i ain't lying

$3.50

Volume 2 Winter, 1982 No. 1

Featuring--

ARTEMEASIE BRANDON
SAUL DORSEY
GENEVA GIBSON
BERNICE GREEN
ROSETTA MACKEY
FRANK OLIVER
HYSTERCINE RANKIN
MARY LEE TRIMBLE
EARLY WREN

Since we published out first issue in Spring, 1981, many good things have happened. In Fall, 1981, the Claiborne County Board of Supervisors allocated $10,000 to support the activities of Mississippi: Cultural Crossroads. That support enabled us to rent office space in an old warehouse across from Port Gibson High School and a block away from Chamberlain-Hunt Academy. It also enabled us to match a Media Artist in the Schools grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission.

Through the Media Artist grant we set up a darkroom in our offices and got to work. The students began taking pictures during interviews, and, as they gained confidence and skill, branched out to take pictures for their families and for school events. Several students were fortunate enough to see their pictures in print in the local newspaper.

In June, 1982, Mississippi: Cultural Crossroads launched the Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater. Under the direction of Jim Veenstra, with the help of Sarah Chambliss, local high school students, inexperienced in drama, developed a series of improvised skits. While developing their dramatic skill they performed for groups of children at locations around the county.

In the past three years our summer art program has more than doubled under the direction of Mrs. Tonsie Wicks. This year 130 young children met for two weeks, painting, coloring, and building sculptures. Each teacher worked out the activities for her group ahead of time with consultant Keith Alford. Local high school students helped as aides. The children's work was exhibited on the final day of the program and again for a month this fall at the Harriette Person Memorial Library.

We began the interviews for this issue of **I AIN'T LYING** in Spring, 1981. Last Fall, while some students finished up work on the early interviews, others conducted more. In late Spring, with all the transcribing finished, we began to lay out the articles. By Fall we realized we had enough material for two issues. We continued to lay out, and now have completed work on both issues. The earliest interviews are published in this issue.

All of us who worked on this issue wish to thank Sarah Chambliss and James Miller for their continuing help; Joyce Stewart, who typed all of our manuscripts; Alcorn State University's Communications Program for the occasional use of a computer; David Crosby, who with Joyce's help typed the manuscript into the computer and helped us edit the transcripts into finished articles.

My thanks go to Lena Davis and Veronica Buck who transcribed at home interviews for students who had moved on, to Marhea Farmer and Sarah Crosby, who did what needed to be done each step of the way, and to all the other students who took a risk and tried something new.

Above all we wish to thank the men and women who took time to talk to us and tell us about themselves and Claiborne County. We learned much and are eager to learn more.

—Patricia Crosby

i ain't lying

Volume 2 Winter, 1982 No. 1

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENEVA GIBSON 3

EDDIE DUFFIN 12

MARY LEE TRIMBLE 20

HOMECOMING 26

ARTEMEASIE BRANDON 29

ROSETTA MACKEY 40

BERNICE GREEN 43

EARLY WREN 48

FRANK OLIVER & SAUL DORSEY . . . 55

HYSTERCINE RANKIN 61

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In working on the second issue of **I AIN'T LYING** I met many interesting people who told me about past experiences in their lives, each one telling a story that seemed magic, leaving us spellbound for many days to come. The most amazing thing was seeing people who were so different but in some ways alike come together to form **I AIN'T LYING.**

The work that we did in order to complete this magazine was very hectic, but the people that we worked with made the task seem a little easier. The many hours spent transcribing, editing, and laying out the articles were demanding. And then there was the printing and developing of the pictures, which turned out to be the most fun of all.

As you read the stories in this magazine, you will learn things about Port Gibson and its people. Some of the things have been lost down through the years, such as the Rabbit's Foot Minstrel Show, many songs that once were sung, and the one-room school house.

To most people who visit our town, Port Gibson is known as the "City of Churches," but to us at the magazine it is the people who live here, people who will be and who have been featured in our magazine, people who are unique and possess a style and culture that are truly their own.

--Marhea Farmer

PICTORIAL CREDITS

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8 S. Crosby; 14 Moore; 24 de la Garza; 26 Theriot; 27 Farmer; 41 Theriot; 48 O. Davis; 63,65,66 Moore; 67 O. Davis; 69 Moore; 70 O. Davis.

Geneva Gibson

Interview by Sarah Crosby
Transcribed/edited by Sarah Crosby

I met Miss Geneva Gibson when I was in the ninth grade. She came to Addison Junior High School for a week and taught my home economics class to quilt. During that week we pieced and quilted a red, white, and blue nine-patch, all by hand. While we were piecing, each section we did was checked by Miss Gibson. Her high standards and eventual approval gave us a definite feeling of accomplishment.

Miss Gibson's advice to us, as young people, was "get the most education you can." She said that education is more important today than ever before, because now almost all jobs require a high school diploma.

Also during the interview, Miss Gibson described remedies for everything from high blood pressure to chicken pox, many that she uses and some that she has only heard about.

Miss Gibson has lived in the Ingleside Community all her life, and is a member of Old Come and See Missionary Baptist Church. She is known and admired throughout the community and is affectionately referred to as Miss Geneva.

--Sarah Crosby

[What was it like when you were little?]

Well, I was born in Claiborne County before the war. 1916. You know we was poor and didn't have nothing much, but I just loved to play and that kept me going. We played all kinds of games. Ball, softball, and hide-and-go-seek.

[Did you have softball teams?]

Uh-huh. We played if it hit the ground and you caught it on the first

bounce, you was out. Then you got to hit and that person was out. Different ones would hit, just like I have so many on my side, or I'd be on the side with so many, you know. Mostly it'd be about nine, if we had them. If not, three or four just gang up and go to playing. Uh-huh, just to be playing.

And what that [game where] you skip? With them figures in it? Hop-scotch! We just put down something in the road or on the ground out there in the hard yard. You know, how was that thing go? One, two, three, or something. How was that? You jump way over and then you run round and--y'all know what I'm talking about, but I done forgot exactly how it went then.

[Were girls allowed to play baseball in those days?]

Oh, yes ma'am! Girls were rough as boys then, just like they is now. More so.

[Where did you go to school?]

Ingleside School. My favorite teacher was Miss Roseanna Tyler. She just seemed like she was a sweet person. She didn't teach long, but while she did teach us she was my favorite. I done forgot my books, but when I was going to school, if I could get to the subject, I had the story. The whole story. If it was three pages, I had it off by heart. But I done forgot the subjects of those lessons now.

[How long did you go to school?]

Not too long. I passed to the fifth. I didn't go to school long.

[What made you stop?]

I just didn't like no whipping, and I kinda got scared of the teacher that I was under then and stopped. I wasn't pregnant or nothing like that. I [was] just a big girl, you know, and she'd whip big and little. I decided I would stay at home to keep from getting whipped. My mama had done passed, too, and I didn't want no whipping.

[What was the first job you had when you were growing up?]

Hoeing. All I know. The first time I had to pick one hundred pounds of cotton, I think I was fourteen. And I like to had a fit.

[What'd you get paid for picking a hundred pounds?]

Oh, about fifty cents. I think long about that. Seventy-five cents, something like that.

[How long did it take you to pick a hundred pounds?]

One day. That's the reason I like to had a fit. We didn't start too early [in the day] cause people didn't used to like for you to pick that dew cotton. You know, make it kind of heavy. You used to have to let the cotton dry off before you could work. Spike of rain come, you had to quit or either sit down out there till it dries some.

I worked for fifty cents a day and fifty cents a hundred and all like that. Uh-huh. Y'all have a fit now if they tell y'all to work fifty cents a day. I don't blame you, but we couldn't do no better. We used to have to get us hoes and things and go on the road and cut bushes for to get [our] food. And in the graveyard, [too]. That ain't been a good while, [either] --I was a grown woman when that happened. Money was so scarce they was giving you some kind of little old scrip, you know. No money. Some kind of scrip, go to a store and go get some groceries off it, didn't give you no money.

[Who were you working for then?]

Well, who was that? I reckon he was governor or something the other. Mr. Norwood--I can't call the first name now--he was the head of it [around here]. But I think that was

something like stamps are now. They didn't give you no money, they give you some kind of little scrip to go to a store and get you some groceries. It's rough now, [but] it was rougher then.

[Do you garden a lot?]

Not much. I ain't able now, but I likes it though.

[One day when I came to visit, you were shelling butterbeans and throwing the hulls out front. Why did you do that?]

They say that make them bear, for people to walk over them. That what they say.

[Is there anything else you do to help make the plants grow or bear better?]

Yes. I burn that okra what I cut. Cut that tip and bottom off it and burn that. Now I think that's a really good thing. Carry it out in the yard, if I ain't got up a wood heater, and burn it.

[That'll help things grow?]

That what they say. And I believe them. You know, help that okra to bear. It'll start it to bearing, [and] then it'll just bear fast and good. My son daddy say he cut his [leaves] off this year. Cut it off and it put back out and start to bearing like crazy. I hadn't heard about okra, but I heard about peas, just like them peas what I was shelling. When they stop bearing they say you cut them off, and they'll put back out and go to bearing. That's what they say.

[Do you plant by the signs?]

Not all the time, cause if I got an almanac, I don't understand it all the time and I just go on and plant, hoping I get a mess of something. Now that man over there--Sam, Josephine's husband--he don't plant by no nothing. Just get his hoe and go on down the hill and plant, and anything he plant, it does good.

[Who built your house?]

Chester Jackson and Henderson Nash. Better known by Sawyer and Nappy. A whole lot of people know them by that name. They called Henderson Nappy, and called Chester Sawyer. A whole lot of people say, "Yeah, I know old Sawyer. I know old Nappy, uh-huh." Sawyer, he got a nail in every house round but that'n right there. He was a pretty good little old jack-leg carpenter.

[Do you remember any remedies from your childhood?]

Yes'm. They used to have an old weed they call jimsonweed. Lord have mercy, that stuff smelled so bad and taste so bad, but it would make you feel better. And there used to be bittertop weeds. I don't know if you see any of them now or not. It got a little yellow bud in the top of it, and it'd be little leaves sticking down all around it. It's a bunch of them on Big Black dump. I saw them when I was up that road. Last month we went to Karnac [an old ferry landing on the Big Black River] to fish. We went in by Mr. Anderson Tully's, and on that dump, on the outside of the bridge, just a plenty of them. The little yellow leaves. I say, "Well, here is a bittertop. It's bitter, but it's good for the fever.

You see that big-leaf flower there in my yard? That's good for the fever. A lady slipper. You take a leaf, and if you want to you warm it, and put it on you. If you got fever bad it'll parch that leaf on you.

Just put it on you. If you have it bad enough you used to just wrap a person up in them things. Just leaves, just wrap them in that leaf.

My mama had a hot bottle. That's a bottle you put pepper, salt, coal oil, and, I think, Sloan's linament for to rub for hurt. It was good, too. She mostly had it for herself, cause she had bad knees. But it was good.

You know, olden times the parents used to go in the woods and get this sarsparilla. Dig up the roots and bring it to the house, wash it off and put it out in the sun, let it dry and make tea out of it. They talk about if you have any kind of bad blood, or something or other in your blood, that sarsparilla tea would bring it out. Some people just like it. They used to put milk and sugar in it, you know. It tastes good. Just drink it for to drink it. But still they say it's good for anything was in your blood.

[What did you do for poison ivy?]

I got that once in my life. I was real small then. Used sweet milk. Wash in it. Warm it and just wash in it. I ain't never broke out no more. I was quite small then, but I remember it all right.

[What did your mama do for the mumps?]

Used to have an old hog jawbone, you know, and they get that marrow out of that jawbone and put turpentine in that and mix it around and get behind it and rub you up like this [under your jaw].

[What about the chicken pox?]

You hear them talk about go in the hen house and go up through the top and come out of it. Go in the hen house and go up through the top. It would dry them off. That what they used to say. Now I ain't never see nobody do that, but they used to say that. Go through the door and go out through the top. Dry up them chicken pox.

They say if you got a crook in your neck, you get to a hog pen where a hog done rubbed with that mud, and rub your neck where he done been rubbing, and that crook'll leave out of your neck. I ain't tried that, but I heard it.

[Why do you put mustard in your shoe?]

They say that's good for that pressure, and it is. It cools that hurt down. It'll bring it down. My head felt better right after I put that mustard in these old shoes. I say, "My pressure must be up."

[When did you first learn how to quilt?]

Oh, I reckon about fifty-five years ago. My mama [taught me].

[Do you remember when you did

your first one by yourself?]

No, not really, cause all the time, you know, we'd have help. Until here lately. People don't visit one another now to help out in nothing like that. But back [then] you didn't have to do nothing like that by yourself. You have help, day or night. Tell somebody come help me to quilt, well, they'd come help. But since then people got scattered, you know, and don't fool with one another to amount to nothing. And that make you have to be by yourself.

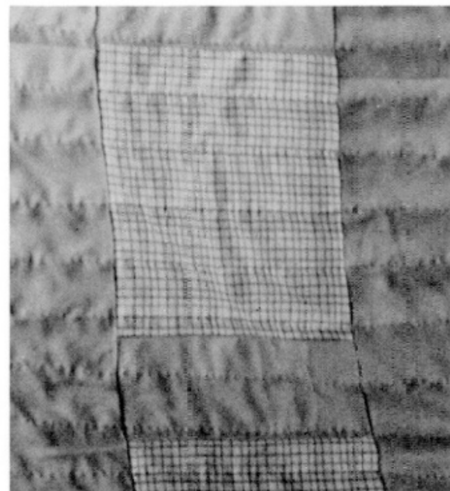
I used to quilt with my sister Fannie, and my sister Beatrice, and Ruth Nash. We four would sure enough be quilters together. They all done passed and gone.

[Do you have any favorite patterns or colors that you like in a quilt?]

My mama didn't piece no fancy quilts like the people of today, which is the reason I can't piece no fancy ones. I do like to have a little speck of red about a quilt. I don't know why, and I don't just like red. I ain't fond of red, but when it come to a quilt I like to have a little speck of red about it. Look like it sets it off.

[This sample of how people used to quilt--would you tell me about it.]

That's just a frame. The quilt is baste in there, you know, with the thread. I didn't do that. I've seen that done, but I was to young to do that at that time. They'd hang that or put it on a something like a horse. They didn't roll, you know. That's the way they used to quilt when I was young. They'd have it stretched whole, just like this.



Let me show you how I do it. It's padded in now, see. This the quilt. This is the lining and this is the top. This is your frame here. You tack the quilt to this frame, all the way down [on each end]. Now I'm fixing to roll it up to where I'm a start to sewing about half way of it. Now see, I got it about half rolled under. Then you take this [board] and put it over here [perpendicular to the others]. That's for to stretch it. And the last one, that's gonna do the stretching. Then you tack [the quilt to the two side pieces]. You put a nail in and nail it there. Then you nail it here. The last one that you nailed, you push it. Just push that last one, sure enough. That's gonna stretch your whole quilt like it ought to be stretched. And then if it don't be stretched like you want it, you go between them tacks and catch it, the lining and the top, and pull it up on this frame here and tack in between them tacks to make it tight up under there where won't no slack be under the bottom of it.

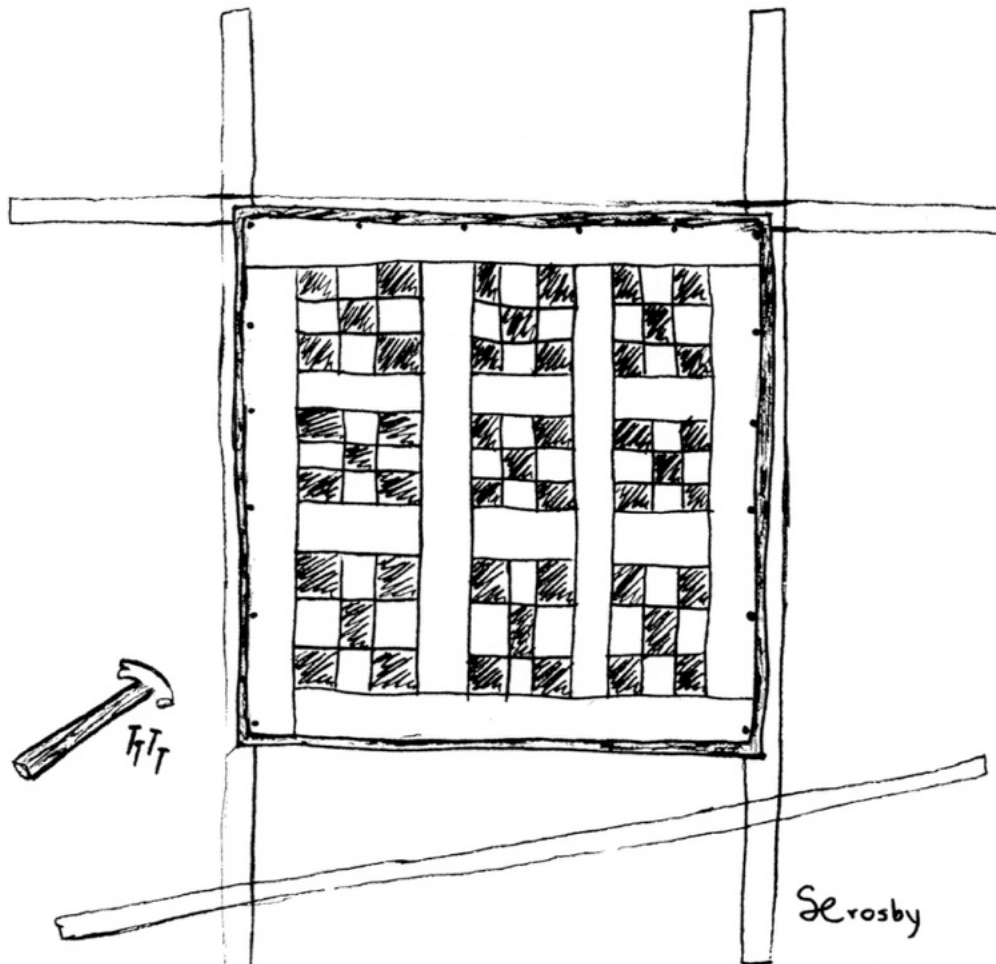
[Why is it important that there isn't any slack in it?]

It'll make puckers, and you don't want that unless'n you can't help it.

[How do you decide which way to quilt each one?]

I just say, "Well, I'm a just run some rows across this and be through with it." I can't quilt in but two ways, and that's the straight rows or either checked.

[So if you're in a hurry you do straight rows. About how long does it take you?]



If I could put up one today, if I could get it in [the frame], by nine o'clock tonight I'll be able to take it out. That straight row, you know. Just running straight up. I been feeling too bad to quilt lately. I done run two together since I saw you, but I was feeling too bad to do it, yes ma'am. If I don't have too much to do, I just sit there and straight row it on out.

[When you get a bag of material, how do you decide what to do with it?]

I don't know. I reckon I just say, "Well, I'll just strip this this-a-way, or just gonna run this this-a-way. All I can see.

[Now if you're gonna make a ninepatch--you do that every once in a while--how do you do that?]

Oh, I cut my pieces for that. I get me a piece of pasteboard, you see, and cut it, and then lay my pasteboard on my material and cut it like that. Mostly I strips them nine-patches. I mostly put a little strip between them nine-patches. [I put them together in a strip until it's] as long as the bed. Then I sew that single strip down the long side, and piece up me some more blocks, you know, strip up me some more blocks. Sew them to that second piece. That's the way I do it.

[To make a cowcatcher I] go round [a square piece] on each side, see, just like that [until I get] a square block. I sew me a piece here, then I sew me a piece here on this side, then I come back and I sew me another piece here. Then I sew me another piece here on that side like that.

[Is it important that the colors match in a cowcatcher?]

No, not just really, but the people done got so now they likes colored quilts. They don't want no just one color. They want all sorts of the colors.

[Do you remember the first time you voted?]

Oh, yes. I was good and grown. Mrs. Easley was the Circuit Clerk and she wasn't too particular about colored folks coming in for to register.

[Do you think it's important to vote?]

I don't know. It might be.

[If I were old enough, would you tell me to vote?]

Yeah, I'd tell you to vote, cause I reckon it's an honor. I reckon it's just good to be able to vote. I'd tell you to vote.

[Who do you think has done the most good that you remember?]

Well, I don't know whether or not I ought to say it, because I don't know too much, but from what I been hearing, since it happened, look like to me Martin Luther King done more than anybody, cause he wanted peace out of confusion. And when they got violent, then they wanted nonviolent. I say, "Well, they done killed nonviolent. He had them to go along, nonviolent. He wouldn't even hit back. When they hauled away and killed him and people went crazy, they went to saying, "Nonviolent, nonviolent." Well, they done killed nonviolent.

