?
- C: I don't know anything about that.
- M: If Hutchinson was south of the Willis plantation, do you suppose it would be pretty likely that it was between the Cox and the Willis plantations?
- C: Yes, but the Hutchinson place, I think is a little bit east of either one. I don't think it would have been necessarily in a direct line between the Willis place and the Cox place.
- M: Oh, you think the Hutchinson plantation might not have necessarily been on the Tombigbee River?
- C: I really don't know. I don't think it went all the way to the Tombigbee, but it could have. What I have seen in reference to the Hutchinson place, there was an upper plantation and a lower plantation; one was on one side of the Buttahatchie River and the other was on the other side. I really don't know how far east and west that plantation went.
- M: I was just wondering if you have ever come across any homesteading in connection with the acquisition of large plantation lands?
- C: I don't think so. The homestead law, when did it come into effect?
- M: I'm not even sure.
- C: I don't think there was such a thing at this time.
- M: So, what you see in the way of purchases, in the case of the first purchases, would have been purchases from the federal government?
- C: Yes, that's right. The federal government got the land from the Indians. All three tribes, that is the Choctaws, the Chickasaws, and the Creeks gave what amounted to quitclaim deeds to this land right here in the section that was Monroe County in 1821. There was some dispute as to who actually. . . . Well, they all claimed it, I guess, is what it amounted to; they had overlapping claims on it.
- M: When you say "all" are you speaking of the three tribes?
- C: The three tribes.
- M: I suppose this information is in books, but presumably when the deeds were given, the Indians were paid something for it at that time.

- C: Yes, I would think so. I don't know about the Creeks. I just never have read up on them, but I think in every instance the Chickasaws were paid something.
- M: I'm going to ask you some questions that I don't expect you will be able to answer because they are much before your time, but let's get it on the record anyway. Our primary research has to do with three extinct towns along the Tombigbee River. Do you have any knowledge at all about the town of Colbert?
- C: No.
- M: The same question about Vinton?
- C: No.
- M: And Barton's Ferry?
- C: I have heard of Barton's Ferry for a long, long time, but the other two I had not heard of until the last few years.
- M: A ferry was at Barton in the early years, and then for awhile it was discontinued. Then, I understand, it ran in the 1950s and the 1960s. Did you have any contact with the ferry in those years?
- C: I've been across on the ferry going to Waverly. Is that the Waverly Ferry?
- M: No, this would be a separate one.
- C: I've been across one but I thought it was the Waverly Ferry, and I think it must have been. Well, how close together are they?
- M: My guess would maybe be ten miles; I have no idea for sure.
- C: I've always been confused about that. All I know about is the one that I went across on as a child, and then it was in operation after the air base was reactivated. That was in the 1950s, I guess. But I believe that is Waverly Ferry because we used to go that way to go to Waverly.
- M: In your research, have you had any indication that there was ever commerce on the Buttahatchie River?
- C: No. I have never heard anybody say, and I've tape recorded interviews of several people. Mrs. Stewart talked about going across the Buttahatchie River to the other side of Lowndes County to have wheat ground into flour, I believe. There was a flour mill over there. And I've read about Gallagher's Ferry. I think there was a ferry down here from Hamilton. I think Hezekiah Farris owned it in the 1820s.
- M: This is the ferry going across the Buttahatchie?
- C: Yes. I think I'm right about that. F-A-R-R-I-S. But so far as com-

merce up and down the Buttahatchie--that's what you're talking about--coming from north of Bartahatchie all the way down to the Tombigbee River, I just don't know.

M: Mr. Andrew Stewart who I spoke to yesterday is the son of the woman you just referred to, I believe.

C: That's right.

M: He also mentioned a wheat mill to me.

C: Did he?

M: When you spoke to his mother do you know whether or not she pinpointed the site of that mill?

C: I don't remember.

M: He could not do so. He just knows there was one.

C: We'll just have to go back and listen to her tape.

M: That is something that I would be interested in finding out, and perhaps we can find it on records. He also mentioned an old ferry that's probably at the bottom of the Buttahatchie, and I mentioned that to you earlier today. Is that the first you've ever heard of it?

C: At Neal's ferry?

M: At Neal's Ford.

C: I never had heard of that before.

M: There are some other things that people have mentioned to me, so I'm just going to ask if you have ever heard of these things or if in talking to other people they have told you. Two or three people told me about their Christmas celebration in this area, and they described what they called "serenading." Does that terminology ring a bell with you?

C: No.

M: I just wonder in your work if you ever came across any discussion of holiday celebrations that might be kind of unusual?

C: If I'm not mistaken, on the Fay Willis tape recording that he made shortly before he died, he described a celebration of some kind, but I'm not certain which one it is. It may have been the Eighth of May,² and it may have been Christmas. If I'm not mistaken, it had to do with the colored people on the plantation, but I wouldn't say posi-

²Eighth of May was the day the Emancipation Proclamation news reached this area.

tively about that. I have a copy of his tape, and there is a transcript of it at the Hamilton Public Library.

M: Were those interviews of him?

C: No, they were not interviews. He would just stop in whenever he felt like it and do a few minutes on the tape, and each time he would just pick up and do a little bit more whenever he felt like it. Tombigbee Regional Library out of West Point furnishes this library at Hamilton, and they furnished a tape recorder for him to use when he felt like it. So that's how we have it.

M: That makes me think about a question in respect to black people. There used to be a saying that after the Civil War black people were promised forty acres and a mule. Have you ever heard that before?

C: I've heard that; I don't know of any instances in which it actually happened, but that doesn't mean anything. I haven't looked into it, so I really don't know if that came about in this area or not.

M: You don't know, then, in what ways black people might have acquired or lost property?

C: I have wondered about that. I do know that "Drewsy" Leonard Andrew Stewart's daddy bought and sold land, and some of the land that he had he sold to blacks over in that area. You've been over there to interview Drewsy, so you know the general area that I'm talking about. But so far as knowing past that. . . . There is one instance up here on the road, we call it Delks Road now, some coloreds have some property up there still. It's in an estate, and it was passed down to them from the Gay--that's the surname. Mr. Gay owned it at one time, and he left some to one of his. . . I guess she was a slave. I guess that was back in slavery times or shortly thereafter. Anyway, that's how they got that land.

M: And it remains in the family?

C: I think a small portion of it is still owned by some black heirs. There is a whole section they call "the Quarters," and I have tried to find out. I haven't been as diligent about it as I should have been, but I intend someday to find out whose plantation it was that the Quarters was on. You know, it could have been Hutchinson; it could have been Willis; it could have been any one of several. But I don't think it was either one of those, because of where it was. It's called Valley Chapel now.

M: The Quarters, then, was a designation for an area?

C: Yes, back in slavery times the quarters were where the black people lived, where slaves lived. If you went down into the quarters, that was where the slaves lived.

M: Does that persist as a title of an area?

- C: I'm assuming that's how this area got its name. I don't know that it was actually the quarter for any particular plantation, but that's my guess.
- M: Is that area still primarily a black area?
- C: Yes. It called the Quarters.
- M: Can you describe in what section of Monroe County that would be?
- C: It's not too far from Old Hamilton. I think it's south and maybe to the east. But I'm not positive about that because I've never been there myself. But there are plenty of people who could tell you and could take you there, and there might be some people living there who could give you all kinds of information.
- M: That is something that we do want to do.
- C: I would like to know what you find out.
- M: I wonder if there is anything else that you think of at the moment that you'd like to say before we finish the tape?
- C: I've thoroughly enjoyed it, and I'm delighted that you people are over here doing some research on the Buttahatchie and on the people in this area, and the commerce. I think it is something that has not been done and needs doing. The people that I have talked to who have done research have not found that there has been any commerce, and yet there just almost had to be if nothing but just rafts coming down the river. I would say this, there were covered bridges across that river, and they would have had to be turnbridges for a boat to go up and down, you know, like a steamboat. I don't believe that there were any turnbridges on the river; I've never heard of one.
- M: The covered bridges were in the era of the nineteenth century?
- C: Yes, in the 1800s; they may have been in the late 1800s. I don't know exactly when the first ones were built, nor the last ones, but there was one across the Buttahatchie between here and the air base. I have a picture of that.
- M: This is one before your time?
- C: Before my time.
- M: Do you know of any others?
- C: Yes, there was another one. I believe that we have a picture of that one across. . . somewhere around Bartahatchie, somewhere up in that direction. I don't know if the Lawrence Bridge was ever a covered bridge or not, but I don't believe the one that fell in was a covered bridge.
- M: Which was the one that fell in?

C: That's the Lawrence Bridge.

M: When did that happen?

C: I don't know, but they have been talking about it ever since I can remember.

M: So, it was really before your time?

B: Before we came out here, definitely.

M: Oh, it was in your lifetime but before you came here?

C: Yes, I'm sure it was usable in my lifetime, but I don't believe they have used it since we came to Hamilton. I've been to it from both sides of the river, but I don't really know when it fell in. You'll just have to ask somebody that lived out here longer than I have.

M: Well, I certainly enjoyed our talk, too, and I really feel very grateful that you've shared with me the things that you know and your materials. I intend to come back, if possible, and go through your materials more thoroughly.

C: I hope you will.

M: It's wonderful that you've made such a collection. I do want to thank you on behalf of the Project and myself.

C: You're quite welcome; it's been my pleasure.

THTP - Oral History Interview OH 116
Interviews with
Ethel Smith Watson

conducted and edited by
Peggy Uland Anderson



Ethel Watson was born near Memphis, Alabama on July 1, 1890. She is the daughter and granddaughter of prosperous Mississippi planters. In the fall of 1907, she married Henry Watson II and moved to Strong Station where she resides today. Both her father-in-law and her husband owned the Vinton townsite and land adjoining Colbert. Mrs. Watson's recollections of structures and events that took place at Vinton, as well as her interest in her husband's family history, are invaluable for reconstructing life on the Vinton townsite.

Both interviews with Mrs. Watson were conducted in her home by Peggy U. Anderson. The first interview session was held on January 25, 1980, and Ethel Watson Wallace was also present. The second interview was recorded on March 13, 1980 and only Ms. Anderson and Mrs. Watson were present.

U: This is an interview with Mrs. Arachne Ethel Smith Watson for the Tombigbee Historic Townsites Project by Peggy Uland at Mrs. Watson's home on January 25, 1980. Her address is Route 4, Box 293, Aberdeen, Mississippi 39730. Her telephone number is 369-2355.

Mrs. Watson, could you tell me where you were born and when you were born?

W: I was born near Memphis, Alabama. It's east of Macon, Mississippi. My father's place--he owned eight hundred acres of land--was on the line between Alabama and Mississippi. The house was on the line. We could sleep in Mississippi and eat in Alabama. They always thought that was so interesting.

I went to school in Memphis, Alabama. We had a private teacher, a very fine teacher. She taught in her own home. We didn't have any grades. She just had a one-room school and she prepared the pupils well. A good many of the children went on to college just from that school. Well, they did have a public school, too, but it was very small and it wasn't too good.

U: When were you born?

W: I was born July 1, 1890.

U: So you're ninety years old?

W: I'll be ninety this summer.

U: Congratulations.

W: I'm still here.

U: What were your father's and your mother's names?

W: My father's name was Kirby Conrad Smith and my mother's name was Safronia Alice Stuart. She was from Macon and he was from Prairie Point, Mississippi.

He farmed. We used to go to Columbus on the river in a boat. He used to take his cotton to Mobile, Alabama on the Tombigbee River. I think that was interesting.

U: Do you remember seeing him do that?

W: We went to Columbus one winter. It was the coldest spell of weather I believe I ever felt. We stayed a day or two up there and he transacted business. He did business with one of the banks in Columbus. When we got home, the blacks I believe they're called, met us with six mules hitched to a wagon. It was so cold. They

got out and walked and drove the mules. When we got home, my mother's fruit had all frozen. There was no heat in the house, and all the jars had broken.

U: So, you took a boat ride to Columbus?

W: We took a boat ride. It was a very pleasant ride, too. The boat's name was the Hardcash.

U: Hardcash?

W: The Hardcash. (laughter)

U: Could you tell me what it looked like?

W: Well, it was not a very up-to-date boat. It was one of those with a big old wheel in the back. What do you call it?

U: Paddlewheel?

W: Yes. They used to tell a joke on a man down there who was a coon hunter. They said he flagged this boat down. He didn't do this while we were on there, but they said he flagged the boat down. The boat had a time getting up to the bank because there was a lot of brush. When they got there and stopped, he said, "Do you want to buy a big fat coon?" They wanted to kill him. (laughter)

My father was full of fun and jokes and always could find some fun in life. That is a good way to be, isn't it?

U: Yes. How long would it take to go from Memphis, Alabama to Columbus, Mississippi?

W: We were on the boat all night. I remember that. They were dancing and having a good time.

U: How old were you?

W: I was a good big child. There were the three of us children-- my sister and brother and I. We were big enough to remember all of it. I must have been ten or twelve years old. I guess I was ten years old because I left home pretty soon. I went off to school early.

We rode horseback to school. We lived two miles from the schoolhouse and we rode horseback. My sister and brother rode one horse, and I rode behind my father until sister went off to school. Then we had a horse and my brother and I rode it. Finally, we ended up with a horse apiece. It was fun. I guess children would consider that fun now, too, wouldn't they?

U: What was your schoolteacher's name?