He did [good]. Far as I hear since he been gone. I didn't hear nothing about Martin Luther King before he was killed. I don't know why. I reckon it was just cause I wasn't paying no attention to the radio. I didn't have no TV at that time, you see, and I didn't like radios to amount to nothing. When I first got a TV I didn't care nothing about it no more than the news and turn it off. And after Martin Luther King got killed, then I could hear about him, and he would appear on the TV a little while and say a few words. Well, them words he said taught me.

When you want peace, you can't want no better thing, cause peace is the best thing you can have. If you ain't got nothing but bread and water and you got peace, you 'll make it, but you can have this house full of money and ain't in no peace, it ain't no good to you. Just confused all the time. You won't know what to do with the money. You too confused. But you got that bread and water and contented. You can sit there and just bite that bread and drink that water, and just sit and look all around everywhere with a contented mind and say, "Lord, I thank you."

[Do you think times are better now than they were when you were growing up, or do you think they're worse now?]

Harder. The times ain't as hard, you know, with getting food and clothes and things like that, but the way people live is worse. They don't get along with one another like they used to. People used to love one another back yonder. Look like all that's gone. But so far as folk having more money and more clothes and shoes and better homes and things, it's better. But peace and harmony, singing and praying, are just about gone.

[Do you think the president is going to make things better?]

He ain't gonna help us, but God got the whole world in his hands. We don't have to worry. President can't beat God. He can't beat God, now. So we just lean and depend on the Lord. Uh-huh, a few prayers. We need to pray more. Prayer takes us through. The president can't do no more than God let him do, and He ain't gonna let him go but so far. He can't beat him. So he just well to see it that way and straighten up and fly right, and do just as right as he can, cause he can't beat God. I can't, and he can't, and nobody else can't beat him. He say, "The earth is mine, and the fullness thereof." That make Presi-

dent Reagan and me and you and everybody else belong to the Lord.

I belongs to Old Come and See Missionary Baptist Church. [I used to] sing, pray, usher, and go to Sunday school. I wasn't no teacher or nothing like that. Used to be treasury holder and stuff like that. I liked the choir and I did love ushering. I don't know why, but I just liked to usher.

[What advice would you give young people coming up now?]

Young peoples coming up now? The advice I would give them is to love your parents and obey your parents and respect your parents, and respect yourself and everybody else, and give honor to those who honor due, and go to school to the limit. Get all you can out of school, cause you gonna need it. Try to get the best education that you can get, cause that's gonna help now.

Yeah, we used to could take a hoe and just go on out there and dig in the ground for a living. You can't hardly do that now. You need to know how to read and write for to do mostly anything now. A little anyhow. People used to jump on they old iron-wheeled tractors and drive them on. Now they wants a diploma for you to get on these tractors and things now to drive. They asking for a diploma for everything mostly. So my advice to the young people to try to get all the education that they can get.

Eddie Duffin

Interview by Darryl Warner
and Vincent Goods
Transcribed by Octavis Davis
Edited by Marhea Farmer

Last winter Darryl and I went to Mr. Duffin's home to inquire about hunting. He told us that there are a few important things you should know about hunting. They are, "Never go a long way alone, and always have your own gun." He also told us about how he raises his dogs, and when they were sick how he took care of them by just doing some things that his elders did to help their animals. He told us he'd been hunting for about sixty years. He said he couldn't tell us how many deer he had killed but it was a lot over the years. Then he told us the game he like to hunt: rabbits, squirrels and deer. He likes deer the most because it gives you the most amount of fight in stalking and killing it. He showed us the guns he had collected over the years he had been hunting. There were five rifles and about six shotguns. He showed us how to use the guns correctly in the woods and out of the woods.

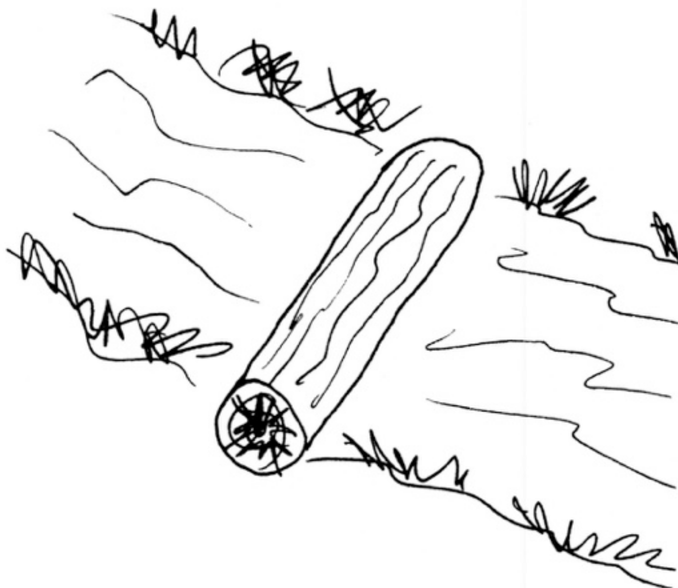
Eventually it got too dark for us to see outside and we had to go inside. We talked about his family and the hunting club that he and his brother started when they were young. Mr. Duffin is a superb hunter. He is one of the best hunters in the county. My advice to hunters is to go to Mr. Duffin's Hunting Club.

--Vincent Goods

[I was born] in Claiborne County in 1914.

[How did you get to school?]

Walked. Had to go 'cross a creek. Walk a log, mud and rain. Then had to come home and work when you came from school. You see, most of the time,



'long in March, we had to knock stalks. Didn't have no stalk cutter then. You had to cut you a stick and cut cotton stalks. Rake 'em up and burn 'em. They were too thick to plow under, you see. Didn't have no tractor then, nothing but a mule and a horse.

[How long have you had cows?]

Ah, ever since before the first year I married. See, when I married, mama give me a cow, hog, and a rooster and four hens.

[What started you driving the school bus?]

I had stopped work. I ain't never asked for no job. No, I ain't never asked for no job. [Professor] Robinson came right here and asked me. I ain't never asked for no job. Ain't never been hunting a job. If I quit work, if anyone else was working, you see, they come here and hunt me. All us brothers like that.

They didn't give you nothing when I was a young man. You had to work. I never will forget this. We were picking cotton down there, hoeing cotton, and the man right down the road had a camp down there. He was logging--he named Tank Raner. It was just about day, near, and we had to walk five mile home, and we met him in the car. He say, "What you all doing knocking off?" Say it time. "Naw," he say, "No, you all going back, work till lightning bugs come out." And we went back there and hoed. You could see the lightning bugs, too. Went on home. We didn't want to go back there.

One of my brothers left home. Stepdaddy told him you got to work, go back. Well, we drug on back. We worked till the lightning bug come out.

Now would you all do that? You had to do it. You had to do it. Anytime them old folks told you, you go back. You see, you had to do what they say. I didn't want to go. You earn fifty cents a hundred for picking cotton, fifty cents a hundred. Hundred pounds, take a head to make a hundred. I used to pick three hundred. I used to pick one hundred and fifty against dinner. Yeah, in the hill--and that was clean cotton. You were helping carry the house home. You were helping buying grocery at home.

In the Delta anything you get in your hand, you see, you put it in the sack. [But] you had [to have] clean cotton in the hill. They didn't have the kind of gin here they did in the Delta. Delta level land, up there in Hollandale. I say, I picked three hundred in the hills.

Folks in the Delta, they be in the field at day light. We had to milk and like that. Sun be way up there when we get in place. I had nine cows to milk. I had a large can had to get full of milk. Had a twelve pound pail . You had to strip the cow to get that, that's where you get the butter. You could come up with milk short, but don't come up with that stripping short. You see, you all don't know about stripping. That's the last thing come out of the cow's tit. See, you milk two tits. Leave the calf two tits, and when she let down that stripping you tie the calf off. That rich milk, cream. That's cream.

[What else did you do?]

We went to hunting when we come up. Three of us used to go to hunting first part of the night, and if we didn't kill nothing first part of the night, the other three got up and went to hunting now that we come in. See, we was selling the hides. That's where we got us money from then--coon hide, possum, polecat. You don't know nothing about polecat, do you? Some people call them skunk.

[You sold the hide?]

Sure, you had to stretch 'em and let 'em get dry, and we had to ship 'em every week.

[How much you get?]

You'd get five dollars for a big coon then, fifty cents for a possum, a dollar, two and three for a polecat. Good money. Black polecats, one broad-backed polecat had just a little dot on him, they got five dollars for him. The black one, you'd get about ten dollars for a jet black one got long hair on him. You done seen one, ain't you?

[How old were you when you started hunting?]

About seven years old, hard up hunting when I was eight. We had one gun, single barrel gun, and all five us used to buy a quarter's worth of shell and go to hunting, see, and this one killed a squirrel, and the next one killed a squirrel.

[How much was a quarter's worth of shells?]

About ten for a quarter. [I learned to hunt] at home. I don't stay over three miles from where I was born. I been hunting all my days. Ain't nothing but hunting. I'd set my plate down to

go to hunting, right now. Well, the white people used to hunt with us. Lot of time, see, we had the dogs, and they'd buy the shell; and lot of time they'd go out there and they wouldn't get a shot, and we'd kill all the squirrels.

[When did you start hunting deer?]

I started hunting deer about three years before I went in the army. World War II. Been had a deer club every since I come out the army.

[Anything special you do to join the deer club?]

Yeah, you got to have your money, and we don't let no drinking. If you got to drink, see, you can't get on the deer club, 'cause whiskey and buck shot don't mix.

[Any special age?]

No, we give all the boys go to school a cut. School age used to didn't pay, but dog feed and things so high, see. We got some hunting pay twenty-five dollars.

[What you do to join, just come to you?]

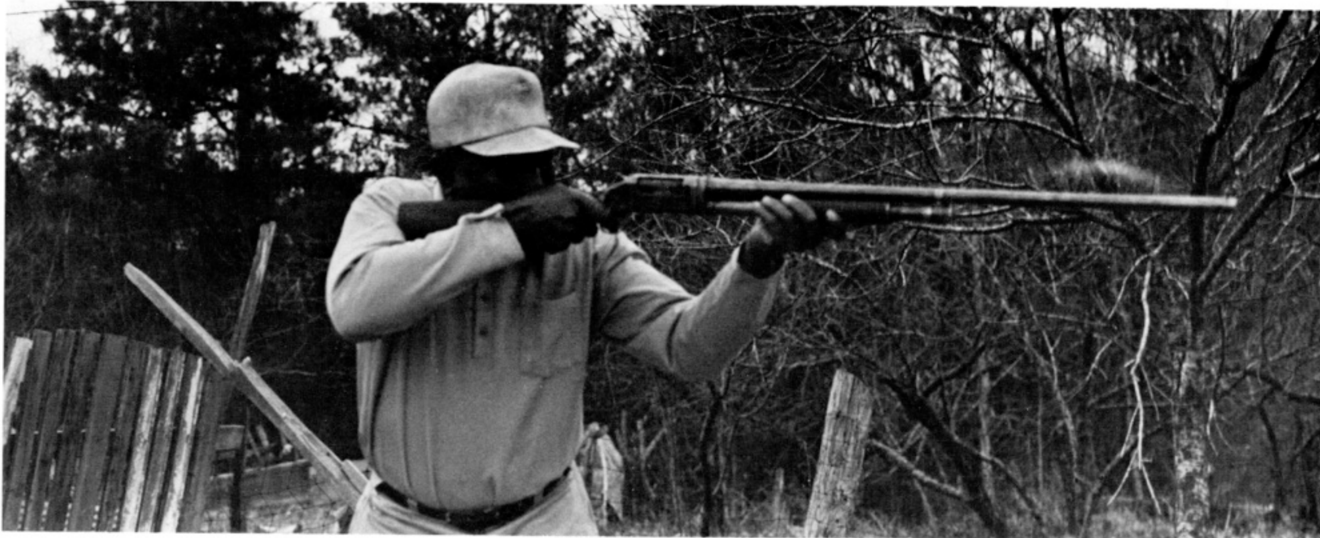
Yeah, I'm president. Reverend Moore from Gloster is the vice-president, Carl Brandon [is secretary], and Danny Richard from Jackson, vice. Know Carl Brandon, don't you? He work in the schools.

[What does it take to be a good hunter?]

Well, you got to love to hunt to be a good hunter. You got to love sport. You can come out here now and if you ain't got your mind on hunting, you go down there and sit down and go to sleep. That what it takes to be a good hunter.

[You ever see anyone go to sleep?]

Yeah, plenty of 'em. A dog walk up and lick they mouth and they never wake up. Yeah, have a bed there look like a cow done layed down, plenty of 'em. I be carry the dog, they be laying down asleep. He have his lunch on 'em, the dog be trying to turn him over to get his lunch out of this pocket coat.



[What kind of gun did you use?]

Pump, old pump, twelve gauge. The only kind I can use. Biggest of 'em got automatic. When we would use single barrel we killed more deers than we kill now. But you see, they got these automatic when a deer come by he just squeeze the trigger and shoot and sometime the deer be cross the road and he just shooting at it. But a single barrel you didn't have time to. When you got two shots you had to have a shell in your hand to get two shots. See, you break it down. You know how a single barrel does.

[Who was the best hunter you have hunted with?]

My nephew, Abraham Brown. He stay in Columbia now.

[Why him?]

Well, see didn't nothing get by us. Anytime we shot we had gravy. That's the best, yeah. See, we hunted all the way from here down to the church. You supposed to catch the dog if the deer go cross the road. See, me and him would catch [the dog] and kill the deer. But so many shoot at the deer and let the dog go on across. See, we don't hunt no further than the road. They go on, somebody else hunt then.

[What kind of stand do you like?]

I like on the ground. I don't like no tree stand. Well, I tell you if you [shoot] a deer on the ground you get another shot on him. But see, if you up on a stand you got to come down and you got to watch yourself when you come down. When you come down you don't know which way the deer gone.

[After you kill a deer, what do you do?]

When you first kill him you cut

his seeds out. See, if you don't cut them out he be so strong, an old deer, you can't hardly eat him. Castrate. Bring him to the lamp, that's where you dress him at. Then cut his throat. Well, we got fifteen or twenty men, they skins 'em. You got to know how to skin a deer. Be clean with him. See, you ain't never skinned one, you go there, he'll look like a hairy worm, all the hair on him. See, you start, you hang him up by the head and split him open down here. And split all the legs open, and catch him behind the neck and cut a little and just swing down, and the hide slip off. They skin better from the head, you see, squirrel or anything. Start right around the neck, won't no meat stay on the hide. If you skin him from the hind part the meat'll stick to his hide.

[When is the best time to go hunting?]

Early in the morning. Everything hungry then, you see. Squirrels, and deers be wanting to lay down.

[How did you start your deer club?]

Well, this how we started. Just like you want to go to hunting, he want to go to hunting, we'd get together and go to hunting. See when you kill a deer you bring it to one of us houses and we meet there every morning. You bring your friend, you see. That's how the deer camp got started. When we started the deer camp we just dug some holes and put a little shed to go in out the rain. Then from there we walled it in. Wasn't no floor in it and then we put a floor in it and put it up on blocks. Now we got frigidaire and everything in there now. If you hunting and got to go home you can leave your meat right there in the deep freezer till you get back. Used to have to wait for your meat.

[How do people find out about your club?]

Just like you hunt, you go around and be telling your friends. You bring some to hunt. He go back and tell his friends. See, that's how you get started. You ain't got to advertise. All you got to do is treat 'em right.

[How do you tell if you gonna let a person hunt on your deer club?]

Some of us got to mostly recommend 'em. Most of the people hunt with me, mostly all of 'em belong to church. They ain't gone bring no body to us that always get drunk or always clowning.

[They got to go to church?]

Well, they ain't got to go to church, but see, we don't hunt on Sundays, never have. We don't hunt on Sundays. We used to hunt everyday.

[You hunt through the week?]

Yeah, but most of the men is working now. You got to hold the job. We just hunt mostly on holidays. Just like the hunting season is open right now, deer season open right now. With a muzzle loader, you see. It open up Saturday with a regular gun.

[Do you still sell skins?]

We don't sell skins. We been burning 'em up. And a man came here last year, he brought something to put 'em in and when we skin we always put 'em in that barrel and he would come in at night and pick 'em up, skins.

[Mrs. Duffin, can you shoot?]

Sure, sure she can shoot. Born in the country. Sure she can shoot.

[If someone gave you an automatic would you use it, or a pump?]

I already [got] one rifle, don't use it. You got to keep a automatic clean. If you don't keep it clean, you go out there and get a little rain or a

little dust in it, if you don't clean it, it ain't gonna automatic for you. That's the reason I use a pump.

[Do you have your father's gun?]

No, I got a old gun I got from a white lady up there to Port Gibson. See, I got a old shotgun. I reckon it was old. It's a old pump. First rifle I owned, it was a twenty-two. After I got one I loaned it to my brother-in-law and his house got burned down.

[How much did the gun cost when you first bought it?]

I paid fifteen dollars. Used to get a single barrel for seven dollars. First single barrel I got I paid seven dollars and kept it about thirty-five years and sold it for twenty-five dollars. Could have gotten more for it. I paid seven dollars for it. Kept it about thirty-five years and sold it for twenty-five dollars.

[What did you say you do with that gun when you shoot a squirrel?]

It supposed to be plugged. You put a plug in it. It won't hold but three shells. Game warden catch you and it ain't plugged when you hunting a squirrel and you got a fine to pay. You trim a little stick and put it up in there, got a spring in it and you take it loose.

[Why is that?]

Well, they don't allow you to shoot at a squirrel but three times. Give him a chance to live. But a deer you take your plugs out. And a turkey, three times. Gun got to be plugged. Three shells all you supposed to put in it.

[What game warden you got out there?]

J.D. Price. He hunt on a camp other side of Big Boy Walker. You know where Big Boy Walker stay? On that old Alcorn Road coming in there.

[How much land you hunt on?]

About twelve hundred acres. Now that place over there it had twelve hundred acres in. It went up to five dollars an acre. White folks got that now. That was one dollar a acre and this we got on this side was one dollar a acre. Went up on all of it. We pay two dollars for this up here. The same woman got it. She live in California. Timber been cut on this here, so close it growed up. They just thinned out timber on the other place. Yeah, I know it all by heart. Anything you shoot I can go straight to you.

[How long does it take to walk twelve hundred acres?]

See, I go so much a day. Me and Carl carry the dogs. We put three sets in one truck. Three packs, two to three in a pack. I turn loose one pack up here. Sometime we turn loose all three packs in the same area. He have about ten, eight to ten dogs, and I have that many. Deers get stirred then. You out there on your stand. They just come walking through. When too many dogs in there, he got to move out.

[How can you tell with a deer path, where they be running to?]

Look for sign. They have a road. You see, when you get where the deer is plentiful, just like they travel, they have a road.

[When do they travel?]

Well, in the day and at night when they get a rain. They kinda like a rabbit when it start to rain. He get up and start to walking.

[What do they eat?]

Any kinds of weeds, and grass and cane, corn, acorns, soybeans. Eat anything.

[How many deer you kill a day?]

Last year we killed five first day. We have killed twenty, twenty-two and like that. Killed eighteen last year and it was raining all day. Three years straight it was raining all day--have your raincoats and boots and things. You out there in the rain. We killed like seventeen or eighteen with dogs. We had one doe day last year without dogs. We killed four. They ain't giving us no doe day with the dogs this year. Up in these hills you can't hardly get a deer without dogs.

[How you get the deer out the woods?]

Tote 'em, drag 'em. The men drag 'em. See, we got jeeps. Four wheel drives drag 'em, you know. Sometimes you can drive up to them. See we got roads in the woods.

[Well, have you ever had to drag a deer by yourself?]

Yeah, tote 'em by myself.

[Wouldn't that be kind of dangerous?]

No, he'd be dead. Take his guts out.

[I'm talking about other people?]

Well, I notify the people. Yeah, it be dangerous. See, when we start bringing the deer out, I can be right here and the men can be down yonder, know where we come cross the bridge. See, every man know when [I] shout 'em out. I can hoot to the dogs all day long, but I got different hoot. You right out there, you hoot. Next man hoot, next man. You can go plum down to Alcorn. Everybody's supposed to hoot. That carried it on to the end. You see, they knowed we hooting for 'em to come out.

Steady raining last year. We went out and stayed all day. When it starts thundering, we come out. Don't none of them boys come out till I hoot.

[You got some young people in there?]

Yeah, one is Garfield's son. He's the youngest one. We got two from Jackson. So many people out here. They have to hunt five or six year for me to just know their name. But we got one uptown in Vicksburg. He goes to school. He ain't but sixteen. He been hunting. This is his sixth year hunting here. He's just coming sixteen. He's been killing deer ever since he's been out here. He's young. He get out in the woods and be quiet. Anytime you get out in the woods moving around a deer gonna smell you. He standing over there looking at you. But you be out there quiet, you see. Anytime you move, your scent in the air, but when you sit down, your scent right there with you. Just like a rabbit dog. Long as the rabbit's setting he can't come after him. But when that rabbit get up and move, that dog smell him.

[How many deer has the boy killed?]

He kill one every season. One, first season, second season. It used to be where you had a ticket. You couldn't kill but one. See, you kill your first deer your first day, you had to stop hunting. On your license, when you buy your license, was a ticket. You was out there, the game warden come along and you didn't have your ticket, you see, you had a fine to pay. But now it ain't like that. You can kill one every day now.

[Do women ever hunt with you?]

Yeah, we got one that belongs to the club. Got one stay in that trailer out there, her and her husband. And she got a little boy. I think he seven years old, and got a gun too. She keep

him close with her.

[She ever kill anything?]

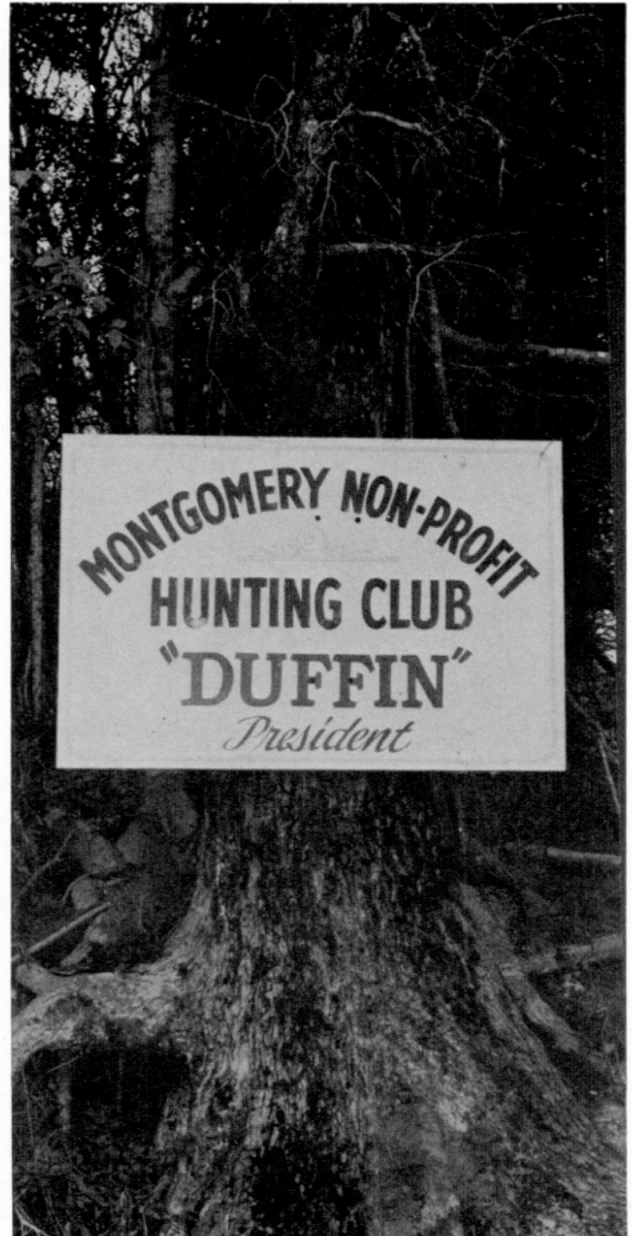
Yeah, you see, you take a woman out there and she gonna be quiet and stay on her stand, but a lot of these men go flopping through the woods. I put one out the other Saturday. And I put him out in the bottom, and I got up on the ridge and I went on down the ridge. The dogs jumped right there and I went down the ridge and could hear something walking down under the hill. And the man had got in front of me. The one I left on the stand had got in front of me.

[Some of these hunters spend the night here?]

Oh, yeah man, we have a lot of them stay here.

[Do they cook for themselves?]

Yeah, they cook for themselves. Most they eat over here. They got a big fellow from Raymond that do all the cooking. Whip him up some eggs and pour over that meat and it be just crunchy. He can cook that stuff. You can't get enough of it. He whip up them eggs and put that flour and stuff on it, and shake it up in a bag. And then he pour them eggs over it and that make it be blistered, just like crackers. He can cook that stuff.



Mary Lee Trimble

Interview by Tracy Breeden
Transcribed by Tracy Breeden
Edited by T. C. Kelleher

Mary Lee Trimble, sharp, decisive, witty and quick. In the short time I spent with Mary Lee I found out a lot about another way of life. I don't mean going down to the hardware store, I mean cutting planks for floors, buying ice for a Sunday picnic, riding horses to school and depending on your garden for your summer and winter supply of food.

Even though she was an orphan at an early age, she has achieved almost everything she wanted. Mary Lee Trimble is the most versatile and down to earth person I've ever met. She makes people feel welcome at the Chamber of Commerce. She is a local historian. She also hunts.

The most important thing about Miss Mary Lee out of everything, is that she will tell anyone what she thinks. I hope you enjoy this article as much as I enjoyed interviewing Mary Lee Trimble.

--Tracy Breeden

I was born in Claiborne County, Port Gison in 1912. June 6th, Invasion Day. World War I Invasion Day.

[What was it like when you were young?]

Well, [I] lived in a beautiful colonial home. Highland Home, up about half a mile west from here. It was sixteen rooms and we had all kind of help--hostesses, maids, and everything. My parents was very rich at that particular time. And I was a very beautiful, bad girl. That's true. Well, I lived out here on a big plantation which was a Spanish [land] grant. And we had, I would say, about fifty tenant houses. And in the hay day, we had a private gin. We had a commissary almost as large as Piggly Wiggly in Port Gibson, as of today. My family was very rich and well off. During the Civil War, my grandfather paid for a whole regiment. I have all that in my genealogy.

When I was growing up we didn't have a telephone out there. We had one bathroom, and you pumped your water. We had lamps. We had a hostler, a man that is a handy man. We had a maid to cook. And we had plenty of cows that were milked morning and night. Then I'd go to town on Sundays. We had a five gallon thing of ice cream, and cakes in there, and all the neighbors would come over and spend the afternoon. We'd eat ice cream. It was [home] made. On Saturday my daddy would send to town with a wagon to get two or three hundred pounds of ice. It was put in saw dust and sacked down. That was to make the ice cream.

[And did that ice last you all week?]

Yeah, most of the time it did. We had a cistern in the cellar. We'd put butter and milk down there to cool.

[Did you buy many of the things you used?]

No, we were self-sufficient. We had everything on the place except sugar, coffee. And we even made our own soap and lard. The soap we made out of lye and hog fat.

[Do you still make many of the things you used to?]

No, I don't do anything I don't have to. But I know how to split a shingle. In the days that I was growing up in covering the tenant houses we took the cyprus and cut logs. I would say about two to three and a half feet and then we had a particular kind of instrument that we sliced those things and made shingles out of them. Now you can see those shingles at the Chamber of Commerce today. We also had them on my home, Highland Home, the hand made shingles.

[Did you go to school?]

My mother was a school teacher and my first year I was taught at home. And my second year I rode a horse to Grand Gulf to school. Old horse was black, named Fanny. There was one teacher. I would say the school room was about thirty by thirty, or maybe forty by forty. And I took corn to feed my horse. And we took our lunch. And we had a pot bellied stove. And we made the fire and kept it going--cut the wood. [I went to] Grand Gulf one or two years, I've forgotten which. Then I went to town. I went to Port Gibson school at the time. It was behind the Presbyterian Church.

[Did you play many games?]

No, I didn't have anyone to play with except little colored children. Most of the time I rode horseback and played baseball with the little colored children.

[How did your parents treat you?]

I was spoiled. Well, I got one whipping in my life. My daddy told me on Sunday not to go down and play baseball in the middle of the road with the little colored boys so I kept on. I didn't stop. So one Sunday, I thought he was taking his siesta, and he went down and got me. Took me into the parlor, took his belt off and that was the end of me going down and playing baseball.

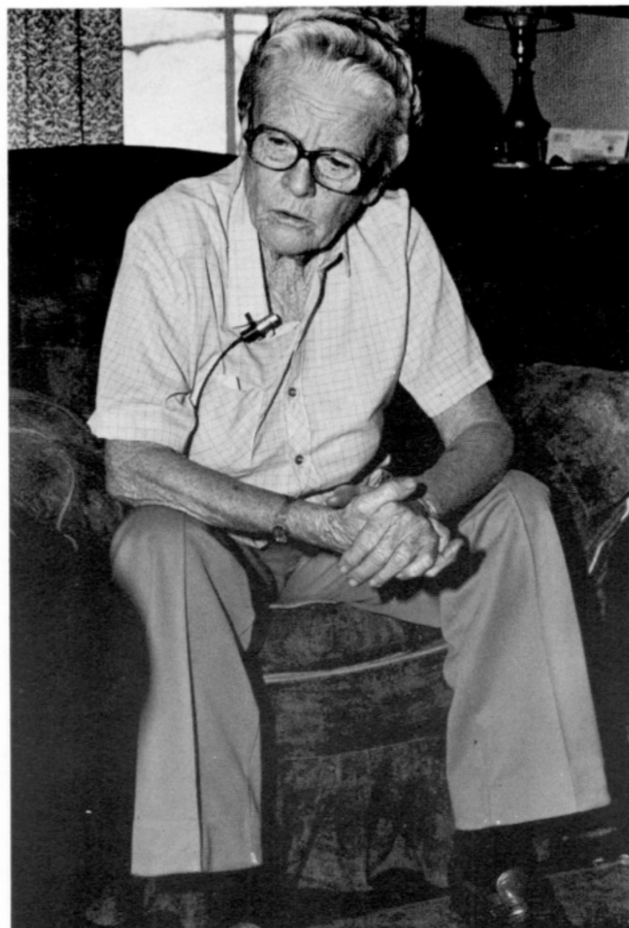
My mother died when I was about seven so I didn't remember my mother too well. My father died when I was ten, so I've been orphaned most of my life. My sister, Pheobe Abraham that just died, [raised me].

[How did your sister help to prepare you for life?]

She made me walk the straight line and she was very good cause it took a many a comb and switch to keep me that way.

[Did you have any adventures?]

Quite a few. One of my nice adventures was when I was in the teens. My brother-in-law was the president of the school board in Port Gibson and he had told us to stay away from the high school over there. Well, we didn't listen so he had sixteen penny nails put in boards and went all the way across the road. So I had a date with this boy and we went over the nails. We had four flat tires. That was a good adventure when I walked home.



[Do you know any ghost stories?]

They say when I was born my mother was sickly. I was raised by this colored woman with a daughter my age named Joby Ward--and Violet lives down there as of today--and she breast fed me. I sat on one side and Joby was on the other. And they told me all of these tales and ghost stories and so forth. I remember one. I'll tell you one as far as I can remmber. I can't be too accurate on it. Down this road here we had a church, used to be where the Mississippi Power and Light had their first offices, slave quarters at the time, you know. Behind those green trees there is the slave cementery. It's there today. Well, anyway, one night they went to church. And they say they saw this horse come by with a man on it, headless. And you couldn't get anybody down that road for a long time. Now I don't know if it's true, but that's what they say. Maggie will still say it true. Maggie is still living. Her mother was one of the slaves on the place. And she died, Aunt Jane, just a few years ago. She was a hundred some odd years old.

[Who was the most important person you knew while you were growing up?]

I would say Mrs. Carrie Ramsey, principal of the Port Gibson High School. I was crazy about her and she did a lot for me.

[In what way?]

Well, Mrs. Ramsey lived across the street from me. She lived with Mrs. Bryan Levy. She lived right across the street from me and I was her chauffeur a lot. And then when Mrs. Levy left her there by herself I'd go for her. And she was my Latin teacher too. I was captain of the basketball team, and very important if I do say so. And she [Mrs. Ramsey] did not want me to get sick so she dosed me up on soda water when I had a cold.

[When you played basketball, who did you play?]

We were in the conference you know, just like they are today. There was Natchez, Red Lick. Red Lick school was awful killers, Brookhaven and others in this particular area down in here.

[What were the rules when you played?]

Well, in the rules in basketall we had the center and the two ends. And we had to stay in that particular area. The guards stayed in their particular place, and the forwards stayed in theirs, and the center stayed [in hers].

[How many people were on the floor for each team?]

Two, four, six people. I played guard. I got fouled practically every game. Sometimes they put me out. Now, I was a pretty good tennis player in my life time. I won quite a few honors and so forth. And I had played with Allen Thompson. He was a champion of Colorado. We played doubles. He was mayor in Jackson for quite a few years. The airport in Jackson is named for him, Thompson Air Field.

[When you played basketball, did you play full court or half court?]

It was divided into three sections. We had to stay in our section. And we got over the lines, we fouled.

[Could you dribble as many times as you wanted?]

I think we could dribble three or four times. I think all girls should have sports. I think it's good for them. It builds their body and their brains, and controls their muscles. I believe in sports in every way.

[When did you join the church?]

I didn't join the church. My mother was a very devout Episcopolian and I took the religion from her, went

right on.

[How big of a part has religion played in your life?]

Well, not so much.

[Did you work when you were young?]

Yeah, all my life. Everything I could get. I graduated in 1931 from high school. And I had worked before high school at a ten cent store. I worked for Mrs. Gibson in the antique shop, old furniture. Any job was available, I took it.

[Did you go to college?]

No, I did not have the money. I graduated in 1931, during the depression.

[What was the depression?]

Well, I was on my way from Florida, back home. I was down there with my two aunts, and I had some money. And we got to Dothan, Alabama. I had a few ten dollar traveling checks. They wouldn't cash them. When we got to Greenwood we had fifty cents. In those days you could buy hamburger for a nickel. When we got to Greenwood the banks closed up. We didn't have any money. A nickel went a long ways then, and so did a penny. You bought a hamburger in those days for a nickel, coca cola, a nickel, candy a nickel. And one of these days it's coming back too. The young people is gonna suffer cause they're all used to too much, and they don't realize what poverty is. All of them are living on a silver platter.

[Do you think it would do some people good to live in poverty a little while?]

Yeah, then they would realize and appreciate things. When everything is handed on a silver and gold platter, you don't appreciate a thing. I'm getting rough, ain't I?

[Where did you meet your husband?]

I met him at the country club in Greenville, Mississippi. I wasn't but sixteen years old, but my aunt lived there and I made my debut in Greenville. I was a member of the Cotillion Club. That's hard to believe, but I was, Greenville Cotillion Club.

[How long have you lived here?]

When I got through with high school during the depression and everything I went to Greenville to live with my aunt. I was gone sixteen years, and I came back to live in this vicinity. I never found a house in Vicksburg so the tenants and I built this house. Most of the lumber came off the place.

[So did you start farming when you came back?]

Yeah, you see during World War II I worked at Camp McCain with the main architect and engineer, and then my husband was drafted and went overseas. And he was gone three years, and I came home and stayed with my sister and helped her with the picture show. And I worked in the post office. I had worked in the post office before. I worked under Miss McLendon. I also ran the place, and my sister's place and my brother's place. He was in England. The total was over three thousand acres I took care of.

[What kind of decisions did you make?]

I payed the bills. I tell them when to plant cotton. I decided how many acres to plant. I did everything I was supposed to do, and I was the only one who made decisions. And I can make 'em just like that today. You are either wrong or right.

[Do you garden?]

I used to garden, had the best garden in Claiborne County. And, for your information, when I was farming, every year the county gave a medal or something for the best farm in Claiborne County. I won it one year over all the men. And that didn't sit well with them. In the fifties, I would say. I raised cotton, corn, cattle, hogs, and hay. I'd rather do cattle than anything else if I had to do, only cattle, yeah.

[Do you still raise animals today?]

No, I retired. I rent my place to Mr. Headley. He raises soybeans on it and in the winter time he keeps cattle here.

[Do you hunt much?]

I used to be a great hunter. In my life I have killed sixteen deer. I have two beautiful heads out there. I'll show them to you. And I used to hunt duck, and squirrel, and geese,

and deer.

[Who taught you to hunt?]

My daddy. I was raised up with it. When I was six, seven years old I had a B.B. gun.

[Do you still hunt much?]

Not quite. Too old.

[When was the last time you went hunting?]

I went dove hunting about two years ago. Sam Magruder and I. I had some shells about six or eight years old. I knowed [I] wasn't going to kill anything, but I killed ten. And I quit and went with Linden Magruder and sat on the back porch and had a drink.

[Did anyone famous come to Port Gibson?]

Well, during the Civil War, Henry Clay came here in 1844. Visited here quite a bit and made speeches off Mr. Eaton's porch to the citizens of Claiborne County. He was running for president at that time. Zachary Taylor won it.*

[How long have you been working at the Chamber of Commerce?]

I think eleven or twelve years this spring.

[Of the old houses in Port Gibson, which do you like the best?]

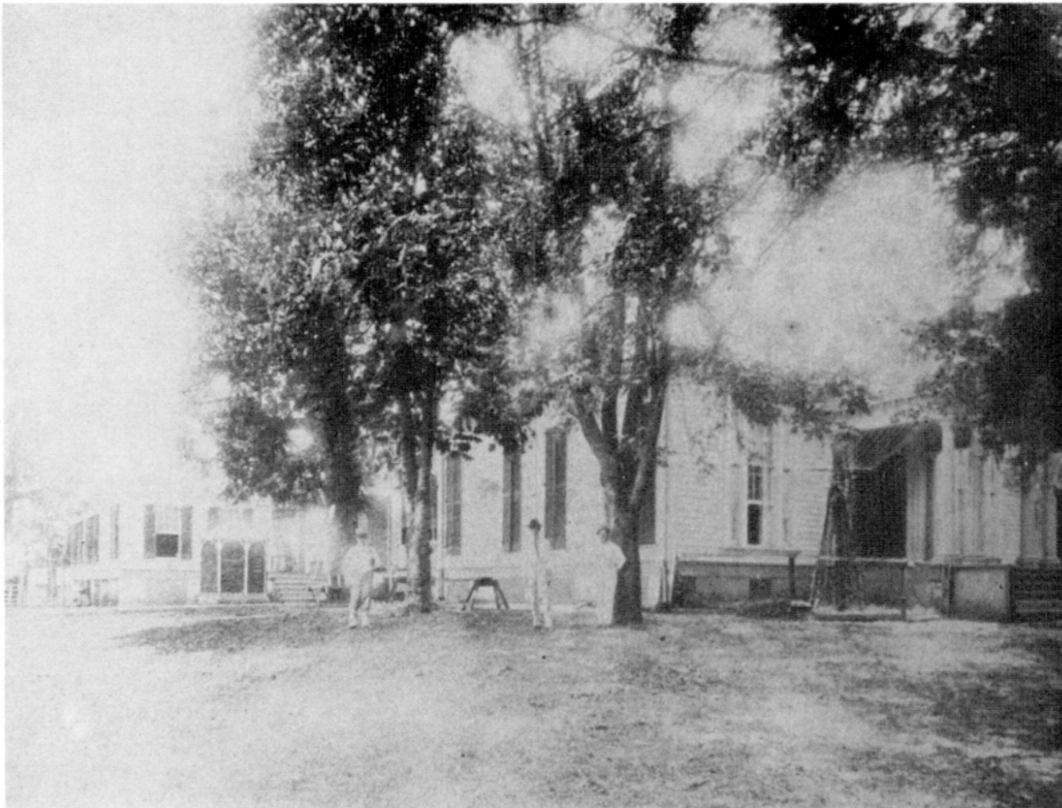
I like Idlewild the best. That's the one I show and the one I like. It is a typical old fashioned country home, built in 1830. When Mr. Stampley gave this to his daughter for a wedding present the daughter wanted a fountain in the front, which she had built. During the Civil War the soldiers took the lead pipes up and made bullets out of it. So that was the end of the fountain.

Now, Rosswood is my favorite home too because the tower part of Rosswood is identical to my home downstairs. Because the architect for Rosswood was the architect for Windsor and my home, Highland Home. His name is over the door at Rosswood.

[How do you feel about life today?]

Well, as far as I'm concerned, I'm happy to be living. On June the sixth I'll be seventy years old. I lived a good life, and I had one child and I'm very happy. I have done about everything I wanted to do. Have a very determined mind and ambitious.

*Editor's Note: Henry Clay, the Whig candidate for President in 1844, was defeated by Democrat James Polk. Clay's fellow Whig, Zachary Taylor, defeated Democrat Lewis Cass in 1848.



Homecoming

By Patricia Morris

HOME-COM-ING /'hom-,kum-in/ 1: A return home 2a: The return of people, esp. on a special occasion to a place formerly frequented or regarded as home b: an annual celebration for alumni at a college or university.

The scene is a rolling field, under a huge tree on the "Tillman Road" roadside in Claiborne County. A hot Mississippi sun shines down on some 200 people who have come from all over to eat, enjoy fellowship, and reminisce with family and friends of years gone by. What is the purpose of this gala occasion?

"Plenty refreshments and meet a lot of friends and relatives you ain't seen in a good while, classmates and schoolmates and all."

"Just a few friends that left here just want to get together and meet again."