W: Mrs. E. J. White. She was a perfectly splendid teacher. She kept

order. We carried our lunches, sometimes in a tin bucket and sometimes in a paper sack. We didn't have many paper sacks then though like we do now. We got along all right.

U: Do you remember any of your grandparents?

W: Oh, yes.

U: What were their names?

W: I wouldn't take anything in the world for having had my father's father live with us for ten years. I think that that is a wonderful thing for children; I really do. I loved that old man. He's the one I said was buried down there on the Tombigbee River in Memphis, Alabama. I just loved him to death. He was the best thing to me, and I just think that children ought to have grandparents around. I think they mean a lot to them. It means more to the children than the children do to the grandparents, although the grandparents are crazy about the grandchildren.

U: What was his name?

W: His name was Littleberry Whitehead Smith. (laughter) That was really his name.

U: Do you remember what your grandmother's name was?

W: Well now, he was married three times. Of course, I didn't remember the first wife and I didn't remember the second one, but I did remember the third one. I didn't remember my father's mother, but I did remember the third wife. He lived to be ninety-one years old. He was the oldest member of the family. He used to laugh and say that he'd have married the fourth time, but my mother wouldn't let him after he lived with us. I just wouldn't take anything for having had him in the family.

U: Was he a farmer as well?

W: Well, he was retired. We had a store. He would sit around out there to pass away the time, but he didn't do any of the farming. My father farmed all this land and grew quite a bit of cotton. Then, that is mostly what people were growing. They would have cotton baled. Sometimes, they'd hold it like they do these beans. Sometimes they'd make money and sometimes they'd lose money. He'd keep this cotton out there baled up. You know how they baled it, and they'd put it on poles out in the yard. The kids would come home from school and have the best time out there playing. There'd be maybe two hundred bales of cotton out there in the yard. He was a big farmer. Another thing, I remember some of those old slaves.

U: From your father's place or your grandfather's place?

W: Just before the Civil War was over, they went up into North Carolina,

I think it was. They bought a bunch of slaves. They had them all freed.

U: Was this your grandfather?

W: My grandfather and his wife. Both of them had money or I'd say were rather well-to-do. It is a wonder that we don't dislike the northern people, but I don't have a bit of dislike in the world for them. But my grandfather used to call Abraham Lincoln "Old Abe Lincoln." (laughter) That's all he ever called him.

They had these slaves all freed. They'd payed the money for them, and they were all turned loose and freed. Of course, they lost not only that, but they came down and took everything they could get their hands on. That's when they hid the silver and stuff. He said they hid a lot of tableware in a hollow tree. Grandpa didn't go to war; he was older. My father was too young; he was about ten or twelve years old. He said the only thing he remembered about it was riding in the parade after the War with a red shirt on.

Grandpa had charge of helping to feed the Southern soldiers. They had a lot of steers. When the Yankees came along, they were going to take all these cows, but they got busy around there and drove all the cows up in the Tombigbee swamp and saved the cows to feed the Southern soldiers.

U: Did the soldiers come to your grandfather's home?

W: Oh, yes. They overran all the South.

I started telling you about those old slaves. They had these great long earrings.

U: The men?

W: No, the women. Then they were tough looking. My grandfather used to say if you let one of these old blue gums--I reckon that's what you'd call them now--bite you, it would be just like a mad dog biting you. He was a sight. (laughter)

They lived around the house. You see the house was in the center and the quarter was all around. You could just get out there and ring a bell and call them, and you could get them to wait on you.

Things have really changed, haven't they? I wish that I had kept some of those old beads. Some of them just had ropes of old glass beads.

U: Did they wear them around their necks?

W: Yes. Maybe they'd have two ropes of them in all colors.

U: Where was that house that your grandfather lived in? Was that the one that your father and you lived in?

- W: He lived with us ten years before he died. He left his place at Prairie Point and came and lived with us.
- U: Where was his place?
- W: It was five miles from our home. They owned a lot of land. He came down and lived with us. We loved to have him because he was such a fine old fellow and very highly educated.
- U: Do you know if he had ever shipped cotton down the river on boats?
- W: Well, my father did. I don't know that he ever did. But he said that when they did capture the South, they came in there and took every bit of that cotton that they had baled up. My father said he remembered seeing the cotton pass on the wagons and they had L.W.S. on them. They marked them with a pencil or some kind of tar or something. My grandmother had her name on hers. We tried to get paid for that cotton. The government just took that cotton. We never could get a thing out of it. Grandfather tried. Then after I married, Asa Watson tried. They wrote him and told him that money had been spent a long time ago. I guess it had been. There wasn't any chance of getting any of it back.
- U: Do you remember your mother's parents?
- W: I sure do. We used to visit them and have a good time. They had the best orchards.
- U: What were their names? And where did they live?
- W: Stuart. They were Stuarts. B. R. Stuart. They lived out near Macon. Mama went to school at Bucks Academy. It was kind of like a little boarding school there in Macon. She taught school, I think, the year before they married. Papa went to A and M College; that is Mississippi State University. It used to be called A and M.
- U: I didn't know that.
- W: Agricultural and Mechanical College. They changed it to Mississippi State. He went to school there.
- U: You said that you went to college. Where did you go?
- W: I went to school at S. F. C. in West Point. Then they moved the school to Nashville, Tennessee. I graduated in Nashville.
- U: What did the initials stand for?
- W: Southern Female College. S. F. C. I've got a good write up¹ of that in yonder. They put it in the paper here a year or two ago.

¹West Point Daily Times Leader, April 11, 1974.

U: What was that like? Did you live there? Did you board there?

W: It was right there where Henry Harris's daughter, the editor of the paper, lives. Her house is right there at the college--a nice brick building. The only thing that's left is a little house way back at the back. Somebody lives in it now. They used to use that when anybody had a contagious disease as a kind of infirmary when the college was there. That's the only thing that's left of it. Mr. Eshman was quite an educator, but he kept everybody in West Point kind of on the outs with him most of the time. He moved the college.

He was giving these trips. They were wonderful trips. I saw more than I've ever seen since. We had one, an eastern trip, where we stayed a month. We went across Lake Erie and down the Hudson River, and we had just a wonderful trip. We went on this boat down the Hudson and went across Lake Erie in a big boat. We went to all the important cities in New York and stayed in Washington three weeks. We saw every public building. It was really quite a trip. Then we went to Mammoth Cave. He was always taking us on trips. That is educational in itself, I think. I don't suppose I'd ever have gotten very many places. I got so busy with my family, after I got married I didn't have time to be going much.

U: When did you marry?

W: I married in 1908, I guess, because the house was built in 1908.

U: What was your husband's name?

W: One of those Henrys. (laughter)

U: Which Henry?

W: I guess he must have been the second one.

U: How did you meet him?

W: Well, we had quite a quick courtship. (laughter) We didn't know each other very long. Somebody asked me the other day about my wedding. "What did you do? Did you have a big wedding?" I said, "No, we didn't have a big wedding. We just went to the preacher's house and got married, and we stayed married, too. We were married just as well as the rest of them that had these big weddings."

U: How did you meet him?

W: Well, I had met him before. You see, we're connected two or three ways. Mrs. Asa Watson was a Smith, and we were cousins. My sister wanted to come to Strong. We were visiting West Point. She wanted to come up here and spend the night or a day or something. I didn't much want to come, but finally I came on with her. I met him then. I had known some other members of the family before that. We got along alright; we did as well as the rest of them, I guess.

- U: Was your husband related to Asa Watson?
- W: Oh, yes.
- U: How were they related?
- W: Well now, my husband and Asa Sr. were double first cousins. Their mothers were sisters and their fathers were brothers. My husband's father and Asa Sr.'s father were brothers. So they were closely related.
- U: You said you got married by a preacher. Where did you get married?
- W: I got married by a Baptist preacher in Macon and I'm a Methodist.
(laughter)
- U: Where did you live after you got married?
- W: We lived at Strong, Mississippi.
- U: In Strong?
- W: Yes. We boarded with his aunt. They had a big two-story house; that was Asa Watson's grandmother.
- U: What was her name?
- W: Her name was Alice Watson. It didn't take them long to get the house ready though because we married in October and then we moved in here in February. They really got in a hurry, didn't they? It was under contract; a regular contractor built it.
- U: It is a beautiful home. Your husband was Henry II. Was his father Henry as well?
- W: Yes, his father was Henry.
- U: Did his father Henry live in Strong?
- W: Henry I and his brother Wheeler lived over here between here and the highway on the old Watson home. He lived in Columbus and he lived at Strongs, and he lived in West Point. He was kind of a trader. He accumulated quite a bit of property. I don't know. He lived, I guess, wherever it suited him. He lived in Columbus awhile. I think Henry II was born in Columbus. Henry I and Julian both died in that Trotter house. They are both buried at Strong Cemetery.
- U: Your husband?
- W: No, Henry's father and brother. They are both buried over here in our cemetery.
- U: Your husband Henry and his father Henry and your husband's brother lived in the Trotter house?

W: Yes.

U: What was his brother's name?

W: Julian. Henry was off at school most of the time. I think he went to every college around here.

U: What was your mother-in-law's name?

W: Fannie Lou Clay. She and Asa's grandmother, Alice Clay, were sisters. They married Henry and Wheeler Watson. They married brothers. So, Henry II and Asa Sr. are double first cousins. The older ones Henry I and Wheeler were real close to each other, too.

U: Did she live there in the Trotter house as well?

W: I don't think she ever lived there.

U: After you and your husband moved here, did your father-in-law and Julian still live in the Trotter house?

W: Yes, they still lived there in the Trotter house.

U: How long did they live there?

W: Until they died. Let's see, Julian lived three years after his brother Henry died. Henry died in 1938. That would mean Julian died in 1941, wouldn't it? His father had been dead a good long while before that.

U: Do you know what year he died?

W: Yes, I do. He died in 1911.

U: Did your husband have any sisters?

W: No, just the two of them.

U: Could you describe the Trotter house that your father-in-law lived in?

W: I can describe what was left of it, but it was not all there. It had some mighty good timber in it. I remember Dr. Ivy was out there once to see Julian, and he said, "They don't make timber like this now, do they?" He knocked on the wall. Dr. Ivy was a doctor of West Point at that time. Everybody was crazy about Dr. Ivy. He said, "They don't make timber like this now." Well, they had cut off part of it, but the kitchen was there. Then they had a little passageway. You know how they used to fix the kitchen; they used to put them away from the house. You know why don't you?

U: No.

W: Everybody had cooks and servants. They were not thinking about the

convenience. Now, they are trying to make it as convenient as they can. Then they didn't want all that clutter in the house. The kitchen was out here and there was a little passageway that went from the kitchen to the dining room. The dining room was over here. Then, it had three rooms just straight along one right after the other that they lived in. They had plenty of room. Then, they had a big porch there on the front. I imagine that porch was a hallway at one time because they said that just half of the house was there. I imagine that that porch must have been a hallway of some kind.

U: Do you know who your father-in-law bought the house from?

W: From Miller.

U: From Miller?

W: That's what Ethel Wallace said. It's on that deed somewhere. I don't know. You'd have to take a Philadelphia lawyer to find it, wouldn't you? (laughter)

U: Do you remember any large shade trees or fruit trees or flowers around that house?

W: Well, they had an orchard there. My husband's father was crazy about fruit, and he had a beautiful orchard on the west side of that house going down that slope. I don't know why it was so pretty unless it got well drained. The only apricots I ever saw were there. He had two growing trees and they were good. We don't grow apricots much here, you know. Then he had an orchard and a garden back over on this other side.

U: On the east side?

W: On the east side--the side towards the river.

U: Which way did the house face?

W: Well, we went in on that porch. I don't know whether that porch was a hallway or whether it was an entrance.

U: But that was on the east side toward the river?

W: Yes.

U: It was just wood frame?

W: Yes.

U: Did the house stand on piers?

W: It was on a brick foundation. I remember that.

U: Was it very high off the ground?

- W: Pretty high. Yes. Most of the houses then were. I don't know why they built them up high, but they did.
- U: Do you know if anybody ever replaced the brick that was under the house?
- W: No, I don't think anybody ever did anything about the brick. No.
- U: Could you see the brick?
- W: Oh, you could see the brick.
- U: Did it have lattice work around the bottom?
- W: Oh, it might have had a little between the brick, but they had brick columns under there--no doubt about that. It did have a little lattice work or something there. You know how they fix them between columns.
- U: Were there any big shade trees right there by the house?
- W: Yes. There was one big tree there right in front. I don't know whether it is still there or not. It may still be there. It would be pretty old and ragged looking right now if it is still there. It was a great big oak. They used to stop under that shade tree.
- U: Were there flowers around the house?
- W: Oh, yes. They had lots of flowers.
- U: Do you remember what kind?
- W: Just a variety. (laughter) The ones that are easy to grow I imagine.
- U: Was there a yard that was fenced in?
- W: Yes, they had a fenced in yard, and I imagine they always did long years ago, don't you? Most of the yards were fenced in with a picket fence, I imagine. You know they just go in the woods and hew out these pickets and put them up there.
- U: Were there any other buildings on the property besides the house itself? Were there any outbuildings?
- W: They had some stables out there. They usually had a horse or two around. They usually had cows and things. The whole thing was fenced, and they ran milk cows. I don't imagine they ever did any big dairying or anything like that because too much was woods.
- U: Was there ever a road on the east side of the house?
- W: On the east side?

- U: On the side that the porch was on. Otherwise, the house faces the wrong direction for the road.
- W: The only thing would be where we go down to the river.
- U: Was that road there?
- W: That road has been there ever since I can remember. But of course, I don't know. We've had a camphouse down there all this time, you see. Even before we started using it as a camphouse, other people used it as a camphouse. They rented it.
- U: You said that your father-in-law died in 1911. Did Julian live there after he died?
- W: Yes. He was an invalid. He had a nurse that stayed with him.
- U: Who was that?
- W: Miss Lucy Natcher. She's buried over there in the cemetery. She used to say that she wanted to be buried with Julian. She died first. Before she died, she said that she wanted to be buried over there with her brother.
- U: Oh, her brother is buried in the Vinton Cemetery?
- W: Yes. So, that's where she is buried.
- U: Was she from Vinton?
- W: She nursed Julian thirty years. Now they always say he had infantile paralysis; they didn't know what he had then. He was afflicted.
- U: You said Lucy's brother is buried in the cemetery. Did she grow up there then?
- W: I don't know just what her history is, but I know she had a brother buried over there. Before she died, she finally said she wanted to be buried over there next to sister Annie and her brother, Joe. So, that's where she was buried. Julian is buried out here where his father and brother are buried. We have a cemetery right out here at Strongs.
- U: With a church?
- W: No, it's just deeded as a cemetery. I deeded it as a cemetery. It is behind the church. You go straight out behind the church.
- U: Do you remember a store at Vinton?
- W: Oh, yes. I sure do remember it. It was there until not too many years ago. I imagine my son Henry must have torn it down when he went down there. He built his house across the road.

U: Your son Henry?

W: Yes. He must have torn it down because it isn't there. It was a big old building--great big building. They used it as a post office and general merchandise store, I imagine. I imagine the stage-coaches stopped there making the trip from Aberdeen to Columbus this way. They had to ford the river. They forded the river, I guess, or went over on the ferry.

U: Where was the ferry?

W: They had two ferries. The ferries were at Barton and down at Waverly. I remember those two ferries. We used to go to Columbus that way. I scared the children one time. We started up the hill, and the brakes in this old Ford didn't do right and we went leaping back down, but we hit the ferry. Scared them to death though. (laughter) They thought they were gone.

U: Was that the Bartons Ferry?

W: Yes. You have to drive up to get out. It scared them so bad, but it didn't scare me so much because I knew the ferry was going to catch us. They thought they were going in the river. We used to go to Columbus on the ferry. It cut the distance a whole lot.

U: Was the general store one-story?

W: Ethel said it was two-story. I don't remember it being two-story, but it may have been.

U: Which way did that face?

W: It faced the road.

U: It faced the west then to the road?

W: Yes.

U: Did it just have one front door?

W: I think you could go in the side some way, too. They rented it to some white families and then they rented it to some colored families late.

I'll tell you where the cabins were on the place. One was up above the big pool and if you'll go there now you'll find some fig bushes. You know you can't kill fig bushes in the South. There was a cabin there, and I remember the Negro that lived in it.

U: Do you remember his name?

W: They called him Pougar. I don't know what his name was. You know, they all had nicknames. Down on Henry's place, down on this side of

the Dry creek, there were two cabins there when they were doing all that farming.

U: Which Henry do you mean?

W: Well, you know where James Watson's house is? Well, down below his house there were two cabins. He has used some of that old timber out of Mattie Mitchell's house and made some frames of it. He's been making some of those old frames if you want any of them. He's got a wood shop in that old Davis building. He's been making some of those old frames if you want to get one and send it back home.

U: On the front of the general store, was there a sign that said "general store?"

W: Well, there wasn't when I knew it, but I guess they did have some kind of sign up a long time ago. Most of them did, you know.

U: Was it being used as a general store when you remember it?

W: No, it wasn't used as a store. It was just used as a house. They rented it when I knew it.

U: Do you remember who was living in it?

W: I should remember, but I don't. I heard Miss Lucy talk about them enough. Miss Lucy nursed Julian for thirty years.

U: Do the names Mr. and Mrs. Poss sound familiar?

W: Oh, yes. They did live in that store. They sure did. Have you run up on them?

U: No, but we've heard their name before. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Brooks? Do they sound familiar?

W: Yes.

U: Do you think they lived there, too?

W: I don't remember, but I remember Mr. and Mrs. Brooks.

U: Mr. and Mrs. Tom Brooks?

W: They lived right across over here. There was a cabin over there where that big tree is. Things sure do change, don't they? They lived over there for a year or two. I remember them.

U: Did your father-in-law run that general store?

W: No, I don't think so. No. He never did go into that kind of business. He was more into farming and trading. I think he traded a lot.

U: Do you know anyone who ever used to run that store?

W: No, I don't. You see, that was a long, long time ago. It wasn't running as a store when I came up here.

Then down on across Dry Creek, on Henry's place, there were two or three cabins. I know where those houses were if it would give you an idea of what it looked like. They said this building that they used as a Masonic Lodge was just north of the cemetery. I imagine it is right where that pool bank is, don't you?

U: Maybe. How long has that pool been there?

W: It's been there, I imagine, fifteen years. It had beautiful fish in there at one time. I don't know whether it is stocked now or not. I used to have the best time fishing. I like to fish.

U: You said there was a post office in the general store. There wasn't one there though when you moved here?

W: No.

U: But it was inside the store?

W: No, they didn't have a post office there then. All the post offices had been consolidated. They got our post office here, too. We have our own route.

U: Do you know if there were any trees or anything around that general store?

W: Very little. Ethel Wallace says she remembers a lot of plum bushes around it, but I don't even remember them. It was kind of barren; there wasn't too much around there.

U: Do you know if your father-in-law Henry shipped cotton or crops down the river?

W: Well, I imagine if there was any shipping done, he did. I don't know whether they shipped them from this far up or not. You see, we were a good deal farther south down at Memphis. The river is bigger down there than it is up here.

U: Did you ever here of a landing or a way to get cotton down to the river at Vinton?

W: They sent it down that ditch some way. I imagine they put poles down and slipped it down there some way and maybe hitched a mule to it and pulled it.

U: Which ditch do you mean?

W: Behind the little camphouse. Henry's place, on Henry's land.

U: Could you tell me where that is?

W: Well, the road goes right on down to it.

U: Right down to the river?

W: Yes.

U: There are two houses right down there. One has sort of a porch on the front and one looks more like a barn. They sit a little up on a bluff, and the road goes right down to the water.

W: Yes. That's where they used to send the cotton down to be loaded on barges or boats. I don't believe the boats could come up that river that far, do you?

U: They supposedly came all the way to Aberdeen.

W: Those bars have filled up so fast. They dug gravel out of that bar when we used to camp down there. They'd haul the gravel for all these roads up here. They got it across there, and they had some kind of thing hooked up where they'd load it and pull it across the river and load it in the dump trucks and sail out with it.

U: Do you remember who told you the stories about sliding cotton down there?

W: I don't know. I guess maybe Henry told it. I don't know who told it.

U: Were there any other houses around the general store or Henry's house?

W: There were bound to have been. They had a blacksmith shop there somewhere. I can't imagine where it was unless it was below there, can you?

U: No, I haven't seen one or heard of one. Do you know who the blacksmith was?

W: Yes, it tells you in that thing there who it was.

U: Oh, it does in your deed abstract?

W: Yes. It tells you who the blacksmith was. Do you want to look at it and see if I can find it?

U: We can look at that later.

W: Alright. I noticed in there this morning it told who the blacksmith was.

U: But it wasn't there when you were there?

- W: No.
- U: Have you heard the name Captain Henry?
- W: They called Henry, Captain Henry. Everybody called him Captain Henry.
- U: They called your husband Captain Henry?
- W: Yes, you see the hands all called him that, and so, everybody got to calling him that. They call me Granny Watson, too. The boys started that. My grandchildren started that when I stayed down there with them. They'd bring the young people out from town, and they'd say Granny--Granny Watson. The kids got to calling me that; now, everybody calls me that. I got letters addressed Granny Watson.
- U: I'd like to read you a couple of newspaper clippings from the West Point Leader.² This is from June 11, 1897. It says, "Next we see Captain H. C.² Watson and his watermelon patch (50 acres.) The vines shaking hands across the rows, full of young melons. Mr. Watson is still plowing and says he will continue to plant until July." Is that your husband?
- W: (laughter) It must have been Henry's father because he raised watermelons. They told a tale on him. He had a peculiar voice; his voice kind of rose and fell. Naturally, he had a little peculiarity about his voice. They said he went to Columbus and had a load of watermelons. They used to tell this tale on him. They said the wagon bed turned over on him. He said, "Somebody come here and help me out from under here." Some man said, "If two of you fools are under there you're just going to have to stay. We're not going to help you get out if two or three of you can't get out." (laughter) They used to tell that on him. Of course, it wasn't true. I don't reckon he ever hauled them in his life. He always called on Negroes to do the work. My husband wasn't much on that working part, but he always got it done. He was a good manager. They had so many around; they'd really suffer now.
- U: So, that was your father-in-law that raised watermelons?
- W: Yes.
- U: Did he raise them near the house?
- W: He must have raised a lot of them. He loved to fool with trucking--fruit and stuff like that. He moved around a good deal. He lived in that house that Mrs. Kyle Chandler lived in. Do you know Mrs. Chandler?
- U: In West Point?

²H. D.

- W: H. D. Watson I built that house and they lived there. In the spring when all those flowers come up, now Henry's mother put those flowers out. Part of that house is log. I don't think they've covered it up on the inside. I haven't been in there, but I think there's some of the logs still exposed. Mrs. Chandler built a smaller house for herself, and I think her daughter lives in the old house.
- U: There is another time where they mention him again in the West Point Leader. It says, "Captain Watson is fixing for a large crop of melons. He will plant forty acres this year."
- W: That's Henry's daddy; that's not Henry because Henry never fooled with watermelons. He had one rule that the children were not to be bothering Mr. Andy Ellis' watermelons; he raised some watermelons. So, one day the kids that were down at the camp went down to the river and got in his patch. It made Henry so mad he made those boys take what money they had and go down there and tell Mr. Andy they were sorry and give him all the money they had. He told them that that was one thing that he would not put up with because people had spent their whole year growing these melons, and he was not going to let those kids go down there and tear up the melons in one afternoon or one day. The boys did it; they didn't mind it.
- U: Have you ever heard of a Captain S. P. Shinn?
- W: Oh, yes.
- U: Do you know anything about him?
- W: His grandson or great-grandson lives here in Aberdeen. He's just come back here to Aberdeen--Jim Shinn. What was his initial?
- U: S. P.
- W: His family and Henry, my husband, were big friends. They lived down below there somewhere. I remember I went down there once to a picnic or something. Have you been about where they lived?
- U: It says they lived on the Mathews place.
- W: Well, they lived below us there somewhere.
- U: Someplace below Barton?
- W: Yes. They are not here now, but this man has just come back from California. He has been living out there. He and his wife have settled in Aberdeen.
- U: So you went down for a picnic. Did they have a big place?
- W: They did then. They were big farmers then. My husband thought so much of Mrs. Shinn and them. He thought the world of all of them. I expect I've heard of most of those people.

U: Have you ever heard of G. S. Neville?

W: Neville?

U: N-E-V-I-L-L-E.

W: No, not up here I don't believe.

U: He might own or run a general store around Vinton?

W: No, I don't think I've ever heard of him.

U: W. R. Richardson of Monroe County?

W: Now, I've heard of him, but I don't know anything much about him. What does he do?

U: He's taking care of a set of apple trees in Vinton. Have you ever heard of a Mrs. Lary of Monroe County. L-A-R-Y?

W: Lary. No.

U: E. F. Gibson?

W: Gibson. Yes, I've heard of the Gibsons.

U: It says, "E. F. Gibson and family have moved to Captain H. D. Watson's near this city."

W: I went to Florida and had a doctor for some reason. He was a young fellow by the name of Gibson. He said, "You know, my people used to live out east of West Point." Wasn't that odd? He's been in Florida practicing medicine all these years. He's an old man. He's retired. He's still in the hospital, but he's not doing any active practicing.

U: Did you know any of the Gibson family here?

W: No, but the name rang a bell because I'd heard of them.

U: But you never knew any of them?

W: No, I didn't know them, but I told him I knew it must be the same family.

U: Z. L. Thompson of Strongs Station?

W: Thompson? Oh, yes. What's his initial?

U: Z. L.

W: I know all those Thompsons. That's Guy Thompson I reckon.

U: Is their family still in Strongs?

W: Oh, there was a big bunch of them. Some of them are dead and gone off. This Mattie Lou Keller, that Ethel told you she expects could tell you all about the Uithovens, lives in Starkville. She was a Thompson. Her brother Norman was postmaster here. He's retired. But the older ones, most of them are gone.

U: Do you know a B. N. Edens?

W: Oh, yeah. They are all gone. There may be one of the boys still living, but the daughter died here last year. School down there, what was his name? Coltrane. Have you run up on that name?

U: William Coltrane?

W: Coltrane.

U: Did you know him?

W: I knew the family--part of the Coltranes. I knew his sister real well, but they are all gone.

U: Who was she?

W: Mrs. B. N. Edens.

U: Mrs. Edens? So, the Edens and the Coltranes are cousins?

W: Well now, Mrs. Edens and this one Coltrane were brother and sister. He taught school down in Vinton. Have you run up on him anywhere?

U: William Coltrane is his name. Do you know where he taught school?

W: He taught there in Vinton.