"Well, you know, it's a reunion they set up a few years ago and every four years they would come back to the home state, which is Mississippi, and the other three years they would go to Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Chicago, or whatever, you know. And they would come back to their home state. So, the four years are up and so we back to the home state."

The Mississippi Alumni Club Reunion is an annual event which takes place in different cities all over the country, to give native Mississippians, (particularly from the Claiborne County area), a chance to get together with classmates, friends, and relatives and reflect on good times and "the way things used to be." The club finds its way back to the home state every four years for a week full of class reunions, picnics, dances, and planning for next year's event.

At the annual picnic/barbeque, the 1981 participants gladly talked to our crew on a variety of topics. When asked why they originally left the area, they gave varied responses, with the lack of jobs and the yearning to travel leading the list:

"Well, you know, we all have to make a move sometime."

--Odelle Shaw, Los Angeles, CA

"When I left I was nineteen years old. And I just wanted to see some other part of the world besides the South."

--Billy Joe Brown, Englewood, CA

"I left here because of jobs. There was no work. Only things I knew of working around here was jobs in the field, cotton fields and things. I always wanted to do better than that, so I left."

--Norman O'Quinn, Milwaukee, WI

"During that time, as you know, around '65, there was a lot of jobs that wasn't open for blacks as it is now today. So I decided to go to Chicago, sorta like make a better life for myself. So thataway I would have chance or more opportunity. That's the bottom line."

--James Devine, Chicago, IL

Most of the participants left the state and the Claiborne County area in the mid-sixties, in the midst of racial tensions, soon after their high school graduations. Over a decade has passed and with that the arms of progress and change have embraced the South, as evidenced in the responses of the reunion participants:

"Yes, there's been a lot of changes, quite a few changes. Like the police department and lots of places. I know there's been a lot of improvement here and a lot of changes."

"Well, they have a lot of new homes and they building a few businesses, you know, a few new roads."

"The moving up of people in general. The people have developed to be a much better people. They just took a big step from the old life."

"Well, I see a great deal of changes. For instance, now when I was here in '65, there was a lot of blacks didn't even have homes. So now I see 'em have homes. Also I see a lot of blacks with more jobs. When we was around there wasn't any jobs. So, I don't really see what you would call an economic change. Now it seem like to me that the people who had the money in '65, they have the money now. Like the courthouse in Port Gibson--you're familiar with it--now when I was here it was all white. Now to my understandings, it's all black, which is good. You know I don't like to see anything totally white, totally black. I would like to see we more or less working together at trying to achieve a goal."

The old cliche, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home," appeared to be the general consensus of those interviewed. Now, if given the same opportunity to leave this area, many of them would choose not to. Also, at some point in their lives, many of the reunion participants plan to move back to the area:

"Well, it may be possible sometime. It's getting better."

"Yes, I am. I'm retired now and I don't have anything to do, and I can come down here and live real good. Homes and things not expensive down here as they are in California."

"I would love to come back if I could find a decent paying job. I know I would like to come back."

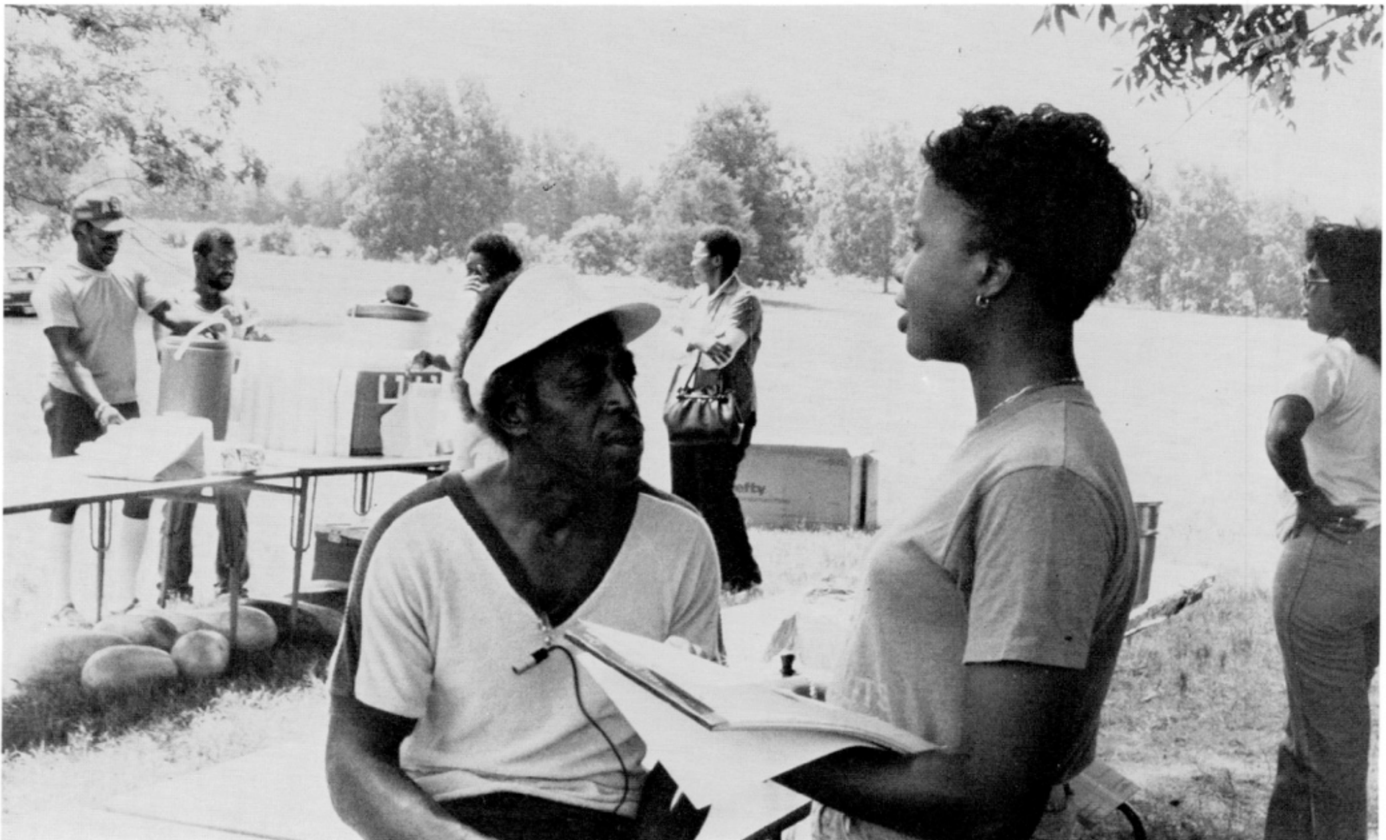
The participants also shared the wealth of their experiences by offering advice to young Mississippians. Should they leave their home state in the eighties?

"Well, yes, you know, if they had some money, some money. It's hard to get a job out there [in California]. The living expenses are higher out there, you see. It's all right to go out there. You just have to have some money. You just can't go out there and live on somebody."

"I don't really know what jobs are here, but you got any opportunity to make it here as you do anywhere else. Because when you leave here, it's a different life. I would just say, 'Jobs are hard to find. Take advantage of any opportunity. Get as much education as you can. Learn as much as you can about anything.'"

Elvin, Octavis, and I were overwhelmed by the response to the reunion. All of our original skepticism soon disappeared when 20 turned into 200 and the party got into full swing. None of us knew very much about the "get-together," but after the day's activities, we left feeling that an enthusiastic group of Mississippians were determined to once again have as much fun and fellowship in their home state as they do in their present localities. The closeness and sincerity of the revelers was apparent in the prevailing attitude of the entire group. You just felt as if you belonged--right at "home."

I would imagine that the plans are already underway for the 1985 reunion when the "Mississippi transplants" will once again invade their "old stomping grounds." I suppose Billy Joe Brown of Englewood put it best when he said of the festivities, "... just a big party--a good time."



Artemeasie Brandon

Interview by Darryl Warner
Transcribed by Octavis Davis
Edited by Marhea Farmer

Quilting is an art that has been passed down by many families over the years. I happened to get a chance to have a talk with one of the women who was caught up in this tradition. Mrs. Artemeasie Brandon, who was born in Amite County, but lived most of her life in Claiborne County, was taught to quilt by her mother. She was about fourteen when she worked on her first quilt on her own. Quilting isn't the only skill that Mrs. Brandon has. She butchers pigs, makes lard and sausage, and raises chickens and sells eggs. She is a very strong and interesting woman.

--Darryl Warner

I was born in Amite County in 1917. April 17. It was nice when I was young. It was seven or eight of us. At that time it was sort of rough with eight kids in a house and one

person there working. School was nice. We had to walk to school four miles, and when we got there we would be wet and cold. We had to go in the woods and get trash to make fires to help keep warm. It was just a two room building, just like a shotgun house or something, but it was a school house.

[Later I went to school in Claiborne County.] You know where Watson Chapel Church is? It was a school facing that church, right across the road. E. W. Reeves was the principal, and [the teacher] was a Mitchell.

[Did you play any games when you were young?]

We had little puzzles. We'd play fiddle sticks. You know anything about that? They be in a little round box. It some little plastic sticks and it's all kinds of colors of them. And you throw those sticks just like you dealing out your cards. And if you touch more than one, you wasn't suppose to pick up. We called it shaking it. They would fall sometimes just like this. You'd have to ease one of those sticks out to keep it from shaking. If you shake the stick then you was out. And then [you] go to that child or you come to somebody else until you got around again.

We would play [ring games], but it would be at school. Little Sally Walker and games like that.

> Little Sally Walker,
> Sitting in the saucer.
> Rise, Sally, rise.
> Wipe out your weeping eyes.
> Turn to the East,
> And you turn to the West,
> You turn to the pretty girl
> You loves the best.

Another one we used to play, I lost my handkerchief yesterday. Some of you all should remember that. Don't you? You just get in a large game. Catch hands till you just spread out real wide. Then somebody would have a pocket handkerchief or anything you could find. And you would just run around, around, around, and say:

> I lost my handkerchief yesterday,
> I found it again today.
> I filled it full of buttermilk,
> And I throw it and throw it away.

And you would drop that pocket handkerchief behind some of the kids. And then they would look behind them and pick it up. Then they would run after you and try to catch you, but you would have to run to get back in their space where they left out of.

[Did you ever play cards as a kid?]

Uh-huh, we did that. We pick cotton during the day, and we wouldn't empty those sack. We was being smart. We wouldn't empty them. We was going to empty them at night. The moon would be shining at night, and that's the way we would play cards.

[So you would play cards by the moon? You weren't allowed to play them at home?]

No! What you talking about! We'd know where our mother would be when we played 'em. Just like she would go visiting during the day someplace, we would go then and do our work. She gon give you enough work to keep you busy. We had to wash, we'd wash. We had to mop. Whatever we had to do, we would go on ahead and do that. Then when we got through, we would get those cards. We'd hid them. So one night she say, "Y'all think y'all smart," she say, "I know what y'all doing." Say, "Y'all playing cards out there at night." See, she was getting up, peeping out the window. Then we got to the place we would wait till she would go to bed, then we would go to our room.

[Did you ever do anything else wrong?]

No, ma'am.

[Did you ever get any whippings?]

Oh yeah, honey, my mama would tear you up. Sometimes I say I did nothing, but I got a whipping for it. Well, maybe we would get to fighting. We got a whipping for that. But children fight now, they parent don't look back at 'em.

[You ever come home late?]

You got to be kidding! We had to be home at a certain hour. If we left home around ten or eleven o'clock [in the morning], two or three o'clock you'd better be back at home. You better not stay and let the sun catch you away from home. Say, "Didn't I tell you all not to stay away from here too late?" Well, we know what was next. If she say, you better not stay away from here till the sun go down. We went out at night, nine o'clock was the limit.

[Did you ever tell riddles?]

Uh-uh. We didn't have time for nothing like that.

[Where did your time go?]

Working. Field work and house work, ironing and washing and cooking and things like that. We had home work to do. Then, at that time, we had to go to the field, which y'all don't know nothing about. Cotton field. We had to hoe, pick cotton, set out potatoes. Then we had to pick them up at the fall of the year in October.

[When did you start going to the field?]

I was about ten years old. When school was out, then we'd be going to the field. Just like when kids get out in May, but we didn't have as long a month as the children have now. We had about seven months in school. In March the majority of the peoples would pull they children out of school. This time of year, the peoples would have they corn and the children would be chopping corn, and in April and May they would be hard up in the cotton field, you see, chopping out the cotton. Then in September they'd have to come out and pick cotton. When they get through they would start school. All the winter months they would be in school, then in March you had to go to the field. We didn't because we lived mostly in the town, but we would go out in the rural and help our grandparents and other peoples to work.

[How did your parents prepare you for life?]

Very nice, you know, for what they had. We had plenty to eat. My mama was a seamstress and she [had] all her children sewing. When we were little my mama would cut out the material for us to make it, and give it to us. She didn't just sit down and say do it like this or do it like that. When she'd cut it out, well, we'd just stay around and we watching her. And then when she got through cutting it out she'd hand you your needle and thread and tell you, "Now this is yours." She didn't pin it like we do for children now. And when we would start sewing she say, "That's right." She would just say, "That's right." Well, we would keep on until we get to the place we didn't know which way to go. Then she would show us or tell us, "You do it like this."

[Did people ever use any home remedies?]

Well, just different remedies their parent had learned them. Just like you was sick or have a fever or something, they would go out and get peach leaves off the peach trees and they would boil them. If you had a fever they would give you a bath in those peach leaves' water. See, it

turn green.

In the winter time they would make hog hoof. It's the hoof off of that hog's foot. They would put it in some hot ashes or put it on the stove. At that time they had fireplaces, and they would just knock the ashes back in the fireplace and they would lay them in front of the fire and they would brown them. And then when they got brown like they wanted them, they would take them and wash them before they would mash them up. You could just take your hand or something and crumble them, just like you crumble bread or something. Put them in some water and put them on the stove and boil them. Then you drank that.

[When you have a live pig, how do you go about killing it?]

Well, some peoples knocks them in the head with an ax and then they stab them. They hits they heart, and that finish killing them. They cut they throat, then they stick that knife down there and they hits that heart. See, when you hit your heart, there's nothing else for you to do to kick out.

[After] you kill it, you put it in a barrel of water, hot boiling water. And when you thinks it just about hot enough to get that hair off it, then you pull it out of that barrel of water. Then you put it out on a board or some tin or something and you scrapes that hair off of it with a knife. Then when you get it clean, you hangs it. Then you washes it. Then you cuts it, gut it, and you put your entrails in a tub or something. Just like when you go to the store and buy you some chitlins. That's from a hog where somebody done cleaned them. But now when you buy them you got to go to work and do just as much to them than if you had went on and cleaned them yourself. Or more. Cause all that old fat trash be's on them and you have to pull all that off. I cleaned chitlins about four hours along here Saturday. And I told them, I say, "Don't bring no more chitlins here, planning on me to clean them."

Then you cuts the skin. You trims your fat off of that hog, then you cut it up [and] put it in a pot. I'll show you the pot out there in the yard. And you makes a fire around it and you cook it till those crackles be's hard. See, just like the one you buy in the store, but only they is thinner. They cut all that whole skin out of it. They don't leave none of that little fat in it. And they puffles up just like the one you buys out of the store.

[Do you clean your lard?]

No, I usually put a drop of soda in it. That just make it white. Put some soda in it. Later on up in the year I'll put it in the deep freezer to keep it from getting strong.

[How did you keep it before you had a deep freezer?]

You didn't. Cause it would get so strong. It would get so old you couldn't use it. You would have to throw it away. Before we got able to own freezers and refrigerators, we'd have to cook the sausage [and] the meat and put it in jars.

[Did you smoke meat?]

We smoke your hams, your shoulders, and the middlings, what they call sides, the ribs. You would get hickory wood. Go out and they'd cut hickory wood or chiney [chinaberry]. Then you would have a smoke house, and you would dig a little pit in that smoke house just to fit that whole little frame there. Then you'd make a fire under it. Not no big fire, just enough to start a smoke. In a couple of days it would be brown and pretty. Just a week, maybe two weeks, according to how they would be able to stay around the house to keep their smoke going. Cause maybe they have to go to town or go to the field or something.

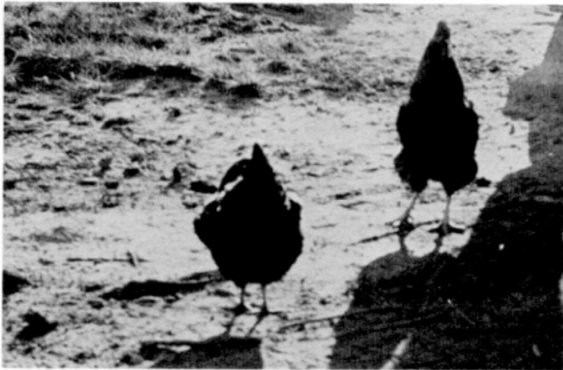
But when they come back, they would start a little smoke under it. [After the smoking] some peoples would take it in and wrap it in newspaper or put it down with shucks off the corn when the corn dries.

[What about the head?]

Hog head sausage. You takes the feet, the ear, and the head, and you just cook it. You put it in a sausage grinder and grind it up when it get good and done, but it's got to be good and done. [First] you have to pick all the bones, those little bones out of it. Then you put it in your mill. Then you put your onions, your pepper. Season it up. Well, I usually put my salt, my pepper, and all like that in when I'm cooking it. Then when I get through I don't have nothing to do but just put my onions and vinegar in it. Then you put it in an old container, old bowl or something, and it will chill just like you get it out of the store. That's right.

[Do you raise other animals?]

Chickens. I sell eggs, see, a dollar a dozen. I got about two dozen or a little better today.



[Do you kill your own chickens?]

Uh-huh. See, I sets hens to raise the chickens, the biddies. And the roosters, I kills them. Just about let them grow about the size of a chicken you buy out of the store. But I never turns them out. They stays up in a pen, you see. But the pullets, I turns all of them out cause I'm not gon kill them. See, I'm gon just kill the little roosters. I used to would just catch them and wring they heads off. But I can't do that now. I don't have the strength in my arms to wring they necks off, [so] I just put my foot on the head and just pull it off.

[What's that black piece of cloth hanging in the tree?]

The crow eats the eggs. If you kill a crow and hang him up there, they won't come. My son had killed a crow, and the crow had begun to smell. Marhea and I then suggested hanging a black piece up there [to scare away the crows].

[What do you grow in your garden?]

Well, I have peas, butterbeans, okra, corn, tomatoes, stringbeans, squash, pepper, all like that. I cans it. Put it in the freezer.

[How do you store sweet potatoes?]

Well, some peoples now, they gather them in the fall of the year and they puts them in a pump. Go out and get corn stalks and you lay all those corn stalks around those potatoes. You call it banking them, pumping potatoes. You get out there and make a round circle somewhere, and you just pile the potatoes up. Then you get those corn stalks. You just plaster those corn stalks around so the potatoes lay on top of one another and the corn stalks on it. Just take them and lay them real close together. Then you takes your shovel and throw dirt all around that pump. That's to keep them from getting wet. When you get through pumping your potatoes, you cut them long stalks off. Then you take an old tub and turn it down over that pump, just like you put a hat on

your head. And that's to keep it from raining down through the pump on your potatoes. If you fix it right they just as dry in there as they would be in the house.

[How do you get them out?]

You go there and you open you a little hole. You pull that dirt back and you break those stalks enough to put your arms up in there and get your potatoes. Then you fasten it back up, push your dirt back to keep your chickens out. Or you put you a sack or something up in there. Enough to keep it from raining down in them. That rain and that cold will rot them.

[What advice would you give young people today?]

My mama would always tell us when we were coming along, growning up, she said, "Learn how to do more than one thing. You don't know what you gonna fall to have to do." And that's what I tell all of my children.

[How did you start quilting?]

My mother started me off at quilting. My mama, she would cut the blocks. The first quilt we worked on was something we call a plate. We pieced those little squares up and you put it on a solid piece of material. Then when we would get through with it, we would take embroidery thread and embroidery it around. I was about fourteen or maybe fifteen when I started doing that one. We was still helping my mama. I was grown when I went out on my own.

Sometimes I just get a gang of little peices and sit down here and work 'em together. And when I get through with 'em I joins 'em all together and I just got a little top for my quilts. [Some of my patterns are] string, nine-patch, stars, and cow-catch.

[Where do you get your pieces?]

I got a sister lives out in Los Angeles. She sends me some pieces. I used to would sew a whole lot when my children was all small. I would use my pieces from sewing. I like the cotton the best. I likes the way it works, 'cause this knit stretches and is sorta hard for you to do it. Now sometimes I uses old bed spreads, uses old blankets. Things I don't need. Just wash them and pad a quilt with them.

[What do you use for lining?]

Wheat shorts sacks, yellow domestic. You make a straight seam all the way down. And then you put your top down to see if it's wide enough. If it's not, maybe you have to put a piece on the end and a piece on the side to make it be wide enough for your top.