U: Have you ever been to their family house?

W: Oh, the Edens used to live right over here. I knew them like a country neighbor would know them--real well.

U: They used to live in Strongs?

W: They used to live right over here. They were members of our church, but they are all gone. You know it makes me feel bad sometimes when I think about how many have gone. Not only the older ones, but so many of these middle aged ones, my children's friends. I heard yesterday one of the girls had died. It makes you feel kind of bad.

U: Which church did you attend when you were first married and lived here?

W: The same church.

U: What's the name of the church?

W: It's the United Methodist Church.

U: Had you ever heard of a Methodist church in Vinton?

W: In Vinton? No, but they used to have a schoolhouse up there on the hill on the corner, and they used that for a church since I've been here.

EWV: But Mom, that wasn't the original schoolhouse.

W: I said that one must have been right up on the pool bank.

U: There was a school there as well?

W: That's where they had the Masonic Lodge. This other was on the corner up there above Mrs. Mary Booker's. There was a little school there when I came here. They used it for church. It wasn't a church, but they used it to preach in.

U: Have you ever been to Bethel Baptist Church?

W: Oh, yes. They keep that church going pretty active.

U: Did people from Vinton come up to Bethel Baptist when you first moved here?

W: From Vinton? The Breitkreutzs go up there to church, and Mrs. Olive Maude Bradley. If it wasn't for Mrs. Bradley, I don't think they'd keep it up like they do. Mr. Bradley helped her so much before he died. They keep that church real active and alive. We have a real nice church here. It's a Methodist church.

U: You were talking about the Trotter house.

W: You could tell that people who lived in it were people of means because the material was so good. It had wide planks. They had a man to come in here and want to buy those planks after they tore it down; he wanted to put them in a new house like they are building now with those wide planks. I'm sure it must have been a nice building to begin with.

U: You don't know who built the house though?

W: No, I don't. Two girls--I think they were Trotters--came out here from Texas when I was down there and wanted to go to the cemetery and see if they could find their grandfather's grave. So, I went over there with them, and he was one of those that are in an iron fence and they were perfectly satisfied. Although it had grown up in bushes and all, they said, "Well, he was just as well off there as he would be anywhere else." But they just wanted to come and find it.

U: You told me a story about an open casket, could you tell me that story again?

W: It was a brick vault built up above the ground, and a cyclone came along and blew that off. There was this casket lying there. You could look down and see it. It looked like an iron casket. It looked like it was in good condition. People came in there from miles around to look at that man.

U: Could you see him?

W: You could see the shape of him. He just looked like he had whiskers. I don't know whether he grew whiskers or whether they grew after he died. Anyway, it was a Masonic grave, and the Masons came in there and covered him up.

U: How could you see him? Was there glass in the casket?

W: There was glass in the casket. Evidently, the air hadn't gotten in to it. It must have been pretty old. It was right about the center of the graveyard. You'll have to go in there and see if you can find it.

(Interruption- she is talking now about a necklace buried with Lucy Natcher). . . . and made out of silver dollars.

EW: Gold dollars.

W: Gold dollars. I saw that she had it on. So, don't dig up to get that out.

U: Miss Lucy Natcher?

W: Yes. Gold has gotten so scarce.

U: When you lived here in Strongs, was Vinton really thought of as a town?

W: No. That was when they were talking so bad about Vinton. They said the rhyme that I told you, "Sift the meal and save the bran, couldn't make a living in the sandy land." (laughter) That's the way they felt about Vinton then. Now, it's come into its own again, hasn't it?

U: You call that the sandy land down there?

W: Yes, they call it the sandy land. People up here didn't think much of it.

U: What do you call this land up here?

W: Well, I guess you call it the prairie.

U: Prairie?

W: Yes.

- U: Is it better for farming?
- W: I don't know that it is. That land that is selling so high down there now--the house lots or the small acreage--they are getting a thousand dollars an acre or maybe more for it. I don't know. They all want to build out in the bushes.
- U: You told me that you had ridden on the Barton and Waverly ferries, could you tell me a little bit about each ferry?
- W: It was just a flat boat on the river. Tell you about the ferry, didn't you ever see one?
- U: No, I've never seen one.
- W: It's just a wooden outfit there. They have a rope that they pull across the river on. That was our only way to get to Columbus unless we went around way down by Mayhew.
- U: Who ran the ferries?
- W: They had a Negro there that ran it. They called him Bear. He'd been there for years. I don't know who ran the Waverly ferry. They had two. They had one at Waverly and one here.
- U: Did they look the same?
- W: No, they were entirely different. We always crossed at Vinton because it was closer. We didn't think anything of running to Columbus going across the river. I guess that every kid that we took on those camping trips learned to swim in the Tombigbee River. My children did. All of them learned to swim in the river, and some of them are good swimmers, too. Why we didn't drown some of them I don't know. (laughter)
- U: Did it cost money to ride on the ferry?
- W: Oh, yes. You'd have to pay about fifty cents or something like that. It didn't cost much like it would now. I imagine they'd charge you two or three dollars to go across now.
- U: Did you take horse and buggies across?
- W: Oh, yes.
- U: Was the ferry big enough to put two buggies on?
- W: I imagine you could, but I think that most of the time they didn't. I know I wouldn't want to go across with two. I'd rather have one. Yeah, I think it was big enough to accomodate two. Anyway it wasn't big enough for more than two. It was just a flat boat.
- U: Did it have rails on the side?

- W: Yes, it had rails on the side. You could get out if you didn't want to stay in there. If you didn't want to take a chance on getting in the river.
- U: Where did the man live who ran the ferry?
- W: He lived there close. He had a cabin up on the hill. He was a black.
- U: Could you ride the ferry all through the year?
- W: They had some kind of a bell or something that you'd go there and ring for him to come and let you across. You could cross most anytime you went down. I expect he was glad to make a little change.
- U: Can you cross the ferry at high water?
- W: I don't imagine they crossed too much when it was up. It can get pretty high. Have you been here when it was high?
- U: Yes. Have you ever been to the Waverly plantation house?
- W: Oh, yes. I've been there quite a few times.
- U: Did you ever go down there when someone lived there?
- W: We went down there before anybody ever went there. Honest to goodness, they just carried off everything they could carry off. It was a shame the way they did that house before Mrs. Snow and them took hold of it. They've done a wonderful job. Mrs. Snow is so nice.
- U: Did your husband's family ever go down there?
- W: Oh, yes. He used to know the older ones. He said he'd been to many a dance down there at that big old place when Captain Young stayed there.
- U: That's your husband or your father-in-law?
- W: My husband. He said he'd been down there many a time to entertainments when they were all in their prime when it was really a mansion. But vandals just wrecked it. They had a fine piano there with ivory on the keys, and they'd pull that ivory off and take it for souvenirs. They'd take parts of the curtains. They just nearly wrecked the place. I don't see how Mrs. Snow and them have gotten it back as much as they have.
- U: But you'd never been down there when the Youngs still lived there?
- W: Oh, no. That was before my time, but my husband said he'd been down there to parties and things they'd have.
- U: When was your husband born?

W: He was three years older than I was. That would make him in 1887, wouldn't it?

U: These are some of the names from the Paine's Chapel register here in Strongs. There is a Henry D. Watson, Jr. listed in the 1890's, would that be your husband?

W: Must be.

U: Alice Louise Watson?

W: Yeah, that's my oldest daughter. She's Mrs. Tucker.

U: Stella Smith Watson?

W: Yes. She's my one in Florida.

U: That's another daughter?

W: Yes.

U: Asa Watson, Jr.?

W: That's Asa up here--Asa's living up here a mile up the road.

U: So, Asa Watson, Jr. would be a cousin to your husband?

W: Yeah, that's right. Now his father and my husband were double first cousins.

U: Do you know a Lorraine Thompson?

W: Yes.

U: Are they related?

W: No. They are not related, but I know she owned some land over here between here and the river.

U: Mrs. Alice C. Watson?

W: That's Henry's aunt. They used to live just right up here. That's Asa, Jr.'s grandmother. That's Alice Clay Watson. She's a sister to my husband's mother. Yes, I know all those.

U: Thomas C. Watson?

W: Yes, I know him. He's dead, but I know who you're talking about. They used to live . . . his son lives right over here.

U: Are they related to your husband?

W: Yes, they're related.

U: Wheeler Watson?

W: Yes, Wheeler Watson lives over here. They go to church every Sunday with us, Wheeler and his wife.

U: Do you know how Wheeler Watson is related?

W: Wheeler's daddy and my husband were double first cousins.

U: Who is Wheeler's father?

W: Tom Watson.

U: Do you know T. D. Champion?

W: Yes, they used to live here long years ago, but I don't know where they are now. He was down here at the station. We used to have a little depot down here and a station house.

U: Do you know a Daniel Watson?

W: Daniel Watson? I never heard of a Daniel Watson. He is not a relative.

U: Gertrude Ann Watson?

W: Oh, yes. She's in Texas now with her son. She's a Mrs. Saunders. She is dead.

U: Do you know how Gertrude Ann is related?

W: Yes. She is Asa Jr.'s sister.

U: There is a list from a Sulphur Springs Baptist Church in the 1870s: Elizabeth, Emma, Mark, Mary, Sarah Watson.

W: That's a Baptist Church, isn't it? What Baptist church is that?

U: Sulphur Springs. You don't know any of them?

W: They are not in the family.

U: Do you know a J. O. Clay, Sr.?

W: Oh, I reckon I do. He was Fannie Lou Clay Watson's brother. His son was J. O. Clay, Jr. J. O. Clay, Jr. is dead, but I know him. He moved from here to Memphis; his wife still lives in Memphis. At one time, they lived up here where Asa, Jr. lives now.

U: Are they related?

W: Yes, they're kinfolks. (laughter) They're about the same kin as to these others. Their father and Henry's mother were brother and sister. They're not double though.

U: Have you ever heard of George Williams?

W: George Williams? There used to be some Williams here and they belonged to this church, but I didn't know any of them named George.

U: Did you ever meet a Doctor Moore?

W: No, that's before my time, but I've heard of him.

U: Do you know what his first name was?

W: No, I don't.

U: John or James?

W: I don't know, but I know the Williams were related to the Moores.

U: How did you hear of Dr. Moore, did he used to ride as a doctor around Darracott or Vinton?

W: No, we have had a doctor here at Strongs, but we haven't any longer. I don't guess these small towns can have them any longer, can they? We did really have a doctor here at one time.

U: Did you ever hear of a Whatley family from around Vinton?

W: Yes, I sure have.

U: Do you know any of their names?

W: I don't know them, but I've heard Miss Lucy talk about the Whatleys.

U: Have you ever heard of a Ratzlaff family, R-A-T-Z-L-A-F-F?

W: No. Where did you find all those names?

U: They are from the newspaper column. Do you know why they called your husband Captain?

W: The hands got to calling him that.

U: When you got married and moved to Strongs was there a railroad here?

W: We had a depot and a post office and we had four trains a day. Mrs. Pulliam and I, a neighbor down here, went to Aberdeen shopping. Both of us had babies at home. We'd go up on the eleven o'clock train and come home on the three. Well, just as we started down the hill to go to catch the train, the old thing says, "Choo-choo" and left us. So, we were stranded in Aberdeen with no way to get home. We called down here and told them and they acted like they were mad. They thought we intended to get left there. We rode on the old "Alex." It was a branch road that went from Aberdeen to Muldon. We caught that train and went over to Muldon. Then we caught the M & O

and went down to West Point. Then that night at eight o'clock, we caught the eight o'clock train, Illinois Central, and came up to Strong. (laughter)

U: You got a little tour that day.

W: They acted out here like they thought we meant to get left with the babies. Acted like they were mad with us. But we wouldn't have got left for anything.

U: Did people ride the train just to go shopping?

W: Oh, yes. We rode the train. We'd go into West Point early in the morning and we'd come back at eleven, or we could wait and come back at eight that night. Oh, yeah. We rode the train all the time to go shopping. It wasn't anything to go up to Aberdeen at eleven and come back at three.

U: Could you get anything to eat on the train?

W: No, we didn't get anything to eat. We didn't stay on there long enough. Jane Upton said that the best experience they had was when they took the children to Meridian and rode to Tuscaloosa so that the children would get to ride on the train. She said they had the diner open. She said they had the nicest little snack for them and flowers on the table. She said it was a most enjoyable trip. They had the schoolbus to meet them in Tuscaloosa and bring them home. She said they really enjoyed it. The kids were so good and enjoyed it so much. Some of them had never ridden on the train.

U: Were the cars open inside or compartments?

W: No, just seats.

U: You mentioned the Drago's house. Do you remember who used to live in that house?

W: That house used to belong to the Dukeminiers. I think they built that house, didn't they Ethel? Dr. Dukeminier?

EW: I think so.

W: Some of the Dukeminiers live here now. His great-great-grandson is here. A whole row of them are buried over there in that cemetery.

U: He's buried in that cemetery?

W: You'll notice the little graves in a long row of them. They look like mostly Dukeminier children.

U: Did you ever see that house when he lived there?

W: No.

U: What did it look like?

W: Now, they have remodeled that house. It's a nice house. Well-built.

U: Thank you very much for the interview on behalf of both the project and myself.

U: This is an interview with Mrs. Ethel Smith Watson for the Tombigbee Historic Townsites Project by Peggy Uland at Mrs. Watson's home on March 13, 1980. Her address is Route 4, Box 293, Aberdeen, Mississippi 39730. Her telephone number is 369-2355.

After we did our last interview, I thought of some more questions I'd like to ask. I'd like to know more about your childhood home. You said that you lived with your grandfather.

W: He lived with us. My father and mother were living, but he lived with us. After he broke up housekeeping, he came and lived with us. He was real old. He was a wonderful person. We just welcomed him instead of feeling like some people do about old people. He never did get real childish or senile. He had a good mind clear to the end. We enjoyed him.

U: I'm sure he probably told you a lot of stories about what it was like when he was young, or about things that had changed since his time. Do you remember any of those stories?

W: Yes, he used to talk to me a lot about what it was like during the war, the Civil War, and about the slaves. We had a lot of the slaves there on the place. They had been freed, but they still continued to live with us. They were good to those old Negroes. They were good hands; they worked the crops. They all sharecropped then. Of course, they don't do that any longer. They were typical looking slaves; they didn't look like the blacks do now. (laughter)

U: Oh, how's that?

W: Their features and everything else looked like. . . . I don't know. They had great big thick lips and noses and everything. They like jewelry. They liked to wear beads and earrings. That's just typical of their nationality, I think. I mean like in Africa. You think about them liking beads and trinkets and things like that. They did. The boss's house was sitting right in the middle and the houses all around him were all the tenants' so they could be called by a bell. They could hear it and come. Then they had a fence around all that, and the crops were out on the outside. We had one old woman who lived not too far from the house the way they did, and she had lots of fun playing with the children. They were scared to death of her. She would run and catch us, and we'd just fly. She'd kiss us; we didn't want to get kissed so we'd run from Aunt Aggie. I remember all of their names. We had one named Aunt Aggie and one named Aunt Hess. Aunt Hess was the one that had so many beads; she had strings of just colored glass beads. I've often wondered whatever became of those beads. I'd like to have those beads. They were a regular curiosity. There was old Uncle Bill and Uncle Phil. We called them Uncle and Aunt then, but now they won't even let you call them that. They'll tell you right quick, "I'm not

your aunt." (laughter) That was kind of an honor then to call them Aunt and Uncle. They thought that was fine. Times sure have changed.

U: Do you remember any stories that your grandfather used to tell you about what it was like when he worked his place before the war, or when he was young?

W: Not especially when he was young. But he used to talk about the Civil War a lot, and about what they had to go through. He was always kind of bitter towards Abraham Lincoln. He always spoke of him as "old Abe." They had all their cotton and everything taken away from them. You couldn't blame them for being bitter. Some of them took a mighty long time to get over it, but I never did feel like that about it. I never did feel that way about Abraham Lincoln. I thought he did a mighty good service for the country. It's a wonder I didn't feel like that, also. (laughter)

U: Was your grandfather able to still keep his place even though he lost a lot of money after the War?

W: Yes, he kept his land. He lost some of his land; he looked after several widows' property. He got beat out of some of his land, but that's a thing of the past. He still had more land than he needed. He lived up at Prairie Point; they called it "Hog Eye." They said they called it "Hog Eye" because they used to sell this whiskey by the barrelsful. They didn't have any prohibition or anything. They used to ship whiskey in barrels, and they'd have a hog eye on the barrel. They named the place "Hog Eye." Prairie Point was the name of the little settlement, but it was known all over that country as Hog Eye. My grandpa lived there.

After he got up in his late eighties--he lived to be ninety-one--he moved down home and stayed with us. We lived on an eight-hundred-acre farm. It was located on the state line between Alabama and Mississippi. We paid taxes in both Alabama and Mississippi; we voted in Mississippi. He came down there and stayed with us, the rest of his life. I was devoted to him. I had a mighty happy childhood. Some people say they didn't, but my parents were mighty good to me.

I went off to school so young because I kind of ran out of transportation. The older ones had gone off, and I was left to ride that two and a half miles to school. I went off to college when I was about thirteen or fourteen years old. I didn't have any trouble. We had a good teacher there in Memphis. She was a perfectly splendid teacher, Mrs. White. The girls nearly all went to college after they left there. Some of the boys did. They'd go right along with their grades; we didn't have a bit of trouble. I graduated real early because I went off so early.

U: Do you know how your grandfather got his farm? Did he inherit it, or do you know if he bought it?

W: Well, they came down here from north Alabama. He said they drove their stock and everything down through the woods. It was woods too; it wasn't just roads. He was educated at LaGrange College in north Alabama. He had a very good education. He could sit up and quote Latin when I never could quote it at all. (laughter) They taught Latin back then, but they don't teach it now like they used to. I never could see much use in it, but they always said our English language was derived from it. It was good for that reason. I never could see much use in Latin.

U: Was he like a pioneer?

W: Well, I should say he was. He was real old when he died. People didn't live that long; it was unusual for anybody to live to be ninety then. In fact, it was unusual since I've been grown. People died a whole lot younger then than they do now. Statistics show you that. If you live to be as old as I am, that's kind of remarkable. I'll be ninety on my birthday. That's just too long. (laughter) I've outlived all my friends and family, too.

U: You told me about a ride that you took on the Hardcash when you were a kid.

W: You're talking about the Hardcash. It's just one of those old paddle boats. What do you call them?

U: Paddle wheel?

W: They had a paddle wheel at the back. The power, the water, went through there. We used to stand and watch that while we were on this boat. I remember my brother spilled some water or something on his clothes. To show you how really backwards it was, Mama was trying to dry his clothes by the lamp. There was a coal oil lamp in our cabin. She was trying to dry these pants or underpants or whatever by holding them right up close to the lamp or around it almost so he could put them back on. (laughter) My brother was always into everything.

U: Did they have sleeping cabins?

W: They had little berths in which to sleep; I reckon you'd call them bunks. They were kind of cramped and small, but they had those kind of places. They had places to dance, and they sold liquor. It was like any big boat, except it was small. Then it was alright to have those things; there wasn't anything wrong with it.

U: Was there a dining room?

W: They had a place to eat, too. It had several decks to it. You could go upstairs.

U: Was it just a passenger boat, or did it carry freight?

W: Well, it had freight, too. It carried freight down in the bottom, bales of cotton or whatever. Papa used to buy his groceries sometimes from Columbus. When they'd go to Mobile, they usually brought back a lot of oysters. They brought them back in croker sacks. Oh, we used to have the biggest oyster suppers. The neighbors and all would get together. We'd have oysters every way imaginable trying to eat up those oysters. (laughter) They'd bring them back when they'd go to Mobile, and then they'd buy their supplies. They furnished the hands. A long time ago some of the farmers, even right down here at Vinton, did that. Mr. Ellis fed his hands from his table. Have you ever seen Mrs. Ellis?

U: No, we haven't.

W: You ought to talk to her. She has a kindergarten in West Point. She's getting kind of old. She lived out there right across from the Cox place, right across from the Dragoos. She had a house there. She ran for supervisor, and she and this man tied.

U: Who?

W: She and this opponent tied in votes. They put names in capsules and drew, and she lost. She's a fine woman. She has a kindergarten, only she's gotten too old for it. She collects china dolls as a hobby. I think you'd like to meet her.

U: What's her first name?

W: Mrs. Andy Ellis. She lived there in West Point, uptown, not too far south of the main part of town. It's in the main part of town. I've been by her place, but I can't tell you just what street it's on. I've been thinking I'd try to get down there and see her collection of dolls. I'd like to see them. She owns that place out there still. She owns that land. She and her daughter own some land right there on the river, too. She just had one child. I believe Mrs. Andy Ellis could tell you something about Vinton.

U: Okay. You said that your dad would go to Mobile. When he shipped cotton to Mobile, would he go with the cotton?

W: Yes, he'd go down there, and then he'd sell his cotton. Sometimes he'd bring supplies back. He had a store, and he'd bring supplies back to the store. Then they rationed them. Every Saturday they'd all come up to get their rations. They rationed them after I got to Strong. They'd give them whatever they needed. To tell you the truth, they just nearly broke this country.

U: You said your father ran a store. What was that like?

W: It was just a country store. It's kind of like this old Vinton store. I think Ethel had the wrong idea. I think those old buildings were just made like straight buildings. I think this old thing down at Vinton had one little side porch where they went in. They

had some big doors up at the front that they opened up. Those people that lived there may have added that little porch there to make it more convenient. We rented that store after it closed. I don't think it had any windows in there; it may have had some there at the front. If it did, it was those windows that shut and just had the iron bar across them. They're wooden; they're not glass at all. They'd put an iron bar across them. That's one of the safest ways to keep people out today. When we had this little store at Strong, we had iron bars across the front of it. There wasn't any way to get those doors open, unless you chopped them to pieces. They don't fix them like that now; these locks they've got are no good.

U: Was this store that your father ran on your place?

W: It was right up there close to the house. Grandpa used to help us out with it a lot after he came down there. We always kind of hated to look after the store. (laughter) We shut it up, and we'd have a bell out there to ring. The kids would hate to hear it ring because they'd want us to run and wait on them. (laughter) Of course, we went, but we didn't like to do it too much. After he came down there to stay with us, he liked to sit out there. He'd been used to a store.

I'll tell you something funny about Grandpa. We could always get some fun out of him. Mama would say, "Now, don't you go outside and ask Grandpa for some candy when you go to the store." She'd say, "Don't go ask him for candy." We'd always go there, and we'd look around hungry like kids do. He'd say, "You want any candy?" Mama had told us not to ask for it, so we'd say, "I don't care." He'd say, "If you don't care, I don't either." He'd just keep walking. (laughter) Then we'd say that Mama told us not to ask for it, and that we was scared to ask. We were dying for candy all the time.

U: Was the Vinton store a long building?

W: Yes, it was a long building. I wish we had gotten some pictures of the thing. All those old store buildings were built like that.

U: Where was the front door?

W: It was just a big wide open door there. It had two windows, one on each side of it.

U: Was the eave over the door, or did it face the other way?

W: You see, that eave was boarded up. Then all this door and window things were fixed down below there.

U: Could you tell me what would be inside a store like that and where?

W: There would be the counters on each side and shelves up above the counters. I think they used that as the post office. It had little

places for the mail to go. I think it was used as a post office at one time. Even here at Strongs, they used one of the stores as a post office until they closed the rural route; they put us all on rural route. But it was in a store building. It was very much like these store buildings down there, except this building is brick with windows all over it. Hardly any of those old buildings had windows. I don't see how they had enough light, but I guess they did.

U: What kind of things could you get in your father's store?

W: Just a little of everything.

U: Could you tell me what the "everything" is?

W: Needles and pins, and lace, and material. They didn't have very many ready-made things. Everybody made their own clothes then. They'd have all kind of groceries. It'd just be general merchandise, nearly everything you could think of, except they did not have a whole lot of ready-made things. People did a lot of sewing at home, and made most of their clothes.

U: Could you get dishes and pots and pans?

W: Oh, yes.

U: Do you remember what kind of dishes he used to sell?

W: He had slop jars and dishes and cheap spoons and anything like that that you wanted. Just almost anything you could mention would be in those stores.

U: Do you remember what the dishes looked like that he used to sell?

W: They were just heavy ordinary everyday dishes; they were not anything fine. Very few of them had anything very fine.

U: Were they decorated?

W: Some of them were; some of them were not. I have a vase here somewhere that everybody's been trying to beat me out of. It came out of our old store. I just thought it was an ordinary glass vase. Several have picked that vase up and said, "Where'd you get this?" I said, "It came from Papa's old store down in Noxubee County." I just thought it was an old cheap glass vase. I don't know what it would cost. They all like it; several have picked it up and looked at it. We've used it quite a bit to put flowers in; it's a nice handy vase for that.

U: So, he sold glassware too?

W: It must be some of that glass they were looking for.

U: What kind of groceries did he sell?

W: Mostly just flour, sugar, and meal. When we first married, we bought flour by the barrel and sugar by the hogshead. It's bigger than a barrel. They called it a hogshead. We put it in that pantry. It'd take a team of mules to get it up here. We used the stuff, but then people cooked three meals a day and they served hot breads. They served both corn bread and biscuits in some fashion every meal. They had a cook in the kitchen. These women now wouldn't do all that cooking, would they? (laughter) You'd be surprised how much we used.

We kept the things under lock and key. We wore our keys hitched to our belts--the housekeeper, the mother, or the wife. We'd give out what we'd want the cook to cook. They'd get mad now if you would do a thing like that. I wouldn't blame them. You'd think we didn't trust them. We'd give out just how much flour, how much lard, and how much everything we wanted them to have.

They used just plain hog lard; they didn't buy this fine Crisco and all that kind of stuff then. They'd stew it up in the backyard in a pot. They killed the hogs on the place. Papa used to try to kill enough for the whole plantation. That was a big job. When hog killing time come, they'd try to catch a cold spell of weather. They'd gather all the nigger men to kill these hogs. When you get through, you'd have a lot of scraps left. He'd put those scraps in different piles, and he'd say, "This is for John. This is for Phil. This is for so and so, and so and so." But they'd get to fussing, so he would put one pile out there and say, "Now, whose meat is this? Whose pile is this?" The one that was fussing would call out the name. He'd then give them that to take home and use. We'd take the parts that we wanted to keep and salt them down. He had a great big old building out there called the smokehouse. We'd salt down all the hams and shoulders and the bacon; then we'd smoke it with hickory chips and cure it there on the place. It was good meat, too.

U: Did you do enough for just your household?