[How do you set up a frame?]

Well, I have to pad [the quilt] first. You put your quilt lining down, then you put your battens down. After you get your top down, then you get your quilt frames and put them a-round your quilt. Then you takes your tacks and tack it together. Then you got it ready for quilting. I takes four chairs and put those chairs in the corner of my house and put those frames up on the chairs. [I use] something to hold those chairs to keep 'em from turning over with those frames on it. And I just go on and go to quilting.

[How large are the quilts you make?]

I haven't measured them. I just make 'em large enough so they'll take care of the sides and long enough to tuck under the foot of the bed.

[Do you quilt in any pattern?]

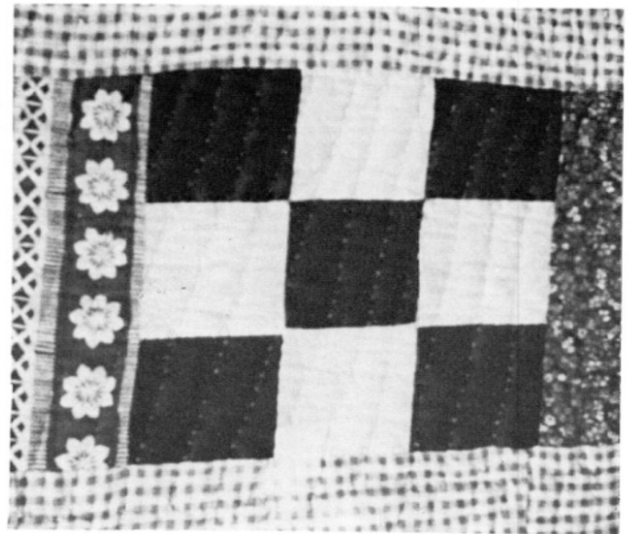
Just start in little rows just like that. When I get it far enough, I can reach out of this corner. Then after I reach out of the corner, I'll catch up here and run me off a row. See? Then I run that off. Maybe I'll come across. See how that is there. You call it a shell. You run it up to here. Then when I get up to here I goes back and quilts all of this out. Then when I get through there, I'll catch again along here. I'll come up to here as far as I want to. Then I'll run me another shell in till I get me one out to where I want to go.

[How do you finish the ends?]

When you get through with [quilting] it, you may have to trim [the lining]. You trim it down as small as you want it. Then you just take it and turn it just like you hemming a dress.

A star is my favorite [pattern]. It's much easier to piece. This is just a star. I take an old sheet and then I cuts my legs--the star legs. Then I take my material and sew it on that sheet. And when I get it sewed all the way around, I finish this leg out. I trims it. When I trim it, you got your star leg. You have to piece the eight legs up first. After you get these legs all pieced, then you have to take some square pieces and put a square here and a point here. See there? Well, there's another square over there. Here's a square over here, and that. Until I get all those places filled out. Then I take just straight strips and go around it. Then I measures it on the bed. If it's large enough I'm through with it. But if it's not, then I put some more strips around it. Call it stripping your quilt.

That's just a string patch. I pieced it up just like you would a nine-patch. I just sewed those blocks all together. You do it just like you do a star. You take paper, or you get some old raggedy sheets, and you just put the pieces on those sheets, and just cut the sheets all the same size. Just like fixing a nine-patch.

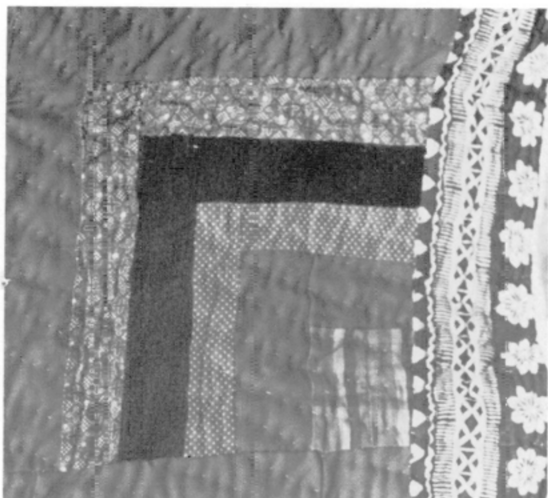


If you making a nine patch, you have to block it. Then after you get [it] blocked, you have to strip it. Put those long strips in it just like I'm putting this here together. You see these blocks here? This little strip in there? Well, you do a nine-patch just like that. So nine blocks up here. Well, this is your strip here. You sew those nine blocks to this little strip here until you get it out to where you want it to be. Maybe I puts five in a row. Then I'll put some long strips. That's to help make it wide enough for the bed. That's all.

That's a nine-patch. It's got a strip down the middle between them. This is a block. Now this is a block here. Now see I joined just a square piece onto this. Then I sewed this piece here. I sewed this block onto this side of this piece. That just make your quilt go longer, you see.

[How many quilts do you think you've made since you began?]

Oh, honey, don't ask that question, because I really couldn't tell you. I've made a good lot of 'em. I quilted seven this year, but I didn't make all of 'em this year. Because I already had them pieced up and everything, I just went on and quilted 'em this year. But I pieced up two.

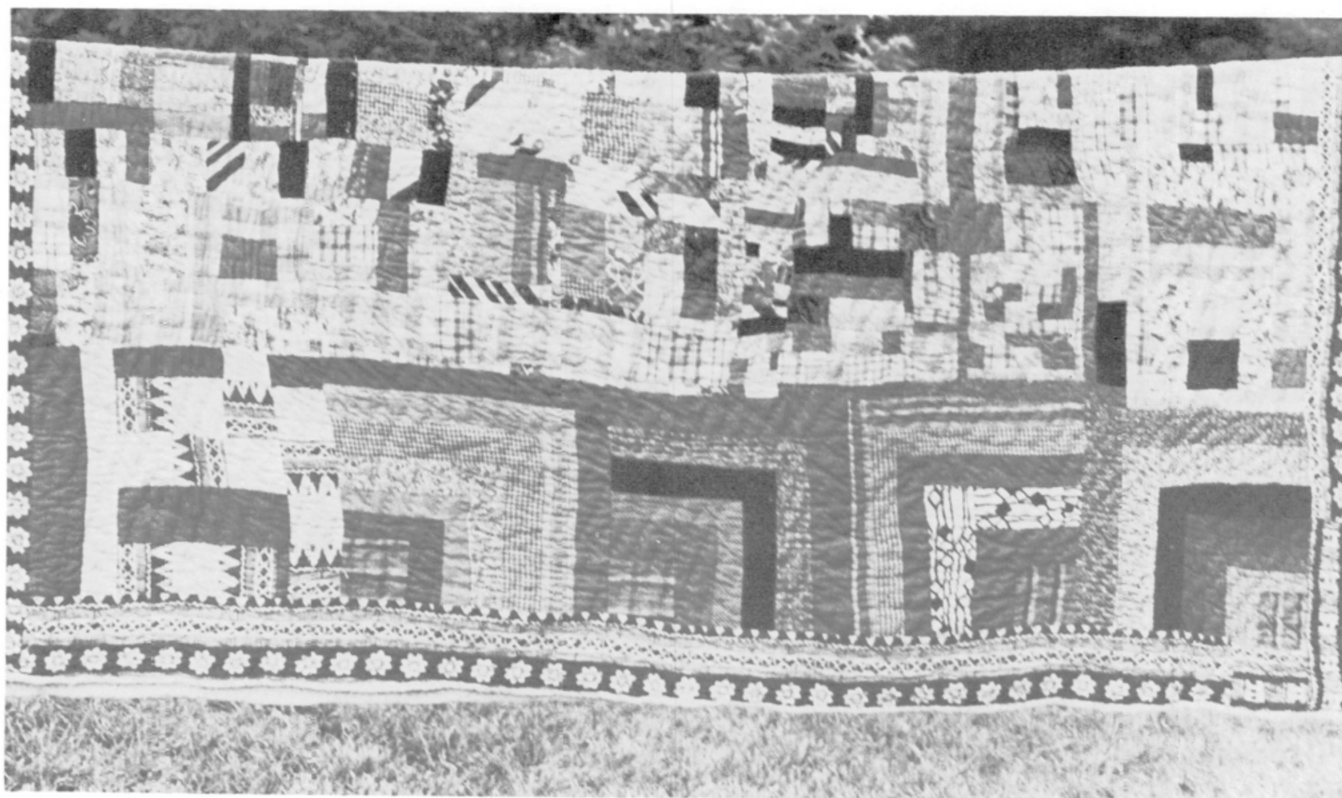


A string is nothing but a little straight string [piece]. I just take some strings and I sew 'em together till I get a block, and when I put them together I would just change the way I was going. Make one go across, some go straight up--all like that. I make [a block] what I want it to be; then, after I get through with it, I just strip it just like you see this stripping here.

Down at the bottom you call it cow-catch. The rest of it up at the top is just string, just little strings I put together. I didn't have no use for those five blocks down there, and so I just sewed them all together and made the quilt on out.

[Have you taught anyone in your family to quilt?]

Uh-huh. My children, even to my boys. And when I be quilting, Lynell and Larry would come in, take them a needle, and help mama quilt.



Rosetta Mackey

Interview by Angela Green
Transcribed/edited by Angela Green

One of the most loved persons in her family, and the Tillman community is the first person I thought about to interview.

Mrs. Mackey is an outstanding mother of the church as well as the oldest. She has a record for being a dynamic pianist as well as an organist. She was the director of the adult choir for many years.

Mrs. Mackey has inspired many young students while teaching in the school system for fifty years in various counties in Mississippi. She also does a lot of sewing, cooking, and eating--which is her favorite reason for cooking.

Mrs. Mackey's advice to young people today is always to strive for the best and you shall succeed.

--Angela Green

[I was born] August 31, 1887, in Claiborne County near Tillman. I went to school at Jefferson County under my mother Mary Walker. I finished eighth grade there. [There were] over one hundred students. It was fine. Enjoyable.

[Did you walk to school?]

When the weather was good, when the weather was bad I rode horseback.

[How long was a school day?]

Nine o'clock to twelve o'clock, from twelve o'clock until four o'clock.

[How many months did you go to school?]

Well, it was six months when I was going to school. And then before I finished the eighth grade it had gone up until eight months. Now remember this was in the year one--I am telling you all.

[Did you ever have to pay to go to school?]

Pay? Oh, when I went to college, I went to Alcorn, I had to pay. My papa and mama sent me. Paid my board every month. I finished high school and college at Alcorn. I had to pay there, but I didn't have to pay for public schools. [I got a] Bachelor of Arts.

My father was a farmer. He owned five hundred acres of land back here in Jefferson and Claiborne County. [Mrs. Mackey said her father bought the land from Brisco Claiborne.] He had plenty cattle, plenty hog, everything. He was a big farmer.

[Does any of that land exist now?]

Yes, it is back there. Our home is still back there.

[What do you remember about your grandparents?]

They was very nice. They was good, kind, loving and believe in you doing right, and used the rod if you didn't do right. I been cooking every since I was eight years old. And my grandmother taught me to cook, washing, ironing. Grandmother was a great cook, number one cook, that all she did do.

I learned to play the piano as a very young child. I played a[n] organ. My lessons were paid for with milk, eggs, and chickens.

When I started out trying to make a dollar and a dime it [was] hard. I had to go to the courthouse. Teachers go to the courthouse in Fayette. There were long tables upstairs, thirty and forty and fifty teachers would be around those tables. The examination would be put on the board. They would go around to see did you have a book, paper or anything in your hand. Then there would be sitting on

each end of the tables, in the middle, on down, examiners--women to see that no one would talk to the other one, that you couldn't have a piece of paper pulling from under your dress to copy off. That's the way I came up. To make that first grade license or that second grade license, see. That the time we had. See what a good time you have it. And as many failed as many passed, see. That license come out, some would have second grade, first grade, or third grade. My mother was a first grade teacher. All right, I went on the examination once and came out second grade. My mama told me you will not teach this fall.

You not going to teach on a second grade license. I began to cry. My brother Arthur, oh, he was good, good in everything. He said, "Okay, don't cry. It's a normal going on in Canon, and let's go down. And if they let me, I will help you." I was weak in arithmetics. "I'm gon to help you on that practical arithmetic. Now you better get that history, and you better get that reading, and you better have that composition, cause I ain't going to fool with it, see." That's the way I came up. See what a hard time I had. I had to make it. I had to study, then I would go.

[Did you eventually get your first grade license?]

Yes indeed, yes. My brother was nothing but a mathmatician. He was good.

[Your brother taught school, too?]

No, he was a doctor [pharmacist]. He said he couldn't stand those little children coming around his knees in the winter time and his nose wasn't presentable. He say he wasn't going to teach.

[Did you ever work?]

I taught school fifty years. Forty-six in Claiborne County, two years in Sunflower County in the high schools, and two years in Bolivar County in the high school and Shawn. Now that was back in my time. [I taught] arithmetic, reading, spelling, English, geography. I taught fifth grade and sixth grade in Bolivar County. I taught all grades in Claiborne County, from the first through the eight. Had a school of a hundred pupils sometimes. Now that was back in my time. It's not of today. [It was a] one-teacher type in Claiborne County. Now, when I was in those other school it was five or six and some- times more. I wasn't the principal when I was teaching in high school.

[How old were you when you started teaching?]

Child I couldn't tell you, but I was a young lady. I was married when I taught here in Claiborne County, but when I was teaching in Sunflower and Bolivar, I was a young lady. [I joined church] when I was twelve years old, Disciple of Christ, Providence.

[Do you remember the day you joined church?]

[It was] cloudy, sun wasn't shining. That's all I can remember.

[When did you go to church?]

On Sundays and sometime at night. Sometime we ran the revival all day, so many hours.

[How big a part has religion played in your life?]

I been a Christian so long until it plays all around. I never been rowdy. I always have lived a Christian life, from a child up, even before I joined church. Couldn't tell the difference.

Bernice Green

Interview by Mary Keller
Transcribed by Veronica Buck
and Stephanie West
Edited by Mary Keller
and Veronica Buck

When I went on this interview it was nice. It was my first time to get out and meet older people and know what it was like when they were growing up. Mrs. Green was born, May 4, 1914 in Hermanville, Mississippi. When she was a little girl she was the only child. She said she used to play mud cake, make cob dolls, etc.

She went to a school named Sweet Home. It was a one-teacher type school. Her mother was the teacher. She went from there to another school called Forest Grove School which was out about four miles from where she lived.

Mrs. Green began to teach school in thirty-seven and thirty-eight. She taught school for forty-one years. When Mrs. Green began teaching she was paid eighteen dollars for seven months work. At that time that was good money, considering the principal didn't get but thirty.

Mrs. Green joined church at Providence Christian Church and later she joined Rose Hill Christian Church. The pastor of Rose Hill is Elder A. M. Gordon.

She has been living with her mother all of her life. Some advice that she would give young people about life today is go to school and get a good education and try to make out of yourself the type of person that you want to be.

--Mary Keller

I was born, May 4, 1914 in Hermanville, Mississippi.

[What was it like when you were young?]

When I was a little girl I was the only child. I used to play mud cake, and make cob dolls. We played ball and we played "Hiding Switches," "Hide-and-Go-Seek," and oh, "Little Sally Walker," and "Chick-a-mae, Chick-a-mae, Crane the Crow," and "Drop the Handkerchief.

Chick-a-mae, chick-a-mae,
Went to the well to wash my toes
When I got back
My black-eyed chicken was gone.
What time it went?

And then after we got all the chickens all straight away, then we say:

My children, my children,
I call you.
We don't hear you.
My children, my children,
I call you.
We don't hear you.
I send my cat at you.
We don't care.
I send my dog at you.
We don't care.
I send myself at you.

Then start running.

I went to school at a little school just across the creek, which was name Sweet Home School, a one-teacher type school. My mama taught there, and I assisted her. I went from there to another school, Forest Grove School, which was out about four miles from where we lived. I walked to school.

[How many miles did you have to walk to school]

When I came down here [Sweet Home] that was six miles a day, but when I went back up to Forest Grove it was something like eight miles a day.

[Were there a lot little schools around the county?]

Yes, there were about seventy-five or eighty, one or maybe two-teacher type schools.

[Was it easy going up under your mother?]

[Not really], I had to be real good cause I got blamed for everything. And I got whippings that I didn't deserve.

[When I taught there] she had two assistant teachers there, other than me. One of them was Mrs. Rachel Wilson. Over in the Pine Grove area, over there past her home there was what they called, the Rosenwald School. One was at Russum--Watson Chapel--and one was there, and one was somewhere else. I believe it was three of them. That was money that Julius Rosenwald gave for the building of schools in certain areas.

[Who was Rosenwald?]

Some kind of philanthropist. He just gave money to build schools.

[Who ran the schools that he built?]

They were county schools, just you know, whatever teachers were assigned to those schools. Most of them would be two-teacher type.

[How did classes go?]

Pretty much as they going now. It seems as if maybe some of them folk who are teaching now possibly went to what we call the old school. I mean teachers who've had other older teachers as their teachers tend to copy, you know. They tend to go in that trend of how they would talk.

[What were school closings like when you were a little girl?]

Everybody at school had a piece to say.

[What kind of piece?]

For instance, mama would order books that had school closing pieces in them, and we had what they called dialogues, you know. People call them plays now, but they had the dialogues. And we would learn them, dress the part, and what have you.

[What was it like back then?]

We had the depression of the thirties, but it wasn't anything like now. We had to get stamps to get

sugar. We had to have stamps to get shoes.

[What kind of stamps?]

I guess they were government stamps. In other words, stuff was rationed, as you would call it. You could get just so much. For instance, a family of say, three could get fifteen pounds of sugar.

[For one stamp?]

No, five pound for each stamp. And if you didn't have the stamp, money would do you no good. And we used to have little tokens where you pay a penny tax. Now we had the one cents tokens. Twenty-five cents tokens were bronze, and I threw away some of those things not too long ago. And if you spent a nickel, you put one of those silver looking tokens with it, and if you spent a quarter you put one of the bronze color tokens with it.

[Ah, what college did you attend?]

Alcorn College. (I got a) Master of Science in Home economics. You got the history of my life. I left after I got two years and worked. I finished in four years.

[Did you like living at Alcorn?]

Yes, I worked in the dining hall and at that time it wasn't cafeteria style. It was family style. They served the dishes and you put them on the table. You had one person who was head of the table who would serve the plates. Plates would be stacked at the end of the table. They'd pass 'em down. And I was one of the waitresses there. Whenever something would get out on the table, I would take it, go back and they would dish it up. Sometime it would all be gone and they say--they didn't say it all out, they say number four. That meant it's gone.

[Who was the best teacher you had

at Alcorn?]

A lady who was my foods teacher, Mrs. Sarah. She was a Page before she married, Page Homes, and Alice Tanner. My aunt [Alice Tanner] who worked at Alcorn College used to tell me little stories or little riddles. I remember one she told me about a minister, about a preacher. She said it was during the time of slavery, and this preacher couldn't read and said a bunch of youngster ask him one day, said, "Uncle Tom, you have the church. What do you tell the preachers?" He said, "Well, when I get up I tell them what I'm gone tell them, and then I tell 'em. And when I get through with that, I tell them what I done told them."

I taught at Claiborne County Training School, and I taught at Addison.

[What were the subjects that you taught?]

I taught chemistry and biology.

I taught world history and I taught home economics and science. I taught wherever the position came available.

[How much did you get paid for teaching?]

My first pay check was eighteen dollars for a month. That was wonderful when considering the principal didn't get but thirty.

[Who were the principals when you taught?]

E.W. Reeves, J.C. Dunbar, Mr. Hurd, Mr. Watson. I went to Addison in fifty-nine (and retired) in seventy-five.

[You said earlier that some things have changed since you were a child. What things would you say have changed for the better?]

I think the method of children being transported to and from school. That's a change that I really admire because when I went to school I had to walk in the rain, and in the cold. And when you got to this one-teacher type school, or this two-teacher type school, the wood was wet and you had this wood stove. The wood was wet. It would take you all day to get a fire, and by time you got dry, it was time for you to go back home in the rain again. And you had to walk, but now the children ride to school. And when they get to school it's nice and warm, and it's comfortable. They're not wet when they get there. They don't have to worry about the wood, about going out getting wood so they can have the fire the next day, and what have you. I think that's a big change.

[What organizations do you belong to?]

I belong to the Christian Women's Fellowship, and we have what is called a study. They are national topics that's passed down from the national office. We do have a project, and the project this year is clothes for the needy. We are to get clothes together and we send them to Jackson, and from there are sent to wherever the need is. And last year the project was toys for needy. And we sent money for what they call "Outreach". It is sent to maybe CARE, or what have you.

[Are you active in the community?]