W: No, he tried to raise enough there for the hands, but he never could raise enough for them. He'd nearly always have to buy this fatback, and then issue it out to them when they'd come up. It was so many pounds depending on the size of the family. Things sure have changed.

U: Was this store that your father ran for people who lived in the area, or was it for the hands on the place?

W: He sold groceries. He sold things in the store, but he did use it for the hands, too. He sold general merchandise at the store. The neighbors came there and bought from him.

U: Do you know where he bought most of the things that he sold in that store?

W: As long as that boat was going up and down the river, he bought there. Then he got to buying from Macon, Mississippi. He had to go

into Macon with a four-mule wagon or a six-mule wagon to haul it out there. It was eighteen miles. They have a good road now.

U: When did the boat stop going up and down?

W: I think when these sand bars got in the river so bad. I think they got where they couldn't make the trip.

U: Was that when you were still living in Memphis?

W: Yes, they had stopped before I left down there. This was when I was a child that they were still making the trips. I remember exactly where people lived in Memphis, and how those houses were fixed and all. (laughter)

U: When he got his supplies off the boat, would that be from Mobile or would that be from Columbus?

W: Either place. He did some banking in Columbus, I know. He paid his Alabama part of the taxes over there in Pickens County, and he paid Mississippi in Noxubee County. I remember when Aliceville was first started. It's gotten to be a nice little town. I was surprised it had so many stores. There was a picture in the paper the other day of Aliceville, and I was surprised it was that big.

U: Why did it get started?

W: Just a new town. I don't know. Maybe they needed a settlement over there. But I remember when it was first started and opened up as a town.

U: Do you know why Memphis didn't get any bigger, and why people moved away from there?

W: There's one girl working at the bank in Macon if she's not dead. Her name is Ernestine Parker. She could tell you all about this. They tell me Jimmy Parker is down there in this house where we went to school. I have been wanting to go back down there and see those folks and talk to them. I bet they could tell all about down near there. Ernestine has been working for the bank. She may have retired before now; she's old enough to.

U: Did the railroad ever come through Memphis?

W: No. Aberdeen didn't want to be on this main line of the M & O. That's why they hooked off over here by themselves. They didn't want to be worried with trains going through there all night. They just had a branch. They were sorry afterwards that they didn't want to have that main line come through, because it would have been an asset to them. Looks like the railroads are going to play out though.

U: You told me once about riding the train from Strongs to Aberdeen and

getting caught and having to go over to Muldon and down to West Point. Do you remember a place called Louhatton?

W: No, I sure don't. Where was that?

U: Someone told us it might be a rail stop between Muldon and West Point.

W: That's news to me.

U: Did the train ever stop anywhere between here?

W: I never heard of it stopping between Muldon and West Point. They used to call that branch railroad over there "old Alex."

U: How do you spell that?

W: Old A-L-E-X, I reckon. They used to call it old Alex when they used it over there as a branch. The station was right down there under the hill. They tried to keep that station there; I don't know whether they finally tore it down or not. It had a history to it. Aberdeen is bad about these old landmarks and things worse than West Point is. I don't know why, but that old aristocracy still tries to hang onto a lot of that stuff. I like Aberdeen, but they have these pilgrimages and things that West Point never has had too many of. I like both towns, but as I said, they have held onto these old things.

U: When you lived near Memphis did you live close to the river to see boats go up and down?

W: Yes, I played right on that bluff of Tombigbee River. My best friend, a girl about my age, lived in a big old three-story house right on the Tombigbee River. Eva Cole was her name. Her mother was almost an invalid. He didn't own much land himself, but he was an overseer for a big plantation owner that lived beyond us. We lived in the country. He stayed out on the farm so much, and she was sick a lot. She had three children. Eva and I used to play right on the bluff of the river. Why we didn't fall in, I don't know. This day and time you'd fall in. We'd make dolls out of sticks or anything we could find and dress them up. We'd build our dollhouses into the bluff right on the river. Mrs. Cole was in bed the biggest part of the time, and she didn't know what we were doing, I don't reckon. She was a good mother, but she was sick so much. We'd go down there and have the best time. We never did fall in. (laughter)

U: You made dolls out of sticks?

W: We'd make dolls out of anything and play with them.

U: Did you ever have any china dolls?

W: Oh, yes, we had dolls. We were all pretty well fixed, I reckon, for that day and time. Yes, we always had dolls, but we weren't indulged

like they are now. We'd always get a doll every Christmas; we'd get these china dolls. I had one, a blonde named Annie. My sister had one--her's was a brunette--named Lina. There's a doll in there on the bed that looks just like one of those little dolls. It's a doll that Ethel made though.

U: What other kind of toys did you get?

W: We wouldn't have too many of them. We'd always have a good time and hang our stockings up. We always had firecrackers, and I despised them. I always did hate firecrackers.

U: When did you use firecrackers?

W: We had firecrackers when we were little. We sure did. I never did like them; I always got burnt with them. (laughter)

U: Do you use them on holidays or just on Christmas?

W: Oh, yes, just on Christmas. I don't know why they didn't. Southerners just kind of resented the Fourth of July, I reckon. We really always had them on Christmas. We'd hang up our stockings, and later on when I got older, we'd have a tree. I don't think we did have trees until we got old enough to go off to school. We'd hang up our stockings, and we'd usually get an orange, two apples, nuts, and raisins, stuff like that, a package or two of firecrackers, and a toy or two. We'd never get many toys. Just think about what they get now!

U: Can you think of any toys that you had besides china dolls?

W: My brother used to get a toy every Christmas and tear it up before the day was over. He liked to look into it and see how it worked. One Christmas he got a monkey on a string. I wish they'd make those monkeys now. You'd pull the end of it, and the monkey would run up the string. He had that thing to pieces before the day was out. (laughter) He was always into everything. He just rightened up, and he was the best old man you ever saw. He was just really a good old man. Everybody loved him, but he was a bad little boy. I used to follow him and wouldn't tell on him. I don't care what he did, I wouldn't tell on him. (laughter)

U: Do you know where your parents got those toys?

W: They had several good stores there in Macon. They had one old man there, his name was Heindricks. He had the prettiest things. I did have several of the things that I had gotten from him. One of them is in there right now; it's a pitcher. It's in that case. They tell me it's a collector's item. He must have gotten these things from abroad or somewhere. I had a great big plate, and I gave that to one of the children. It's got a mark on the bottom of it that tells you something about it, and I've been told, "You could get no

telling what for that." Mama used to buy us presents there sometimes after we got older. Especially after we married, she'd get a gift for Christmas and send us.

U: Did you have mail-order catalogs?

W: Yeah, we had Sears and Roebuck, but it was cheap then. Sears and Roebuck has gotten high.

U: What kind of things could you get out of Sears and Roebuck?

W: Cheap things. (laughter) You didn't get fine things from Sears and Roebuck. In fact, everybody was kind of ashamed to say they bought a dress from Sears and Roebuck. Now they've got the nicest looking things, and they're high priced now, too.

U: Did your parents buy you things from Sears when you were little?

W: No, very little. They'd rather go to Macon and shop. They make most of my dresses and clothes. We'd go out there and select material we wanted and Mama made it. Then the girls all learned to sew, and my girls all learned to sew as they grew. It certainly is a big help. They don't sew much now.

U: Did your mother sew by hand or did she have a machine?

W: No, she had a machine.

U: Do you know what kind it was?

W: I believe it was a White. I'm not sure. Most of them have Singers, but I believe Mama had a White. She sewed a lot; she was good. Then we sewed as we got older. Then we started buying ready-made clothes.

U: What kind of clothes did you wear when you were a child that would be different than what a child would wear today?

W: We just wore little dresses, little gingham dresses or little print dresses. We didn't wear as many of them as they do now. We'd have two school dresses. We'd come home from school, and we'd pull them off. Now the children don't do that. (laughter) We'd wear those two dresses a week, and then the next week we'd have two more. We'd just save them. When we'd get home, we'd pull them off and put on our play clothes. We wore dresses always. Nobody wore pants in that day and time. Folks put the wash out on Monday morning. They had the wash done by women there on the place. They'd bring it in Friday or Saturday. How we kept clean, I don't know, but we did.

U: What kind of shoes did you wear?

W: Whatever we bought in the store just like we do now.

U: Were they like shoes today?

W: I'll tell you one thing they wore when my children were little. They wore union suits. They were a pain in the neck. It'd be cold, and the houses were colder than they are now. The only way they had to heat them was from the fireplaces, and they were cold; they were just not warm. All the kids wore union suits. It was a pain in the neck to get them fixed down in those long black stockings to go to school. The girls did very well, but help the boys--if I didn't have a time with Henry. He couldn't get those union suits folded over and his stocking over them. If I hadn't had a good cook then, I don't believe I'd ever have gotten them off to school. She'd help me get him ready for school. She'd fix the breakfast, and then she'd help me get him ready for school. She'd run to the front door, and have his coat and cap. They went out the front then. I don't believe I'd have ever gotten that boy off to school if it hadn't been for that good Rosanna helping me. They were good; some of them were mighty good.

U: What kind of shoes did you wear when you were little?

W: They were just like the children wear now. There was very little difference in shoes. Of course, they have more of those sandle type shoes now than they used to have, and they didn't wear tennis shoes as much. My children wore high-topped shoes.

When we had that 1918 flu, everyone in the house had it except my husband. He had the store, and he was having to be there. So, we had a nurse here to wait on us; we happened to get a trained nurse to come and wait on us. Henry was in the back room, and I was in the middle room with Ethel who was a baby. The girls were in this room. We had a little black nurse that we'd brought from Noxubee County. Her uncle told me I could bring her to nurse Ethel. She had the flu. The cook and Henry were the only ones that didn't have it at the same time. That was that 1918 flu. It was just killing people coming and going. This little nurse got so sick, and I got worried about her because she was away from home. The cook was trying to make her take her medicine. She was sleeping here on a cot in the house. The cook would say, "See that box going down the road." They buried these Negroes in just wooden boxes. She'd scare her to make her take her medicine. When my children got up after they had been so sick, their shoes were too big at the tops. That's the reason that I remember they had high-top, laced-up shoes. They all had such a bad siege of the flu.

U: What kind of medicine did they give people for that flu?

W: There wasn't much medicine you could give; you just had to tough it out. This old doctor over here used to give them. . . . What did he give them? It was something I didn't think he should have given them. He was a good doctor, too. I'm not really sure what he was giving them, I didn't think they should have whatever it was. They were real sick.

U: What doctor was that?

W: Doctor Darracott. He's gone a long time ago, but he was a good doctor. He lived over here. We had a doctor at Strongs at one time, Doctor Cross. Dr. Cross and his wife boarded here with us, just the two of them, until I got pregnant and Ethel came. He delivered Ethel. Then he lived up there with Asa Watson in that house. He and his wife left here and went to some foreign country.

U: Before Dr. Cross moved to Strongs, did Dr. Darracott come to Strong?

W: He practiced over here all the time; he was a good doctor, too. He lived right over here in the Darracott neighborhood. That old place was named for his daddy. They left here and moved to Houston, Mississippi, and then they went to Amory. Mrs. Darracott has a daughter in Amory now who runs a store. All the older ones are dead. Dr. Darracott used to go off every year and take a course. I thought it was a good thing for him. He was a good doctor; he used to give the anesthetics for those doctors in Aberdeen all the time when they'd have an operation. We need doctors bad around here now. You can't get these young doctors to go to these little places.

U: Was the flu epidemic in 1918 really bad around here?

W: These schoolboys down here at the college died going and coming. It was the worst they've ever had anywhere, I think. They would die without any cause. They'd maybe just be out on the campus and die. They just had the worst cases of flu you ever heard of in your life. It was just an epidemic of flu.

U: Were there a lot of people who died in the Strongs and Vinton area?

W: No, didn't many die here, but they went to bed and stayed there and took care of themselves. No, we didn't have anybody to die right here at Strongs. So many mothers died that were pregnant during the flu epidemic. I don't know what effect it had, but they died; they had several in West Point die. Dr. Ivy was my doctor, and he said that he didn't want me to have it. Ethel was born in the last of July. When we took the flu, she wasn't very old. We got along better than the other members of the family; we were not as sick as they were for some reason. She had very little fever, and all the others were sick. We happened to get a nurse. We were lucky to get a nurse; we got a good nurse to come in and stay with us and look after us.

U: You were talking about your father shipping cotton to Mobile; did you ever see him actually load cotton on the boats?

W: Yes. We'd go down and see the boats when they'd come in a lot of times. They had planks there; they'd roll it over onto the boat.

U: How would you do that?

- W: Between the water and the boat, they had what you call gangplanks. They'd roll it over onto the flat part of the boat. I've seen them load the boats several times.
- U: Did a whole bunch of different planters put their cotton on the same boats and go down with it?
- W: Yes, the ones who were farmers there; Memphis, Alabama didn't have too many real planters. This Mr. Cole, this friend of mine that I was telling you about, raised a lot of cotton. I think the man he was overseeing for lived in Mobile and that would have had a lot to do with his sending the cotton down there. He farmed quite a bit of land for him; he was an overseer for Mr. Winston Jones. The strange thing about the Coopers is that some of them are still around down there, and they still use that old cemetery. One of the boys lives in Macon now; he married a daughter of a good friend of mine.
- They were very much interested in doing something about that old cemetery, and so was I. This daughter, Jan Cooper, was an actress. She had let them know that she wanted to be buried at Memphis, and she was buried there not many years ago. I was so surprised that she was brought back there and buried. They keep their square up, and they had an inscription on her stone with some of this flowery stuff. Last time I went down there it was well kept; just their plot had a fence around it. I wish they could do something about that old cemetery. The state of Alabama was talking about doing something about it, but I think it all fell through.
- U: When you rode on the Hardcash, you said you went to Columbus and that your father did a lot of business in Columbus.
- W: Papa did his business, and we shopped around some. We didn't stay very long; we stayed a day or two and then we went back home. When we got off at Memphis, it was so snowy. You never saw such a snow. The hands had met us with a six-mule wagon. They got out and walked and drove, and we rode. When we got home, all Mama's fruit and stuff had frozen because there was no fire in the house.
- U: Did you go to Columbus more than once? Often?
- W: No, that's the only time we ever went. I don't remember the boats running very much longer than that. It may have been the reason we went. I don't know. Some of my grandchildren never have ridden the train.
- U: When you were a child, did you have a nannie who took care of you?
- W: I might have had one when I was little, but after I got up older, I didn't. I don't remember having one. I used to play with two little black girls, but they were just playmates, Sarah and Jane.
- U: Did most people have house servants?

W: Oh Lord, yes. (laughter) They'd have both a cook and a maid in the houses. They had plenty of help, no doubt about that. A man never caught his horse or saddled him up. He'd have his horse hitched at the front gate. The lot boy always tended to having it ready for him when he got out. Most of them farmed the plantations on horseback. Most of them carried a pistol everywhere they went. They had a scabbard, and they just put it right up under their arm; nearly all the men did. They didn't use them, though. They just carried them for protection. I believe they ought to carry a pistol myself. I used to carry one when I would go by myself places, but now they don't do it.

U: You told me that your father, your mother, your husband and yourself had been to college or an academy. Did most people do that?

W: No, I wouldn't say all of them did it, but a good many did. Mrs. White's students nearly all went off to college. The boys didn't go quite as much as the girls for some reason, but I think that's natural. Nearly every one of those girls went to college.

They just had this country school. We used to have a spelling match there every morning. We had a dictionary, and she'd make us learn a page in the dictionary. If we missed it, we'd stay in. (laughter) She didn't mind keeping you in; she was kind of strict. If you take a page in the dictionary and learn the definition of it, it's quite a job for a child.

U: That's a lot.

W: It is.

U: Did most of your playmates go on to college?

W: Yeah, most of them did. This little girl I played with got married after she got older; she didn't go, but her sister went. Her sister went several years; I don't know whether she ever graduated. She was just full of fun. She's still living; she lives in the Delta. I hear from her every once in awhile. The one I played with so much has been dead a long time.

U: You said your husband ran a store here in Strongs. When did he do that?

W: Yes, he had a store here. They had several stores down here at Strongs. We have one there now, and I wish the man would clean up around it. We can't get him to do anything about it. I think it's awful the way it looks. There's some neighbors who want to rent it or buy it. I wish he'd sell it to them because they would clean it up and do something with it. It's a good brick building.

U: Do you know in what building your husband ran his store?

W: It's not there now; it's gone. Yes, I know where it was.

U: What did it look like?

W: Just one of these straight buildings, like most of them are. The Dukeminier store used to be over there where the barn is, but they moved over there and built that brick building. They had three or four stores here at one time. We had a post office, a station, and an agent to run the depot. The train stopped here.

U: Do you know what years he ran that store?

W: I don't know just exactly, about 1915 I imagine. I was just trying to figure from how old one of the children was. He had the store several years. It was such a big undertaking when he had so much farmland to look after. He rode mostly horseback. Finally, he got a car to ride in, but mostly it was horseback.

He lost a lot of land when this Depression came along. They gave me a chance to buy it back at a very reasonable price, but I was afraid to tackle it. He had died. Charlie had just come down here, and I didn't know whether he was going to stay. I didn't know whether he was going to like it down here. I was just afraid to tax myself with too much, so I didn't try to take it up. They gave me a very reasonable price. It was the same people that had this Connecticut General in Columbus. They were real nice about it.

U: What kind of things did he have in that store? Was it like your dads'?

W: Yes, just like that. It was just general merchandise and most anything you'd want to buy.

U: Do you know where he got the things that he sold in that store?

W: Well, they delivered. . . . I had a store here. It was just a small building. They have a concrete block in there where it was a concrete floor. They delivered things then; they got them from these merchants in town. The Justice Company used to deliver a lot of stuff. There was a company in Tupelo that delivered a lot of stuff. You didn't even have to go and haul any in unless you got out of something. I had a good business here with just all I could handle. There was just too much for me. Then I had to go and help Henry with his children.

U: Did the things that your husband sold in his store in 1915 come by railroad or did they haul them in wagons?

W: They could ship things by the railroad then, too. Some of the stuff came by railroad, but most of it was delivered. The Coca-Cola people delivered things then out in the country. I guess, though, they still do if they sell enough out in the country. So many people in little stores didn't do well. We don't have any police protection at all. All these stores here got broken into so many

times. They broke into Henry's store and blew the safe there one night. There's no protection at all, unless you just happen to catch them. They break in every once in awhile in the stores in the country.

U: When your husband lived in Vinton as a child, do you know what he called the house that he lived in?

W: That was the Trotter house.

U: Did he call it by that name?

W: I think it always went by the Trotter house. I wish you'd look up and see if I'm wrong about that. Dick Trotter. After y'all left the other day, I got to thinking. I got that Dick Trotter in my mind somewhere. It seems to me like it might be that there was a boy there. Maybe he was here after Mrs. Trotter left. It looks like there ought to be something down there at the courthouse about it.

U: Did Mrs. Trotter live there, too?

W: She lived there during the Civil War. Didn't you ever hear the tale about General Forrest getting bit by the spider?

U: No.

W: They said a black widow spider bit him. I didn't know they had black widows then, but I guess they did. They said he was sick. Somebody found him out there in the woods sick. I don't know whether it was one of her children who found him. She told him to come on up to the house, and Mama would do something for him. She took him in and nursed him back to where he was able to go with his company. That tale is in that book that they got out on West Point and Clay County. They said he'd been bitten by a spider.

U: When your husband was a child and lived down there, do you know who his friends were?

W: Henry didn't stay down there too much. He was born in Columbus. His father liked to trade, I think, from what I can understand about him.

U: What do you mean by trade?

W: He liked to sell and buy land and all that. He accumulated quite a bit of property. He was living in Columbus, I think, when Henry was born and Julian, too. He didn't stay down there too much because they gave him a home up here. They treated him just like a member of their family. They had a great big old colonial home where that house is now.

U: Up here in Strongs?

W: Right up here. Mr. Ott remodeled it. In this room where they sat, they had a big rocking chair for each one of the boys. Henry had his as did Tom and Wheeler and Asa. There were four of them. He had his room upstairs, and stayed up here more than he did at home because Julian was afflicted. He tried to teach Julian, but he never did have much luck teaching him. Julian had a good mind, but it'd take a lot of patience to teach anybody that was all crippled up like that. Henry didn't have much luck; a boy wouldn't have. His daddy said Julian was just as well off not to have an education. I don't know whether he was or not. Anyway, he was happy; we'd give him books and things to look at, mostly pictures. Every Christmas he'd have to have a pocket knife, a harp, and a watch. He liked to blow on a harp. There were two or three things that he'd want every Christmas. He'd want a new one, and he got them. He never wanted for anything. Henry didn't stay down there too much. These boys were just like brothers to him. They're double first cousins.

U: Whose house was this?

W: That was Asa Watson, Sr. Wheeler Watson was the old man, and Asa was a son. Henry and Tom and Wheeler were just like brothers. Wheeler and Henry were almost like twin brothers. They were double first cousins, and they were just crazy about each other.

Wheeler got killed as a young man; he was riding around with a girl from Nashville. She was kin to Mrs. George Payne in Aberdeen. They drove in this car and turned off of the road in a puddle of water. The puddle wasn't much bigger than the car. They just flipped over in there and both of them were killed. They phoned Henry first and told him; they wanted to break the news as easy as they could. A friend phoned Henry and told him that they'd been killed right on the road out from Aberdeen. The boys were in business together; they had a bunch of hogs and things they were working together. It was so sad because he was such a fine young man.

U: Do you remember what the interior of the Trotter house looked like?

W: Yeah, I remember exactly what it looked like.

U: Could you describe the furnishings and what they looked like to me?

W: They had most of the Watson furniture. I'll tell you what they've got down there. They gave James Watson this old organ. They have it in their house. Sometimes if you catch them at home, go over there and ask them to let you see it.

U: Who played the organ?

W: Well, it was an old church organ, way back yonder. They used to all have these organs in the church. Nancy got the one we had up here. I was kind of sorry they let her have it. She made a desk out of it. The one James Watson has is so massive; it's a very big tall thing.

U: Did that come out of the Trotter house?

W: Well, this old nurse had it over there, and her son gave it to James. No, I don't know where it came from. I don't know whether they bought it or whether it came from the church or what. I would like you to see it. They're not at home much except on Sunday afternoon.

U: Do you know if your father-in-law or his wife played the organ, or why they would have had it?

W: No, I don't know. They all used to play up here. You'd have to pump them with your feet. They used to play it all the time. I'm sorry they got rid of it; I always liked it in the church. They wanted a piano so they got a piano.

U: Do you know what any of the other things in the house looked like?

W: Most of the things in there belonged to the Watsons. There was old-timey furniture, beds, and little chairs. Ethel said that somebody went in there and got some of them, but we've given most of it away. All this old furniture in yonder belonged to the Watsons. That old sideboard was my grandfather's. They call them buffets now, but it's an old sideboard. I think it's pretty.

U: Was the inside of that house plastered?

W: It was mostly boards. I don't think it was plastered; I think it was just rough. That house, on the side next to the tree was just straight. It had three rooms, and each room had a window in it. The front room and the middle room were big rooms, and the little one was kind of a shed room on the back. I imagine, they used it mostly just as a storage room when they had the whole house. Over here was the dining room. We let an old sideboard just go plumb to pieces down there. I don't know why in the world we didn't get it and fix it up, but we didn't. They had a room there that they used for the dining room. They had a porch out in front. Ethel was trying to draw something; I don't know whether she could draw it or not. You'd drop down another little place here and go into the kitchen.

U: Did you have to step down?

W: Let me see if I can do it; I'm not any drawer.

(The following discussion continues while Mrs. Watson sketches the Trotter house.)

W: This was where the house was cut in two.

U: Along the side that the porch is on?

W: Yes.

- U: Didn't the kitchen look like it was the same as the rest of the house?
- W: No, it didn't look like it was as fine lumber. When we had Dr. Ivy out there to see Julian once, I was there. He knocked on that wall and said, "They don't make lumber like this any longer, do they?" The kitchen seemed to me like it was just a roughly constructed afterthought. I believe that you came out here and you could walk right into the kitchen. They had the stove sitting right here. Let me see if I can do that.
- U: Did the kitchen have plain shingles?
- W: Yes, I just don't believe it was. . . . You had to come out on the porch to get to the kitchen. I don't know why they didn't have a door here in the northwest room.
- U: It would have been easier to get to.
- W: Yes. These rooms were bigger then the others. I got this southroom, too big, but I don't reckon it makes any difference. There was a door here in the middle room, that's where we went in whenever we'd go down there to see Julian. He had a white woman who stayed with him until she died; then we got this old Negro woman to go and stay with him. His daddy had died. She was so good to him. You can't get them to do that any longer.
- U: Was the first woman to take care of him, Lucy Natcher?
- W: Yes. She was the best old soul.
- U: You told me she was buried in the Vinton Cemetery.
- W: Yeah, her marker is down there.
- U: Does she have any family buried there?
- W: Yes, she has a brother and a sister buried there.
- U: Do you know where she grew up or where she was from?
- W: No. I wish Miss Lucy was living. She could tell you more about all those Posses and all those children that lived down there. She knew all about them. She could tell you all about that.
- U: Do you know if Lucy Natcher grew up in Vinton?
- W: I don't know where she grew up, but she was a devoted person. After Miss Lucy died, this old Negro woman who was a good old Negro stayed there. When the grandchildren would go down there with me, she'd want to grab them and hug them and kiss them. They'd just fly and they'd jump off this end of the porch to keep Maude from kissing them. We'd go up in here, and sometimes we'd sit on the porch.

Most of the time it was cold, and we'd go in here. They had a chimney right here. There was a chimney between those two rooms right there.

U: Did it open onto both rooms?

W: Both rooms, yes. I don't remember any fireplace being in that northwest room; that's the reason I believe that was more of a storage room. I don't remember any fireplace. They always had a good warm fire there. This middle room right here was kind of a company room. I think Miss Lucy and Maude slept in this middle room when they were there looking after Julian. Julian stayed in the middle room. We talked about moving him, and Doctor Ivy advised us not to after his father died. He said that he was happy there, and it was home to him. If we had moved him up here, he'd be in the way. The children were having dates and going and one thing and another. You know how youngsters are. We had lots of company, so he advised us not to. He stayed there until he died, and Maude, this old Negro woman, stayed with him. Henry III lived across the road.

U: What was her last name?

W: Maude Chandler. She's dead too, and her children are dead. She has one grandson living in West Point. I've kind of kept up with them. Those boys are dead; she had three great big husky boys. One's in St. Louis, I think. I don't know whether you could get in touch with him.

U: When your father-in-law was alive, which room was his?