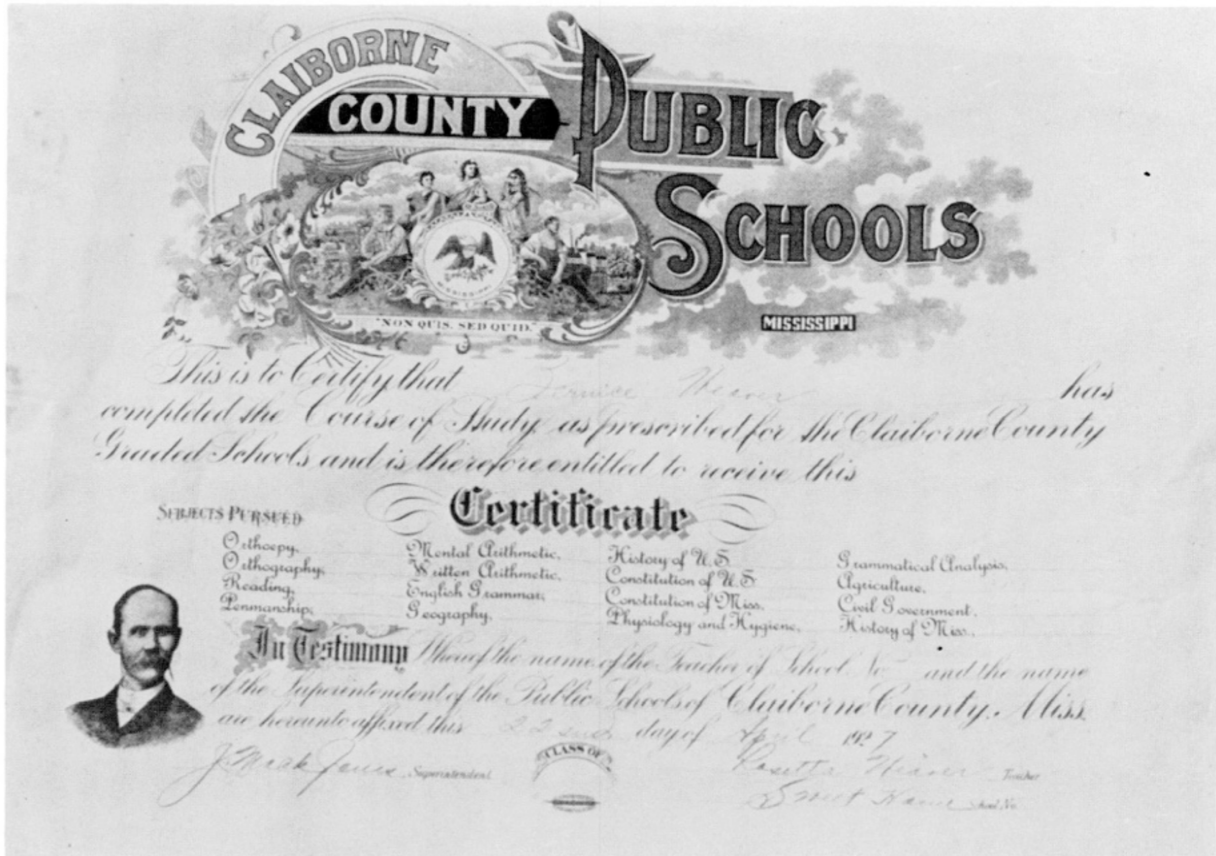
Yes, I am one of the members of the hospital board. I am one of the committeemen of the FHA, and I'm on the Health Clinic Board, and I do a little part-time class work with the adults around in the community. It's called a CHIDA program [Consumer Homemaking in Depressed Areas]. It is a vocational program, and they're taught how to make better use of their food stamps and how to fix balanced meals and do one dish meals. We've just finished a foods unit. We're going to be doing a booklet on various recipes that they've come up with, that weren't copied.

[You mentioned the medical center that's opening in town, being on that board. Why is that important to you?]

I like people. And there are people who are in need of medical attention who are not able. They don't have the one, two, three, four, five dollars. And if my services on that board can insure that somebody who is in need of medical attention gets the medical attention that's needed, then I'm happy.

[What about the FHA committee, what do you do there?]

This FHA committee is a committee for loaning money, and this committee approves or disapproves money to persons who are farming. That is, if they want so much for soybeans, so much for wheat, or if they have what they call emergency loans. For instance, they got the soybean, and the crop didn't yield what they was ex-


CLAIBORNE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"NON QUIS, SED QUID."

MISSISSIPPI

This is to Certify that has completed the Course of Study as prescribed for the Claiborne County Graded Schools and is therefore entitled to receive this

Certificate

SUBJECTS PURSUED

Orthoepy, Orthography, Reading, Penmanship, Mental Arithmetic, Written Arithmetic, English Grammar, Geography, History of U.S., Constitution of U.S., Constitution of Miss., Physiology and Hygiene, Grammatical Analysis, Agriculture, Civil Government, History of Miss.

In Testimony Whereof the name of the Teacher of School No. and the name of the Superintendent of the Public Schools of Claiborne County, Miss. are hereunto affixed this 22nd day of April 1927

Superintendent

CLASS OF

Teacher

School No.

pecting. They get what is known as an emergency loan and kind of pull them over. And they give loans for buying cattle, for buying property, you know.

[What made you decide to get on the FHA committee?]

I didn't, I was appointed.

[You said you're on the hospital board. What do you do as part of the hospital board?]

[As a member of the] Board of Trustees of the hospital, we approve equipment that is being bought, you know for the hospital. We make decisions on the pay scale, or what have you. If there are persons who have grievances, we hear that.

[What advice would you give young people today about life?]

Well, oh, one thing I would say maybe try to go to school and try to make out of yourself the type of person that you would want to be, and try to instill within them that. The dollar isn't all of it even though it plays a big part in your life. But after all, there are other things a little more important things than just the dollar. We need to learn to be friendly, and to have friends and learn to accept responsibility.

Early Wren

Interview by Stacy Brooks
Transcribed/edited by Stacy Brooks

There are many people who may know my grandfather, but not like I do. My grandfather is known as "Hunner" around the countryside.

From the time I was eight years old I could remember my grandfather telling these fascinating stories and singing songs. My family and I would go to visit him up the road, and he would tell us stories and sing us songs all the time. Whenever my relatives from the city would come down from Detroit, they would go over to listen to my grandfather's stories.

My grandfather is a very nice old man and I've always admired him. He's a real grandfather. He would give us advice about important matters if we were to ask. Hardships, such as helping his mother raise the family, and being deprived of an education, began at an early age for my grandfather. I admire my grandfather a lot because he hasn't given up on everything because of old age. He's the kind that takes a lick and keeps on ticking. At such an old age he still farms. He has a garden where he raises corn, greens, English peas, onions, cabbage, and other things. He also raises chickens, pigs, and hogs that he keeps healthy.

I reallly enjoyed my interview with my grandfather because he told so many funny stories and filled our ears with old songs. I even learned about how to prepare things for freezing and canning. My grandfather is real special to me because I only have one living, and I love him. He possesses qualities that I have always admired and always will.

--Stacy Brooks

[Granddaddy, when were you born?]

December, 1900, in Claiborne County. I liked it when I was young. I just have a good time, you know. I could go everywhere I wanted to go. Enjoy.

Mother and father treat me all right. Yes, as far as they was able. They didn't have very much to give me. I was tickled over what they give me.

I got plenty of whippings. I was just a bad boy. Thank God I'm here now. They don't whip now [like they used to]. They tell them what they gonna do. They whip when I come along.

[Did you play games when you were young?]

Baseball, hopscotch, all kinds of games. I like hiding--"Count, Run, and Hide," you know. "Ten, Ten, Double Ten"--all like a that. Oh, I just love it. We would play the big ring plays, you know, and we had a big time. But ain't no more of them times.

You know one ring play you don't never hear no more: "Chick-a-mae, Chick-a-mae, Crane or Crow." The way we used to play, you know, I'll sit down here. I the head of it, and I'm

making up my little fire. That old gal walking up there, she'll see me making up the fire, she got her little flock there. She says, "What are you doing making up that fire?" "I'm wringing chicken heads." "Who flock you gonna get them out, mine or

yours?" "Yours." "Chick-a-mae, crane-a-mae." You know the children be all behind one. One got hold of me; I'm the old hawk. Now he's gonna fly around, fly around chicken. Oh, we used to play that game! Y'all ain't never heard nothing like that, and never will no more. "Chick-a-mae, Chick-a-mae, crane or crow. What time it is?"--all like a that. You never will hear that more. That's old and gone.*

Now, I'm a poor singer, but I got another one I'm going to sing. We used to go out there and play on Sunday in the yard, "Go In and Out the Window." All catch hands, going around and around. "Go in and out the window, go in and out the window." One got the handkerchief going to go in and out the window. When you get through going in and out the window, "Go in and out the window, for we are gang today, I mention my love to show you." She be standing up to the boy then with her kerchief, laying it on him. She like him, you know. He's going in and she's going to get in the gang. "I mention my love to show you, for we are gang today."

Granddaddy can't sing, I'm just telling you.

[Did you work when you were little?]

Yeah, I would pick up boll weevils and go sell them. Put them in a bottle and carry them to the store and they will pour coal oil on them, you know. Catch 'em off the cotton and put him out on the counter and count them and give me so much a weevil. They were eating your cotton, and they would hire us to catch them off the

*Editor's note: A version of this game from the Tennessee mountains, titled "Chickie, My Cranie-Crow," is reported by May Justus, The Complete Peddler's Pack (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967).

cotton. See, would catch them boll weevils, and we would have our own money, a tobacco sack of nickles, big tobacco sack of nickles. I would go in there and catch me a bottle full and go on to the store with them. Pour coal oil on them and pour 'em out and count, and they pay me so much a weevil.

[They weren't familiar with cotton poison?]

No, they ain't see'd no cotton poison, know nothing about none.

[So they would hire people to catch 'em?]

And pick up the squares what they done punched. And after that they made poison then.

[Did ya'll have electric lights?]

Had a pine light. Yeah, go out there in the wood and find some fat pine, or some trees, you know. You could chop on them pine trees and get that pine off of there and put it on a top, hold a big light. You could see good. Ain't knowed nothing 'bout no electric light. The only light I seen when I was a youngster like that was a carbide light. They had carbide houses, you know. They could fix 'em and then run into your house. And it'll have your light in there from the carbide. No electric lights.

I tell you about this. When us was boys all getting together, you know us didn't have no way of calling

one another. Didn't have no telephone. Us all stayed in the big quarters, great big quarters. If I live and go out through there I going to show you them big places us use to stay on, show you them big places us use to stay on. Ain't no company come yet. How we'll ring up you know, we'll holler, "Whow! whow!" Way after while you'll hear another over yonder, "Whow!" He getting ready. After a while you hear one over here, "Whow! whow!" and holler, "Whow!" And you hear one back over here holler, ain't much fitting. And you hear one over here holler, "Let's stir it up." We was all getting together then, we was going to leave out. We didn't have no phones.

[How did you get around?]

Oh, well, we walked, saddled up a horse and ride it, till T-models come in style. Then we got an old T-model and we'd go in it. Oh, I was the first man drove. Learn 'em all out in Bluehill how to drive a T-model. That's right, learn 'em how to drive them T-models.

[Who taught you how to drive a T-model?]

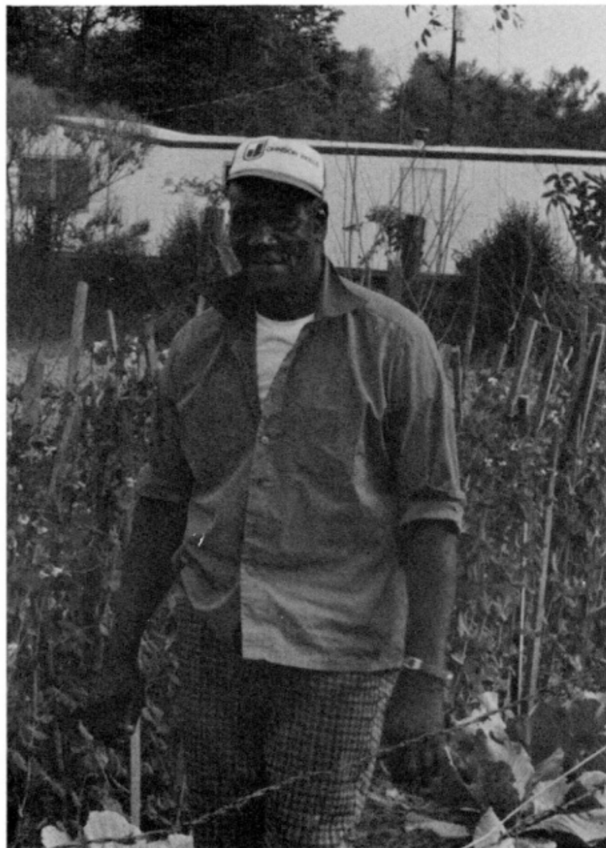
Well, my boss men, they all went to the oil field to work and they wanted me to stay there with their momma and daddy and carry them places while they was gone to the oil well. I taught everybody out there how to drive a T-model. Well, you heard your folks talk about T-models, didn't you?

[What kind of food did you raise in your garden?]

Oh, I can tell you that plenty of everything suppose to grow in a garden. When I was raising my children --beans, butterbeans, cabbages, okra, eggplant, everything that was supposed to grow in a garden, I raised it. When I was raising my children.

[Some people plant by different times of the season and year. Did you know about any?]

Oh, yeah, I tell you the way I done when I was raising my garden. When I get my ground ready I plant in the ground. I didn't plant it by no season. Just get out there and plant it in the ground and I always made, that's right. I hear them talkin' about the moon. I plant it in the ground. I don't plant in the moon. That's the way I plant mine, in the ground. The same way in my field when I was farming corn and cotton. When I



got ready I went there and plant it in the field, in the ground. I weren't plantin' in the moon. And I always made something.

[Did you hunt a lot?]

Yeah, goodness, did I hunt? I reckon I did. I nearly raised up all them children hunting. [laugh]

[What kind of hunting did you do?]

Squirrel hunting, possum hunting, coon hunting, and partridge [quail]. I didn't deer hunt.

[Have you ever heard any ghost stories about hunting?]

Yeah, I heard a fellow say he was hunting and he see'd a possum, and he went up the tree to get it. And when he got up there and it weren't no possum setting up there on the limb. Say he was setting up there on the limb, say he told come on and get me. Say he come on down, and say he said, "Come on back and get me." And say he come on down. But I ain't never done that way. He told me that's the way he was did.

[Did you hear tell of any superstitions?]

Oh, 'bout the black cat. Put the black cat bone in your mouth and you go out of sight, nobody see you. Well, they said it. They said it, so it's true.

[Mr. Wren began reciting speeches and singing songs and telling ghost stories.]

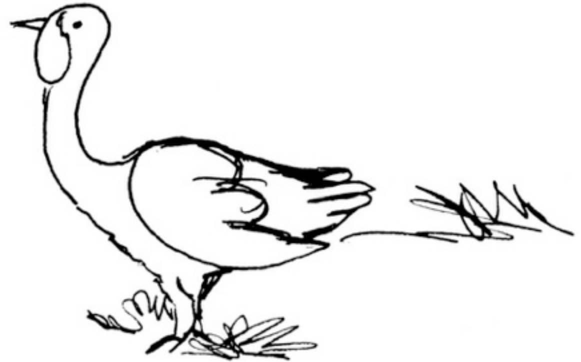
I got a little speech I'm going tell you. A little speech about two little fishes:

> Two little fishes in the brook,
> Poppa caught them with the hook.
> Momma fried them in the pan,
> And Buddy ate them like man.

And another, "Turkey Sneeze":

> I went 'round behind
> the hen house
> I fell upon my knees.
> I like to laugh myself to death,
> To hear that old turkey sneeze.

And:



> What shall we do for bacon now,
> Sambo shot the sandy sow.
> She jumped the fence
> and broke the rail,
> Sambo shot her through the tail.

> Judge, judge, shoot that nigger
> behind the tree.
> I got money, he got none.
> Put him in the callaboose
> Just for fun.

> Good morning, Captain buzzard.
> I came to borrow your wing,
> To fly over the ocean,
> To hear Miss Lucy sing.
> Her mouth just like a coffee pot,
> Her nose just like a spout.
> So take your time Miss Lucy,
> And pour your coffee out.

I used to sing all kind of blues. I done forgot them things now. I used to sing everything. I could whistle anything I wanted. I had a lot of foolish songs I used to sing. People used to ask me to sing 'em. I used to sing 'em. 'Bout:

Old hog, half a hog,
Old alligator,
Yon' come sister Liza Jane
She loves her yam potato.

Little boy, little boy
Who made your britches?
Mama cut 'em out,
Papa sewed the stitches.

I used to sing all that. I'm too old to sing the Blues. I'm about to die.

Let's stand on the hillside
And see old Martha coming,
Bullwhip in one hand,
Cowhide in the other.
Just a little piece of leather,
Gonna tie your hand together.

[Would you tell us some ghost stories?]

All right, I'll tell you what I know. Yeah, one time it was an old house, couldn't nobody stay in it. And this old man said, "I'll stay, I'll stay in that house." They pay 'em so much to stay in that house.

Well, that night he went in and made his big fire and reared back, you know. Way in the night he thought he'll put him a few potatoes in that fire there, in them ashes. He put the potatoes in them ashes, cooking. 'Bout time, 'bout time his taters got about half done, I reckon, old cat come in the cat hole. He said, "Oh, got company. Kitty come in." He said, "Hello kitty." And he sitting up in there, "Meow, meow." Setting round there with man, rubbing all up side him. Well, while he set down over there in the corner. The old cat, the old man was glad of his company, sitting up there at that big house by himself. So many people had died there, couldn't nobody stay there.

So, the old man potatoes got done. He thought he get the fire iron out and get one. The old man got his stick and raked his potatoes out and blowed the ashes off it. When he looked around the kitty reached and raked out him one and blowed the ashes off it. The old man got up 'bout that time. That old man step out the door. Say the old cat walked out and slapped him on the shoulder and say, "Where you going?". Say that old man run, run, run. Say the old man run so far he got tired. He said, "Whew! good God a mighty, I done run so far." Say the kitty said, "You ain't run fast enough, far enough yet. Let's go some more." You know about how that man felt, don't you?

When I was a boy I used to have to tend to the geeses every day. A hundred head of geeses. I'll get my breaksfast and get my geeses and get on out in the pasture. I was laying up under that shade tree, look out down there. The geese eating out down there. They all right, I said. One mind told me to look up. I looked up out in head of me. I see'd a pair of mules on a big old blue wagon wheels going. Look, man standing up in there that whip tossing long back behind that man holding it. Them wagon wheels turning. I reached and got my cap. When I got home it took me a long time to tell momma. Shucks, old folks didn't pay no attention to you. She run me right on back there. You ain't see'd no wagon up in the air. I know what I was looking at . I was looking right at it, but she mad me go on back. I went on back up there. I never did see that no more, never did. I mean them wagon wheels were turning far as I could see him he was going, a black mule and a red one. He was gone. A black and a red . He standing up in it, had his line. I said look at that wagon rolling, just like it rolling on the ground.

[Would you tell us another one?]

I know one, yeah. One time I stopped to pick up my sister's boy's books. He was staying with me. Well, the moon was shining, but it was cloudy. Well, my brother, Cal was scared to walk at night. The moon was

shining. I could see way down the road. When I come on out the white folks house, I picked up the boy's books and come on out to the road. And they told me a man died up there in that barn there, the way I had to go. And I looked back down the road and see'd my brother coming, looked just like my brother, Calvin, look just like him, walked like him. His coat fit like him. I stood there and looked at him. He walked right on by me, walked right on through the gate I was going through to go to my sister. I was staying with them then. When he got to the gate he never open the gate. He walked right on through that gate. When he go to that crib he turn short to the right. That's the last place I seen him. It was a haint all right. That was the last place I seen him.

[Tell us another ghost story.]

Well, I was sitting down in the house, and I heard one call me. All the people, all the children, your mama, and all of them heard him. They stopped. He call me just as good, "Ole Hunner." Luda Bell stopped. I heard him, but I didn't answer. "Ole Hunner." Everybody in the house heard it. Didn't noboby answer, and I didn't answer.

[Have you ever been home by yourself and a ghost come up right in front of you? Have you ever talked to any?]

No, but I saw a plenty of them, baby. They would come so close by me until they would burn me in the face.

[Ghosts are hot?]

Yeah, hot steam burn me up, but I don't ever meet that anymore. Don't never run across me now. I never feel it no more now. Whew, that hot steam fire in my face. Sometime it smell right fresh, right in my face, good goodness. Yeah, I've seen a many. I can't see nothing now.

[Granddaddy, how can you tell a ghost is near by?]

Well, I never could tell he was nearby. I could just see 'em when I was seeing 'em.

[I mean when they were real close to you.]

Oh, my hair rise up on my head. I know something was round me. My hair would stand straight up on my head. I know something was round me.