W: I guess he slept in the room with Julian. I don't know.

U: Was this front room like a parlor?

W: They didn't use it very much. They had a bed in it; the bed was over here. They had the big old organ sitting over here in this corner. I remember that. This was just a porch, and they had a great, long heavy bench out there. I wonder what became of that bench. I bet someone would want it now.

U: Where was the door into this south room?

W: There was a door here, and there was a door right here. The door went right from one to the other.

U: Could you go into both rooms from the porch?

W: Yes, you could go into both rooms from the porch. I believe that house was cut in two right here.

U: Did this little walk over to the kitchen have steps to it?

W: Yes. This building down here was the tackiest looking little old thing. It looked like it was just thrown together. You know what I mean. The lumber in this main part of the house was seasoned and the best looking lumber you ever saw. A lot of that lumber used to be over there at Henry's. They used it making picture frames; they made a lot of picture frames out of it.

U: Where was the well for this house?

W: The well was right here at the northwest corner of the house. That's the reason Ethel says she doesn't believe the house was near there. That well was condemned. They finally stopped using the well, since it was so close to the house.

U: Was it an artesian well?

W: No, it was a pump well. They used to have a pump well right there. I guess they got water over at. . . . My son Henry had two wells. He still has two wells. He has a well across the road, down nearer the road. He had a well there. He used to have a trailer there that some of them lived in. They got their water from there and they had pumped it to the trailer. They must have gotten their water there. They had an overflowing well down here at the camp, but I think that was a little too far. I don't think they got the water there. They had a real overflowing well. All those wells used to overflow.

U: Where was the dining room?

W: They might have cut that room off there for a dining room.

U: Is that what they used it for?

W: This was a dining room. They had a table in here and a sideboard. I wish we had gotten those things out of there. It had an old sideboard with a marble top on it across here. I guess they'd be all fussing about it now.

U: Was the fireplace made out of brick?

W: Oh yes, it was brick. All this under here was brick. I know that to be a fact. This old house was cut in two right here.

U: Were there mantelpieces on that fireplace?

W: Yes, there was a heavy mantelpiece.

U: Was it wood?

W: Yes. There was a heavy mantelpiece there. They had the bed right over here.

U: You told me that your father-in-law traded a lot of property. If he

had a lot of property in the prairie land, do you know why he lived in the sandy land where it's not as good to farm?

W: (laughter) He might have thought it was good; he liked to do trucking. My husband said he always hated an Irish potato, because he had to help his daddy harvest so many of them. They were rough with sand on them. He liked to do truck patching, and that sandy land is the best place in the world for trucking. It was ideal for fruit and trucking and stuff like that. But he lived up here at Strongs at one time. He lived in this house right down here south of us, and that's the oldest house in Strongs.

U: Is that the one just below us?

W: Yes. It belongs to Babe Ripetoe, and that's the oldest house at Strongs now. Then he lived where Kyle Chandler lived on that high hill. Captain Henry's mother put out all those old yellow daffodils and those flowers. If you ever get them started, they'll stay there forever. Then they lived in Columbus. In that old Bible, I found an article where they had given a party for Donie Watson in Columbus.

U: Who is Donie Watson?

W: It's an account of a party that they'd had in Columbus for her when she was a little girl. It was real interesting. They called it a spider party, and it seems like they had thread running everywhere. You followed the thread to find your toy, or whatever they had hid out. It was a cute thing, but I'd hate to have to have it. (laughter) She was giving it for Donie Watson who was Donie Pulliam later. They live in this house right next to me.

Then he lived down there. He owned no telling how much land. They all laughed because when he bought this Cox place, he said that the man wanted to get him to agree that if he ever dug up silver or gold, or anything on there that it belonged to the previous owner. He was kind of quick spoken, and he said no, he wasn't going to trade with anybody like that. "When he bought anything, he bought it from heaven to hell." (laughter)

U: Thank you.

W: It's crude though. Don't forget that this is the old oak tree and this is as you go in. We always came around here and went through this yard and up in here. I believe that house was cut in two right here. This is the first time I've ever figured out where I thought that house was cut in two along the porch. They could have put this partition in here and fixed this for a dining room, or maybe they didn't use that for a dining room. Maybe they just used this north room. This little old building couldn't have belonged to that house the way it looked. You stepped down when you came here to go out the walkway there, and they had little steps going out the back. They had steps going down to the front also to make it convenient to get down. I don't know why else they'd want all that many steps.

U: You mentioned that you rented out that building that was the general store and that the Poss family lived there. Do you know what they did for a living?

W: They farmed. They sharecropped or something like that. I wish Miss Lucy was living. I've heard her talk so much about those different ones. I thought maybe those Withovens could give you some information.

U: Did you ever know anyone named Curren Miller?

W: I wonder if that's the one they bought the Miller place from.

U: No, this would have been after 1900.

W: There was a bunch of Millers around Clay County. No, I don't remember anybody by that name.

U: Do you know anybody named Funderburke?

W: Now there's a name. There's some Columbus folks named Funderburke.

U: This is someone that I thought might have lived around Vinton.

W: No.

U: When you were a child, did many people wear jewelry?

W: No, they didn't. I just get disgusted with some of these folks about jewelry. I never did care for jewelry at all, and the only reason I'm wearing this ring is my daughter put it on there. Her son made it, and she wanted me to wear it. I've tried to give it to her several times, but she won't take it. It's a pretty little opal. I don't care anything about jewelry.

This little granddaughter is the worst little thing that you ever laid your eyes on, but I take a patience with her; I have patience with her and the rest of them don't. They say, "Oh, Lou is so bad." At Christmas, her mother gave her some money, and she went down there and bought this little crystal thing. Her mother told her to buy something for her very best friend. She put this on the Christmas tree, "For Granny from Lou." I put it on to let her see me wearing it, and it just tickled her to death. This here's a little child's thing; it's a cute little thing. (laughter)

U: Did people wear jewelry when you were little?

W: They all had jewelry. They all had breast pins. Miss Lucy wanted to be buried with a breast pin on that was made out of a gold dollar or a gold half-piece. She got buried with it on because I put it on her. She told me what she wanted to be buried in, and she wanted this breast pin. Yes, they wore rings and jewelry, but I don't believe they were quite as crazy about it as some of the girls now.

U: What kind of horse and buggy did you use when you first moved up here? Did you have horses and buggies?

W: Oh, yes. (laughter) My husband and I had quite a fast courtship; we didn't know each other anytime, hardly. We had three dates a day. I was visiting in Columbus, and he came over there. I met him over here. When I went over to Columbus to see my aunt who was living there then, we'd go to the races. He had a race horse in the races. They used to have races at the fairs. We'd go to preaching in the morning, to the races in the afternoon, and to the opera house at night. We had that thing pretty well patched up in short order.

He had this nice horse he called Bonniebelle. He said she'd win. She was a fine horse. After we married, he had another one, from the same strain of horses that he called Lucibelle. That was my horse. We had a buggy. So instead of going car riding, the lot boy would hitch the buggy and horse up, at the front. We'd take the children, and we'd ride all around, up and down the roads in the buggy. That's the only way you had to get around. I guess we were the first ones at Strongs to buy a car. He had to go to Columbus to buy it; he couldn't buy it here. He bought a Dodge. It was the first car in Strongs. It wasn't long after that before one or two of the neighbors bought one. Then, they didn't have glass at all. They had just curtains. When one of the neighbors started to buy his, he said he didn't want to travel in a hearse before he died. (laughter) He wouldn't buy one with glass.

U: Did you ever know anybody that had a surrey?

W: Oh, yes. I remember the old, old, "sho 'nuff" surrey. It sat down there in Grandfather's outbuilding. They didn't call them garages then. It had fringe all around there and had this step up on. It was sure enough old-timey. Nobody ever rode in it, but we used to go out there and play in it. It was a pretty thing. I just wonder what became of it.

I wonder what became of Miss Lucy's buggy and horse. She had a buggy and horse that she rode Julian around. She'd come up here to church every Sunday in it. She had that horse and buggy in that little house out there in front of the main house. We took Julian to West Point one day to have something done to his teeth. They had to put him on a table and put him to sleep. He cut up so. When he got through, we just thought we'd ride him around town. He was the funniest, cutest thing I ever saw. He thought this fellow was going to run over him. (laughter) He hadn't seen cars before. He couldn't talk much, but he could cuss. He'd just cuss them out. I reckon I'll be dead when I stop seeing something funny. Ethel says it's not funny at all; Ethel sits down on me every once in awhile.

U: Were their county fairs around here?

W: Lord, yes. They used to have races. I won a prize driving in one

of the buggy driving contests. It surprised me to death because they had these older drivers in there. It was when I first married. I had a good looking horse, and the horse won it. I knew how to handle her. This was Lucibelle that I said was such a fine horse. We were driving and this neighbor down here had been driving all her life as had all the rest of them. I thought, "I'll go in there, but I won't win anything." Bonniebelle broke; she was trotting along and all at once she started galloping. I just reached over and took the whip out of that thing and gave her a tap. I knew how to handle her. She came on back down and got in her pace and went right on trotting just like she'd always done. I won first place. (laughter)

U: Where did they have the fair?

W: Up in Aberdeen. They had a race track there. Nearly all the towns had race tracks. In Columbus, they had a real sure enough race track.

U: Did you ever go to dances around here?

W: Oh Lord, yes. I chaperoned more dances than I've got money. They used to always chaperone them, but now they don't want the mothers to go any longer. But we used to go with them; they didn't go without a chaperone. They didn't need them so much, but all the mothers went with them.

U: Well, I don't have any more questions. Thank you very much for this second interview.

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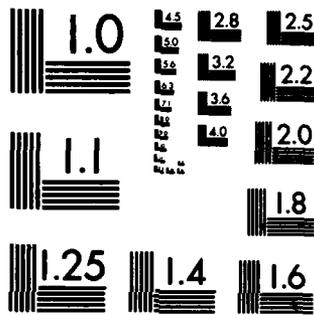
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Addendum to Mrs. Ethel Watson's interviews.

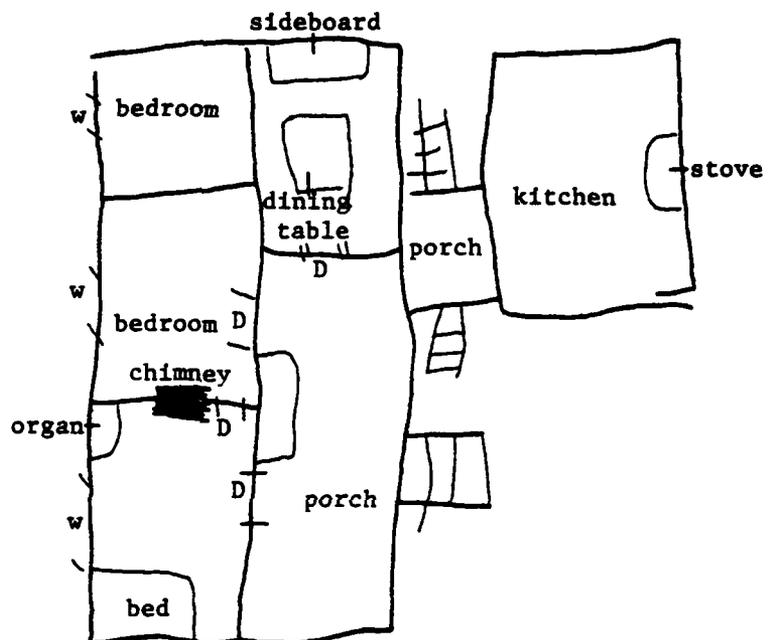
On August 15, 1980 at Mrs. Watson's home a conversation took place between Mrs. Watson's daughter, Alice Louise Watson Tucker, and Peggy Anderson. The following information summarizes that conversation.

Alice Louise Watson, as a child, has seen the remnants of the Cox house located on the Cox place. It stood on the side of a large hill on the Cox place. Only portions of the walls of the house were still standing. It was very delapidated when she saw it, and it may have partially burned. There was still one large chimney standing on the west end of the house. The big open fireplace was brick, but the hearth was made of stone. A large stone at the center of the front hearth area could be removed. As children, they would often remove this stone. There was a hollow area below the hearth stone that lent credence to the story of the burial of the Cox gold. The house itself faced east and appeared to have been two-story. There was a garden area south of the house and to the north was an overflowing well with cypress casing. The casing was made by slave labor. The remnants of the house were later used as a cabin for sharecroppers by Henry Watson II.

The house that Mattie Bennett lived in on the west side of the Vinton road below Henry Watson III's was once occupied by white families. After the house fell into disrepair, it was cut down and used as a cabin for sharecroppers.

A tornado passed through the Vinton area and damaged a grave in the Vinton Cemetery. The casket had a piece of glass in it and the body could be viewed through it. The man had been buried clean shaven, but a full beard grew after he was buried. The tornado may also have damaged the Trotter house. Standing on the bluff at the Linger Longer camphouse, you could look east into Lowndes County and see a swath that the tornado had cut, about fifty feet wide. The trees that grew back there were shorter.

The old road from the general store to the river used to start in front of the store and run north of the house that Lucy Natcher lived in and then cut down to the river. The road was deeply eroded north of Lucy's because it ran in a low area. Where the road hit the river was north of the standing Watson camphouse. This section of the road was also deeply eroded and dropped sharply.



 oak

Figure 1. Floor plan of the Trotter house. Drawing by Ethel Watson.