[Has anyone ever come back as a spirit or ghost to you?]

I've see'd my folks. I've see'd 'em, you know. No, I seen 'em just like they living. That old night that old thing walked over and went through the gate. I went back round and went through the woods. Well, my brother's dog he had, his shoulder done got broke and every night I come in off my job that dog would meet me. And I weren't looking where I was going. I was looking back to see if I was going to see that haint. When I got near Chris house that old dog knowed I was coming. She smelt me when I looked round. She was sitting right in front of me, met me. And I saw that foot and I like to fainted. I like to died.

[Did you ever see a ghost?]

Oh, I see'd them if it was a ghost. I seen plenty things, but since I've got up in age I can't see nothing no more. I use to see 'em all the time. Oh, yes, me and my brother was going to my other brother one night, and it got dark on me and had to cut out through the wood in a little path to go cross to my brother's house. And I looked up the tree and see'd it standing up under there, mangle hair, mangle beard. His hands was mangle. He was standing up under there with his head, and I got out the path. And I said to my brother, "I done lost the path." Well, he saw him 'bout time I seen him. He said, "Wait

a minute. I'll show you the path." I said, "No, I got the path." Now he went to get in front to show me the path and I said, "No, I'm in it." I weren't gonna let 'em get in front of me cause if he had got in front of me I was lida holler cause I done see'd the man. And I wouldn't tell him I see'd the man. So when us got over to my brother's house that night, setting there, us setting there looking at one another, I called him, I say, "Hey." He said, "Yes." "I see'd that man under that tree." That what I was fixin' to tell him. He told me, "Yeah, I see'd him." But I wouldn't let 'em get in front of me. Oh, I've see'd plenty of them things you call ghost. I believe it's a ghost. Yes, I do cause I see'd them look just natural to me as you do sitting there. Walk right out in the front of me, and I look around and it was gone. I know it was something. Yeah, it's a ghost. Lot of people don't believe in them.

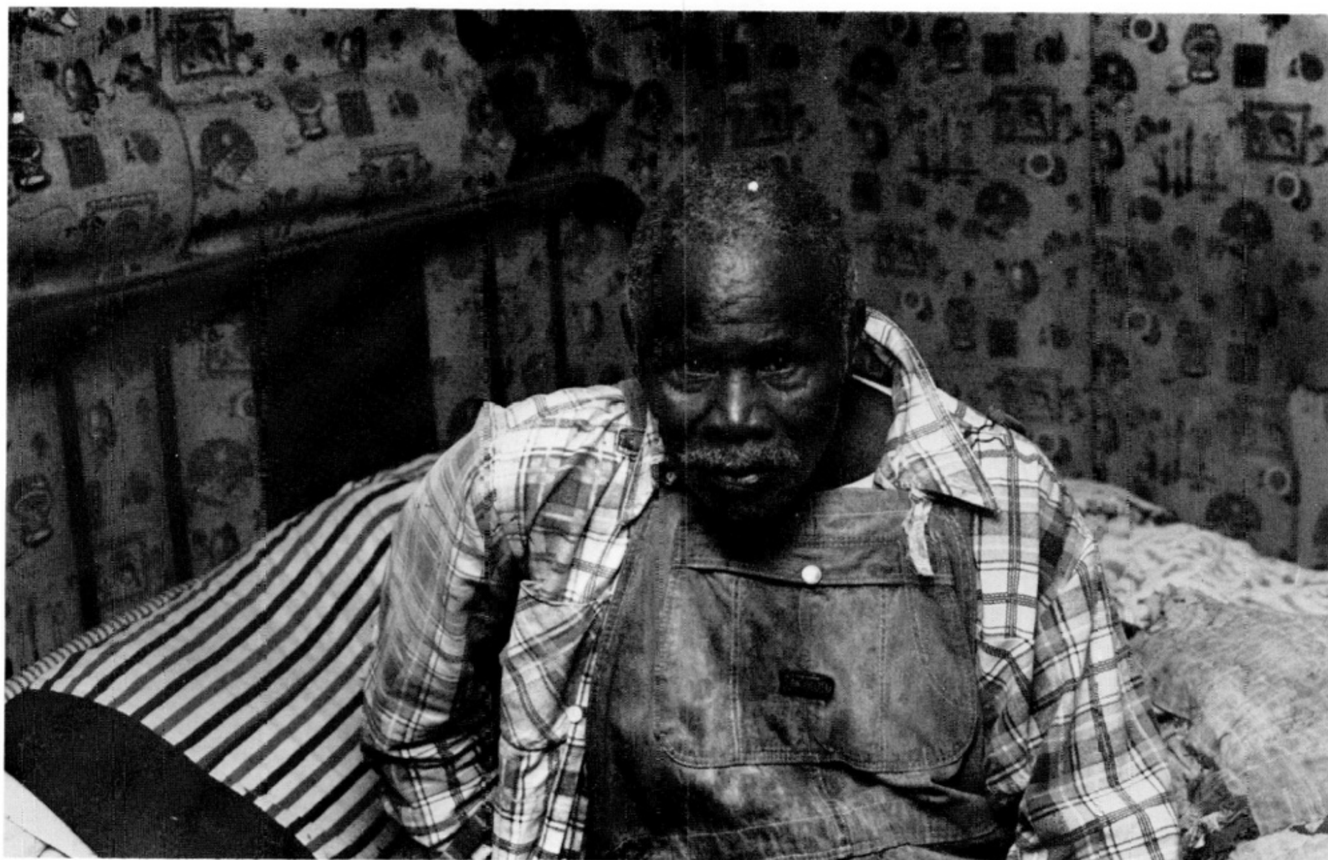
[Tell us about the one you saw on the Disharoon Plantation.]

Well, down on Disharoon, that when your moma was a little old girl. I had the boys up here helping getting this folks cattle off my place. And I sitting on the porch, moon shining and I looked up there and a big pair ole mules walked in the front of my house. Walked up to my lot and looked over in my lot. I called Luda Bell and all of them out there, and I went on out there and headed and put in the lot. One got down and wallowed. And then they went on down in my little corn-field, and I got my ole dog. I had an ole dog. I'm telling you the truth. If a cow or mule or anything was in the field she get him. And I called her come on here. Me and her went on. I heard brother coming in and I told him, "Stand down there boy, and head mules." I had the others all up the road there gone to head them. I was going down there and bring 'em out of that piece of corn down in there. I got down in there and told that ole dog, "Look 'em up, look 'em up." And the dog ain't looked up nothing, and my hair commence arising up on my head. Now that ain't no lie. I had them all standing out going to head them. I come out back up there and got up that morning, and went out there and looked in the dust. Ain't no mule track there, and ain't nare no wallow there. But they walked up there and looked over in my lot. And I went out there and open my gate, and then Luda Bell and all of 'em, and put out there to head them. And I went on down in the corn field to bring 'em out. Ain't no mule come out yet. That's right. I ain't joking. I couldn't tell ya'll all the haints I done seen.

[I remember my mother told me a-bout this ghost she saw that grew taller and taller. It didn't stop growing. She saw him on the Disharoon place when she was on her way to church one night.]

Yeah, I went out there to head-light one night. Right out there in front, out from Archer's, out there. I see'd an eye down on the ground. And I said, "Uh huh, that's a deer." And after a while he got up 'bout that high. Now that's no deer done raised his head up. Now after a while he got up that high. Now that's no deer done raised his head up. Now after a while he got up that high. After a while that eye go up. That eye got about that big. That eye got on up, it got to shining. It got back over here by Charlie Anderson house [Tillman road]. Then it got bigger than the moon. And it just shon't and shone till I walked into the house. I was frighten. Nev-er seen no eye get that tall and get on up in the air.

Granddaddy done told you 'bout all he know.



Frank Oliver

Interview by Charles Ham
Transcribed/edited by Veronica Buck

Mr. Frank Oliver lived on the outskirts of Port Gibson on Highway 547. He lived on a plantation there by himself. We went to interview him and see what he could tell us about his life and times. He agreed to the interview and told us what he had been through.

His education was very little. His house had no electricity at all. He told us stories about his younger days, his family, and the kinds of jobs he had worked on. Shortly after we interviewed him, he went to Texas to live with his daughter. His house was torn down.

It was my first time on an interview. I experienced the ways that a photographer reacts. Trying to take the best shots and timing my snaps were what mainly bothered me. Seeing what would be a good picture ran in my mind. Mr. Oliver told us he had never before had his picture taken, so I'm glad we got this opportunity before he left.

--Ruben Alexander

I enjoyed talking to Mr. Oliver because he talked about my father, Honey Ham, and he had a few items around his house that I remembered from when I was a kid: for example, a pressing iron, an old tea kettle, and two bars that keep wood from rolling out of the fireplace and starting a house fire.

He told me that greens and cornbread were the first foods he cooked. He also said he liked to go hunting for coon and possum. When I went outside, there was plenty of wood cut. Talking to Mr. Oliver remimded me of the way I lived growing up near Carlisle. I enjoyed talking to him and to his visitor, Mr. Saul Dorsey.

--Charles Ham

[I was born] March 27, 1902, in Jefferson County. I'm 79 right now. [When I was young,] I was a farmer on Jim Voices between Red Lick and Stanton.

[How long have you lived in this house?]

Thirty years.

[Do you garden?]

I just raise a little greens, right out there in front of the door. I plant three days before the moon is full, and three days after. [I plant that way] because I want it to grow.

[Did you ever hunt?]

Yeah, I just go out at night, that was all. Carry my dogs and they would tree [a possum]. I'd have a shotgun and I shoot him down. Put him in my sack. I ate him with potatoes. He was a good eat.

Mama cooked him. Pot boil him till he leaves the bone just about, and then take him out and roll it in pepper and meal. Sometime we didn't have the black pepper, and we just boil him in red pepper, then take him out.

[I see you've got a big black pot over by your stove. Do you cook in that?]

Yes, sir. I got some meat in the pot now. Put it on the fire and warm it up, and cook it on the fire. Put some coals out there and cook my bread. All the year.

[How did you learn how to cook?]

My mama learnt me when I was a kid, and I never forgot it. She learnt me how to cook greens and

bread. A teaspoon and a half full of salt, and your greens, and your bread, according to how much I was going to make up. And she showed me how to dish it out. So I could cook it today. I know 'bout how much I take for cornbread. I just pour it in the pan until I found out I had enough. [I like] collards [the best]. I'm not supposed to eat meat, but I do eat it, I'll tell you now, whichever [kind] I get ahold of.

[What is this iron right here used for?]

Well, it keep the fire from rolling in the corner of the house.

[Do you think times are harder now than when you were young?]

It's harder now. My daddy used to make molasses, and raise his own meat and meal. But now everything I get I have to buy it.

[How would you make it better?]

Well, I put on some decent jobs if I were able. Hire somebody to work.

[Did your mama teach you anything besides how to cook?]

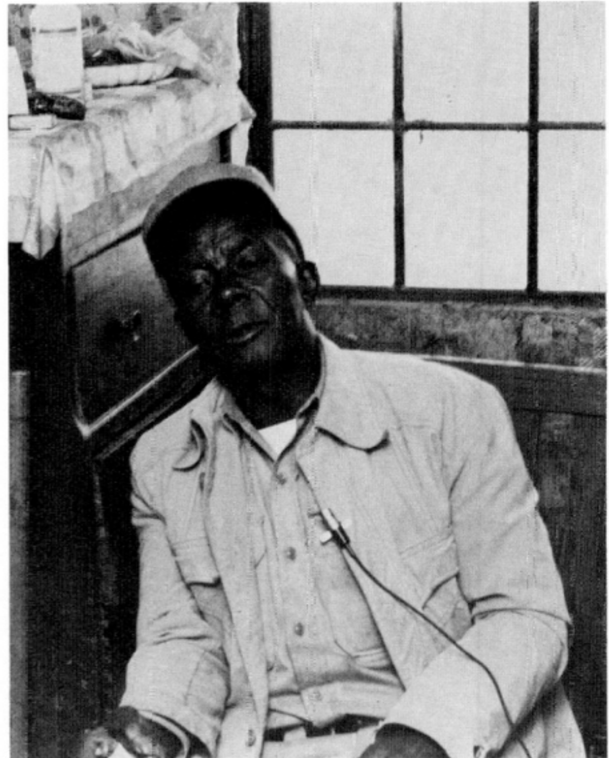
Yeah, she taught me how to tend to my own business and let other fellows alone.

[What advice could you give to a young person now days?]

Stay out the jailhouse, that's the brightest idea.

[Why is religion important to you?]

I don't want to live bad and then die and go to hell, that's why. I want to live good some of my days.



Saul Dorsey

[What did you do in the fields?]

Different things--cut sprouts, plow mules, hoe, set out potatoes, everything. I didn't have no pick of a job. You couldn't pick a job then. You just had to take it as it come. Until I got grown. Then when I got grown I farmed for myself. I got out from under then.

[What other kind of work did you do?]

All different things, cut wood, raise corn, raise a garden, cut yards just different things. I raise that corn, raise hogs. I been doing it so long.

[Do you ever kill any hogs?]

Yes, I have. Gonna kill one this year. Got it up on the floor now, the fattening pen. Kill one every year mostly. I been in the Delta, way up in the Delta, Drew, Mississippi plow-

ing a mule all day for one dollar a day, rows how long. I don't know how long they was. I couldn't talk about it.

[Did you like it?]

Had to like it, didn't have no other choice. Yeah, had to like it. I used to go up there and walk them long roads every day.

[How did you get up there?]

We had a truck transfer, that took a gang of us up there.

[You be going up there everyday or what?]

No, stay up there. That's way up there. Way out there at Parchman. Wouldn't come home, sometime be up there a month. So anything come handy to you then. You wouldn't be picky then. Pullin' skidder like, you don't know nothing about that. Hang that skidder like over your shoulder here and got them tongues out there like that and both hands and then you go way down through the woods to hook them things to a log. Then you down in the woods you holler and go. You walk on up the hill to follow the log, then you go back up there and unhook them tongues. You go on back over the hill again.

[You take these skidder and pull them up?]

Yeah, that skidder wind that log up.

[Pull it on up the hill?]

Yeah, if that didn't do, the mule would do it, sure would. So for work I done, done all kinds of work. Worked on Big Black bridge, you know where that's at, don't you? This Big Black bridge up here now, the one go to Vicksburg. They roll concrete with a wheel barrow, then, yeah, see what I mean. You had a go and a come. See, you go on out with your load this way and them empties coming round there on a scaffels about like that, over that water, on them scaffels just about like that.

[Did you swim?]

Yeah, if the concrete get to going like that and there, bye-bye wheelbarrow it going, 'cause you can't steady it. You know, concrete is heavy. Yeah, so I done done all of that. Shoot dynamite, I've done that. Work on [highways] putting that road through there up at the Crosssroad Store. Shot dynamite all through there when they's laying that road.

[What did you do, blow up things with dynamite?]

Well, you get a long auger, it's got a handle on it like this. That's a cross handle on it just like that auger in the middle of it. And it's a great auger and you just get down between them roots and bore a hole in the ground, oh about that deep, kind a like a big stump is. You get down on the other side, you hit the tap root, you see. Go on the other side and put one in and then you wrap, put your dynamite, then your hanging stem hanging out of there. Then when you get many as you want around you can go back there and go to light, uh-huh. See it lit, you keep going, keep a kicking, but you got to know how many you put there, you can't guess. See, you may go back there doing something and get blowed off. Yeah, you got to have a pretty good head on you.

[Was it easy to do?]

No, indeed, no, anytime you boring a hole in the ground around stump, sometime you got to put boards, big stump. You got to put four hole that deep, that's deep.

[Are people different from what they use to be?]

Yes indeed, uh-huh. I can speak that right away. I can tell you plenty changes--just to get at it--

'cause when I was a boy coming up, didn't nobody meet you up on the street and try to take your wallet from you. Now you can meet some up on the street and they try to take your wallet. Didn't none of that go on. Well, you can go over there and get all 'toxicated up now and sit out there, and when you wake up you ain't got no more. Course, I didn't get that way, but I'm just saying the way it be's. It wasn't thataway when I was coming up then. When you get up you ain't got nothing. They done took and strip you.

[Are you saying the people do a lot drinking nowadays?]

Yeah, more drinking now then it was when I was comimg up, yeah.

[Well, did people make stuff called moonshine?]

Yes, yeah, sure did.

[Do you know anyone who was doing it?]

Yes, yes, I sure did, 'cause I used to do it myself. Used to work at a whiskey gin myself. It wasn't none of mine, but I was working in it. Well, just get a pipe. Get down on the branch, and get your steam up, and your whiskey steaming out over you. It just look like a steam but that's your whiskey. Just keep your fire going. You gonna see that running through that spout all the time. When you get it off it's just like water, clear. Then you get some coloring put in it, color it brown. Get some brown sugar, just brown some sugar, and don't let it burn. If you let it burn your whiskey gonna be nasty to you. You know, your whiskey gonna be colored. Course now, you could put it in a ten gallon can, you know, just let it sit there and it browns the color up itself.

[Did you enjoy doing this?]

Yeah, 'cause I loved it myself. I loved whiskey myself. Yeah, I enjoyed it. I loved to drink it myself then.

[Did it knock you out?]

Yeah, had me where I couldn't walk.

[You be staggering?]

Yeah, everything, uh-huh fall off my horse, stay off, uh-huh.

[How long did the effect of it last?]

Well, if I get it in me tonight it'd last me two or three days before it get me, no quicker than I get over it and go right back on it again, um-huh. I think I'm alright and I go right back and fasten it again. I'm in the shape again. If you ain't got nothing in your pockets, make you feel like you own this house, money. That's the way whiskey do you. You get big minded, and if you got any money in your pocket you gonna spend it.

Don't you see how whiskey has done many a person. Just done carry him to the bank. See, he get whiskey, you know money and whiskey don't agree, you know. Other words gas and whiskey don't agree. You can't get in no automobile and control yourself drinking. Course, I was riding horseback then. If I was riding in a car I would have been killed. I'd fall off the horse, horse stand around and eat grass until daylight, then I'd get up on him and come on home, if my wife didn't come there and get me and bug me out and everything.

[What in your life are you proud of?]

Ah, I'm proud of one thing, first I am proud that he Lord let me be here now. Now that's the first of it. The Lord let me. A lot of boy up along with me are gone, see. Way yonder gone. Goose done pick grass off they grave a long time ago, and I'm here now that's one thing I'm proud of, yeah.

Hystercine Rankin

Interview by Octavis Davis
Transcribed/edited by Octavis Davis

Considerate? Yes. The lady I am speaking of is Mrs. Hystercine Rankin. This lady, who many people consider to be the most loyal in Russum, I consider to be next to my mother.

Interviewing Mrs. Rankin was not just another learning experience. It was like meeting an old relative who was briefing you on your past history. She knew not only her family tree but she could tell about nearly everyone else's family tree.

Mrs. Rankin was born in the Blue Hill community on the old Oak Grove Place on August 11, 1929. She is a member of St. Mark's Baptist Church in Blue Hill. She is the mother of seven children.

During her childhood, Mrs. Rankin did various chores. She picked cotton, fed and milked cows, and raised chickens and pigs. Today she grows her own garden and preserves her own fruit and vegetables. She is a very good mother and wife. In her spare time she provides her family with plenty warmth by making quilts.

Mrs. Rankin has been making quilts since the age of twelve. She learned the craft from her grandmother. She is very proud to know how to make quilts and to express the family tradition with every one she makes.

Mrs. Rankin is a very independent lady and one of the kindest I know.

--Octavis Davis

I was born in Jefferson County, 1929, August 11th. Let me say, I was born in a slave house right down on Daddy Joe's place, in a log cabin.

I lived in Union Church ten years and my father died and I moved with my grandparents to Brookhaven. I lived on Washington Street until my grandmother died in '44. I moved back to my great uncle out in the Blue Hill community, on my great-grandfather's place, which was Joe January.

[Where did you go to school?]

Well, I first went to the Zion School which was Contentment. Mrs. Daisy Thomas and a Mrs. Gronetta [Woodard] taught me during that time. But then, after daddy got killed, I went to Alexander High in Brookhaven. After my grandmother died I come down to Fayette school under the Professor Ratcliff.

[Did you play games at school?]

They played "Pop the Whip". And the kids would run the possum up the tree or the coon--whatever. A child would run up a tree and the dogs would bark in behind. That was the little kids. As you grew older, if you was in the rural, you'd stand around in groups talking, and play "See More Lady". That was one of our main games.

See no non,
Satisfied.
Get your partner,
I got mine.

You'd skip across and get a partner in a hurry. Don't want to get left out. Then you'd start clapping and going around in circles. Popping the whip: the largest child would be on the front and the next one, down to the smallest one, and they would run fast as they can and then they'd stop and everybody would whirl they arm and the last one, usually, if they didn't hold him tight, he'd sail in the mud or whatever he went.

One of the ring games was "Bumblebee, You Stinging Me."

Bumblebee,
You're stinging me.
Bet you five dollars
I'll get out of here.

It was a circle of kids and they'd be

going around, "Bumblebee, you stinging me."

The old men would come and sit around watching the kids play and they holler, "Wind the ball." That's when we was twisting and they say, "It's a crying shame. We gon take our children out of Contentment and send 'em to St. Mark, 'cause them children over there is bout to wring off their waist." They didn't say it that way, but it was a disgrace they say. You would be wring when they say wind the ball. And the child get in the middle and she be trying to break out. And they didn't allow that, 'cause the boys was holding girls' hands. And see the girls, when they be trying to get out, the girls would be leaning on they arms. Well, they didn't want the girls' bust or nothing touching the boys' arms. Well, that was a disgraceful game, but we loved it. I don't know why. But we loved it.

And being late for school, you better not be late! Because the teacher say, "Walk right down this plank," with her switch in her hand. Well, everyone walk through this family, and if it was six or seven in this group, everyone got a good whip. And you could remember that whip all day 'cause it would be a welp left there. I can't forget that.

[If you went home late?]

Ah, you didn't go home late. You didn't go home late. If school was out at three--and we walked--you was gonna be there before sundown. You didn't stop to chat with nobody that wasn't going to school. You'd go and they'd tell you, "Go in a has' and come in a pace.

[When did school start?]

Let me tell you now, the first six weeks Mr. Alexander would tell the children, "All of you that want to be able to go to pick cotton to make your money to buy your winter clothes, the first six weeks of school, it wouldn't even answer to your grade." You see, they would take that and give the children their time off, which some kids stayed out of school and didn't do nothing. Then when school come you had your new shoes. You had your little school clothes. Some of the kids would come on in dragging with no shoes, but they had this chance free to go out and pick cotton, which we taken advantage of.

[Did you have celebrations at the end of the school year?]

Well, you'd learn your speeches and that night--this is in the rural I'm talking about--when you'd get ready, all the parents would meet together and bring the kids up to this little program that they would have. Usually everybody would have a box with a cake and a little chicken in it, and speeches. You get up. All the kids get up and say speeches. Sometime they start with the spelling bee, see who could get down to one person--he was just the best. Well, you'd have singing and them children all had speeches.

[Were the speeches made up or given to you?]

Well, most of the time, the old people would usually give it to the child. I don't know what they'd write those speeches out of, but they'd always hand you a speech to say.

[Do you remember any of your speeches?]

No indeed, I don't remember not even a speech growing up. But all I can remember about a song we all had when I was graduating from rural school. It was my sister, and about five or six more girls. And they say--when they get to her she says, "Baptist, baptist is my name. I'll be a baptist till I die." And when they get to her they'd say, "Sanctified, sanctified is my name, and I'll be a sanctified till I die." But when they get down to the last one, she'd say, "Hypocrite till I die," and we'd just jump out and go to dancing. That was the funny part of that song. We laugh

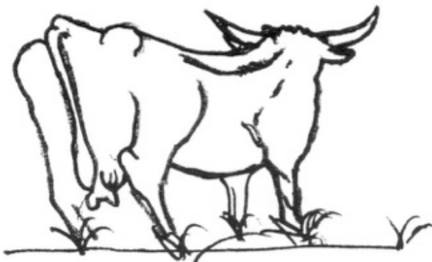
about it now, about that hypocrite, that girl that say she was gonna be a hypocrite.

[Do you remembr the names of any dances?]

Well, I'm a say before I went to Brookhaven it was Trucking and Trailing. My sister couldn't Truck, she Trailed, they say. It was Trucking and the Big Apple and the Hen Peck. And after then the Fan came out. Now this was coming on up to high school --around forty-three. The Sand and Jitterbug--now that was some of our best dances during that time. Slow Dragging, waltzing, and Cha-cha, you did that, too. You'd usually do that at something special going on. You just didn't waltz regularly. Well, getting close to school time you'd have some pretty white dresses on, your little organdy dresses. And they would teach you how to waltz. Now the old people love waltzing. That was one of the beautifulest dances. They say the cleanest it was.

[Did you work when you were growing up?]

Well, we'd milk cows. I'd get up in the morning and milk five cows, five cows. Some of them cows would give a water pail of milk. Me and my first cousins would drive 'em out in the country for about a mile and put 'em in a pasture--the cows and calves together--and in the evening you'd bring 'em back up to the lot which was on the outskirts of town. You separate the calves from the cows to keep 'em from drinking the milk, and you milk the cow the next morning.



My grandmother made butter. You'd sell butter. We didn't have milk like they have now in the store. If they had it, it was delivered in glass jars, and you would take and go if you had yours. Go down Washington Street. My grandmother had customers would buy milk and butter. And every evening that was our chores in the Winter.

In the Spring you'd hoe. We'd catch the cotton trucks about four o'clock [in the morning]. But it was always a elder person on there to be responsible for my grandfather's children. It was a lady cross the street--she had girls along with us. She'd take care of this group of girls, because you'd pick up them rotten people downtown. When you pick cotton, you'd single out from them because you had some real bad ones coming from downtown over in those quarters, we called 'em then. Like I tell you, you'd catch the big trucks and go out and farm, working the crops, which was two dollars a day.

And if you pick cotton, you'd get two dollars a hundred, [when] I was twelve. I picked two hundred pounds of cotton. But you see the thing about it: that was your money and at the end of [that time] you'd have about thirty, thirty-five dollars. Well, you'd have some money, and you'd put that up for your school clothes. Your grandparents would tell you, "Well, if you want clothes, that's the way you had to get 'em."

When my grandmother died--this was on my daddy's side of the family --I come down on my mother's side. In times when you wasn't doing anything --weekends, on Saturday--you'd go out in the pasture and you'd pick up cow batts, which is manure, and you'd put it on poor soil. That's to make the fertilize to help raise garden--corn, or whatever you was doing. If you had any leisure time after then you set out peach trees. We set about an acre for the other sisters and brothers.

And then like weekends in the winter you wasn't doing nothing, you'd go out and take your sack and pick up walnuts and hickory nuts, and you'd put 'em in a trunk in the smokehouse along with your popcorn. Instead of potato chips you made your peanut candy, which was made out of molasses and butter. And that was your candy. They'd twist it and put it up and let it harden. Then you have your walnuts. You made walnut candy out of molasses and your hickory nuts. Instead of going to the store, you'd have a hickory nut block. They'd take it and go out and bust your hickory nuts on that.

And then Spring time, you knock cotton stalks. When you come in in the evening, after you put your cows up, feed your hogs and chickens, you go out and knock cotton stalks until time. Then you come in and sit down with the lamp light and get your lesson. This was in the Spring--you was getting ready to break the land. You'd take a stick and you'd go down the row and hit left, right, left, right, left, right. That's the old stalks. You're gettin' it ready for to put a mule in. See, it wasn't tractors like it is now.

Well, Sunday morning we had a uncle had a body shop downtown in Brookhaven, and we go wash cars for him, getting ready to paint. His wife would be painting, but we never painted. We'd wash and clean up cars for him. It wasn't no leisure time.

And then you was gonna go to Sunday School and you wasn't allowed to play ball Sunday evening, which we loved. We couldn't play ball at our grandparents house. It was a hill right out where a lot of kids may come up on Sunday evenings to play ball. And we wasn't allowed out there to play no ball.

[Daddy Joe] had a wagon sitting in his back yard, which we would go lay down in it and had cards to play. You couldn't play music--or blues, Pa done called it--you couldn't play them on the radio. Well, I was brought up, I reckon, about as strict as strict could get. And it was sometime you thought you was in the pen. But you better not grunt, because they didn't play.

[What about your grandfather?]

That was my great grandfather. That was Daddy Joe. Well, first, I say he had seven daughters and he carried 'em down to Alcorn in a wagon. Well, that's where they went to school, down at the oldest dorm down there. They wore white stockings and blue uniforms, blue long dresses, down to the ankle with blue dresses. He educated his daughters down to Alcorn. Seven daughters. He had one son. He didn't want to go to school: that's why he got the biggest of the land, 'cause [Daddy Joe] say he educated his daughters.

First, I'll begin with his land. He bought land twenty-five cents an acre. And he would come off the white man place [working the] limit, and cut those trees down at night at the Spring of the year--what you call a new ground cleaning. They would take horses and pull all that together and then they would burn it. That's getting that land ready to work. First, he had a old little house--in 1890, Uncle Levi say, 'cause he was ten years old. He taken and built him a house which takes a thousand dollars, which was a great big house with a big hall in it and the lumber had a beautiful seam in it and it was unusual material. On top they had those shingles. He had four large room and the big hall and then you step down to a back porch and go to the kitchen. They made the kitchen away from the house during that time.

But he worked on the white man's place during the day and he cleaned that land up, which is nothing but bottom land, and it is beautiful. And the pond is out there now, which he dug with a slip. A slip is pulled with two mules, and it goes down and cut into the soil. It's not a wheelbarrow, but the front of it sits up low. When the mule pull through it, see, it digs into that dirt. Then they start on up that hill. When you

working with a slip, you work from the inside of the pond, and that mule always walk up to the top of the hill and pull the soil. Which that pond is there now. It's fill up. Willows is around it, but that's the pond.

He made baskets in his older day, 'cause he worked seven days a week up until he couldn't walk. They say he'd get his kids ready for church, and his wife. Get 'em a nice piece of cloth to make 'em a dress and put 'em in the wagon. And he'd go to the field and you didn't talk to him. You didn't talk about farming. They say he didn't talk with you. And sit always behind the stove to eat. Some of his family got this granite skillet with a handle to it. Now that's what he ate out of. Now he didn't eat biscuits. He ate cornbread, but he didn't eat biscuits. He never ate flour bread. And he raised his tobacco by this chimney in this big old house. They raised rice too. It wasn't pretty like rice is now, but it was rice.

[Did he dry his tobacco?]

Yes, he would put it up and let it dry. After he would dry it, he would put molasses on it, you know, to stick it together. They rolled cigars out of that tobacco. He put molasses on it and dried it. Then he put like a piece of iron to it. He called that his presser. You better not touch it because that's what he made his tobacco in the fall of the year with.

[Did he sell tobacco?]

During that time he didn't sell nothing I remember but baskets. And he sat on the pond down there in a little chair with a little fire. That's where he made his baskets, big cotton baskets. He would use that oak material, a oak tree. He would select a certain tree for baskets. Well, usually, when he cut it, he would take something like a rival [a splitting tool also known as a froe]. He had it and he could cut it so thin. He'd make beautiful dinner baskets for his wife for church, egg baskets. He

would make some beautiful baskets.

[Who was the person you knew most and felt closest to?]

My great uncle. He would raise three and four hundred gallon of sorghum, and two hundred gallons of Louisiana [syrup]. That's where we got our sweets from. Louisiana syrup and sorghum. Then the smokehouse was nothing but smoked meat, which you smoked the meat with china, little china[berry] chips. It would just look like, when you went there, it was always something good around. See, you didn't have too much nourishment, food like that at home, because it just too many of 'em. And my great uncle he was the one. He'd always be bringing you something. He didn't have no children. He'd always have something to hand, a piece of material or pair of unions for one of the boys, or just something he'd hand somebody all the time.

[What was his name?]

Levi January, that was my great granddaddy's son. The land which he was raised on still back out there in the family now.

[Do you know any superstitions?]

No, no more than don't sweep after night. It's bad luck to sweep dirt out the doors after dark, after the sun go down. That's the only thing I remember not to do. We never was superstitious. I believe, even sometime today, I should be, because my daughter ran over a cat going to Vicksburg in the front of that bank in Port Gibson. We had some tires on the truck. One of 'em blowed out and we had a new tire chained in the back of the truck and a lock on it. Which my husband didn't go. And there we was halfway to Vicksburg. A man came through and he filed that chain in two. We had a brand new jack in the truck, and the jack broke. And all we say it had to be something--that black cat crossing, going to the left. I don't believe in the cat either, but that day I thought about it. I say it's good sometime to listen to what some people say about the cat.

[What about old remedies?]

Well, in the spring of the year you usually would have a tonic, which is a little weed grows about that tall. Now that's your working medicine. My husband could tell you the name [may apple root]. You go out and get it in a jar and you give each one of your children a dose of it, which they want no more soon because it really work you out good. But they call it cleaning you out, spring cleaning.

And well, go back to my parent's remedy for cold. They would take and give you a dose of castor oil. [Then] they would take and cut up garlic and they take tallow--the tallow come from when you kill goats--and you cut it up and put that in your molasses along with your garlic. That was for the cough. You had to stand over the skillet with the spoon and eat some of that, which was really bad. This was for the cough and the castor oil was to work it on through you. And that was the only doctor's medicine we had growing up.

Now we go back and we talk about the hog hoof tea. You drink that at night along with your pine top tea. You go and you pull a pine limb down if it's kinda short and break that end off. And you bring it home, rinse it off, and put it in the kettle and set it by the fire and boil it. And everybody drink tea at night sitting around the fire. But that hog hoof tea, another thing about it was that it was for the pneumonia. I had two brothers with the pneumonia and that's all we know--soaking 'em, rubbing 'em down with hot tallow at night and giving 'em castor oil and that hog hoof tea, or shuck tea. Now shuck tea was good for the measles. That's what they gave us during that time. You boil them shucks and drink the water off of it. And you didn't drink no cold water. It was mostly warm water all the time.

We go back to sprains, because this girl went skating last night and she sprung her ankle. And I told her mother to get some red clay and vinegar and take a white cloth and wrap that, and make a paste and put it round that ankle and take that cloth and wrap round it. It is really good for sprains.

And we talk about cuts. If it was bleeding bad they'd reach and get some soot and put in there. That was to stop it from bleeding. Soot, up in

the chimney. I don't know, it stopped it. It was good. It had to be.

I jumped off a stump once--I was getting eggs out the smoke house--on a twentypenny nail. You could see in between my bones--you could see the point of it. And my grandmother pull it out. And they sat that foot in epsom salt water all night, and soaked it in what you call creosote water. I didn't know nothing about no doctor with it. I sat up and slept in a chair, a rocking chair. And they sat up with hot water, to help you from taking what they call lock jaw, and soaked that foot.

[What about salt meat?]

Don't mention salt meat and okra blossum. That was for boils. They would take and put that salt meat on there and they would fix it on there where it would stay and it would draw it, which you could hardly stand it. And that okra blossum--at the spring of the year, if you had a okra blossum--it would really draw it to a head and you didn't have that boil no more in that place 'cause it pull that core out of there.

Sassafras tea, it is really good, but you see, the sap is coming up now, you can't drink it. You have to get the sassafras while the sap is down. But when the tree start budding you can't get the roots then. Sometimes you can go in the wood and find it in vines. This time of year you would have plenty of it. But I never have been able to find the sassafras vine. The sassafras root is what we'd get. Sometimes if you wanted syrup, you would make your sugar syrup and flavor it with sassafras. And it is really good. But that is one of the best drinking teas for breakfast just like it is.

And then we had the everlasting tea--life everlasting. In the fall of the year you get it, which grows wild out here in the pasture. It grows kind of upside the fence. They're more where they don't be done clipped. And you get it and you tie it before the frost hit it. Well, I hang it down in the building and let it dry. Then after you let it dry you crumble it and put it in a jar. And when you get ready to make your tea you just put it off in some boiling water and strain it when you're pouring it into your cup. And it is really good. It's got something like a little wide leaf on it--not too wide a leaf--and it grow about that tall, and it stands out from anything in the pasture.

We talk about high fever. My parents used to pull up bitter weed and boil 'em and bath you down in that bitterweed water. That's to pull that fever off you. A bitterweed, it is yellow and it's got yellow flowers on it. It's beautiful. It grow mostly everywhere. If you milking a cow, she sometime bite off it, and after you go to drink that milk you know she been eating bitterweed.

[What about celebrations?]

Well, you'd smell the apples sometimes two weeks before Christmas, but you never seen 'em. You'd look and hunt 'em, but you couldn't see nothing. But you knew Santa was coming close. Now I'll be fair--but you gonna laugh--I thought it was a Santa Claus till I was fourteen years old. Now I definitely thought it. My auntie said--I spent the night down there during the Christmas time--she said, "Hystercine, you too large for Santa Claus." She say, "It's no Santa Claus." That made me think then that Christmas wasn't like it had been. But Christmas time you would get an apple, an orange--say a stick of peppermint candy and some raisins--and that was it. That was Christmas for us. We thought we had something, which we had. Those great big sticks of candy. Sometimes it had to be cut to divide it among the children.

But you be making hog head souse coming up to Christmas. They are baking all during that time. We say they start baking a week before Christmas after they kill hogs. You make your hog head souse. You boil your pig feet down, then you put 'em in vinegar and make your pickled pig feet. And Christmas day, that morning, all the old people would get up and they would get what they call whisky, and raw eggs, you know, and make that egg nog and that milk, and make everybody had to sip. The kids and all had to drink some of that junk. I didn't like it. But you drinked it because the old people drinked it, and they'd have the children come around. But it was a happy time. You didn't get clothes or nothing like that 'cause they didn't have the money for it, but what you you had you was glad to get. It was just a joyous time because before hand you done smell them apples in the house. But you can put apples in a house now, they don't smell like the apples did then.

[Were there any other kinds of celebrations?]

Easter. Well, Easter time would be a nice time. Everybody would be getting their speech ready for a little Easter program, or singing a little solo. That's when you get your little spring dress. Usually it was white organdy. Everybody would load in the wagon and go to church. Now that was a happy time. Now birthday time usually they gave you a cake. They'd cook a cake for that child and all of 'em would have cake during the birthday. Now that's one time you always celebrate, your birthday. They just give you a cake, which they thought was something else. Whether it was cake or molasses bread, it was still cake.

[What about the fourth of July?]

Well, you'd kill a goat. Maybe you'd go ten or twelve miles if you didn't have a goat and buy a goat for fifty cents or one dollar--a big billy--and you'd bring him home. Children would play with him for a while. Say for instance, if you bring him on a Thursday, and the fourth of July was that Saturday, maybe two days ahead of time they'd tie him out. You didn't tie with no rope. You have a chain, a trace chain, and kids play with him till the morning. They get ready to kill that goat and you'd be so glad you didn't worry about him dying.

They'd hang him up alive--[he] bleates a lot--and they'd cut his throat and they'd gut him, and then take the goat hide and they'd stretch it. That's for the bottom of chairs. They cut up the goat and we cook it in a wash pot.

Then you'd go two or three miles and meet the ice truck and you come back and you gon freeze three or four gallons of ice cream, which you couldn't eat. When you get through you didn't want to see no more ice cream for a long time. Homemade ice cream. You'd milk your cows that morning and you'd put your milk off in dish pans in cool water, that's to make sure it didn't cure or nothing before three o'clock. And get your eggs, and your milk, and your sugar and usually you get your flavor from the Riley man and you make your custard. You getting down to that custard part now. You got to constantly stand over it because you may use about a cup of flour in it. That was to make it thicker and harder when you freezing your cream. Then they'd take a ice pick and you'd chip your ice up and you'd put salt around and freeze it. And you'd know when it's ready, you can't turn it no more.

The Riley man was a man come through the community selling your liniment--white liniment, red liniment--and just like your little bath powder, your flavor and your pepper. You bought it during that time, maybe once a year. You didn't buy it regularly. You may buy flavor which was deep yellow, lemon flavor, or maybe your vanilla flavor. Usually it was the only two kind. All I know we call him the Riley man. They holler, "Here

come the Riley man." You'd sure be there 'cause usually he'd stop. See, we lived about two miles off the road, but it may be a lot of people be there at the fork to meet the Riley man. He sold spices, bath powder, face powder, lemon flavor, different little things like that.

Usually we didn't buy soap 'cause my grandmother made soap. She made lye soap to scrub the floors with and she made this what you call P&G soap. I don't know how she made it, but to begin with you would put your ashes in a barrel and they put water on 'em. And they let that lye drip from the barrel into a big tub. Then you would take and make lye soap, [and] what you call P&G soap. My family, that's what we used, P&G. It wasn't the P&G in the store, but it was white. It was different from the lye soap 'cause the lye soap was to wash with. You put it in your pot and it would give plenty suds. Like quilts, when you got ready to wash them, see, you'd put 'em on the rub board. Look like it would take a half a day to go around that quilt. Then they'd drop it in a wash pot and that's when you'd wash your feet off and get in there and start tramping. When you got through you had a beautiful white quilt. It be done washed it good. This lye soap, that's what we scrubbed with.

[Did you raise chickens or pigs?]

Yes, indeed, we used to sell eggs here. In growing up that's what you raised. There wasn't no buying chickens in the store during that time. You raised your pork. And when you make your lard, you pack it in fifty pound cans. Then your crackles from the hog, from cooking the lard, you would take 'em and pack 'em in

cans. And you'd sprinkle a little salt cross the top, that's to preserve 'em. And see any time of the year you could get you a crackling and it would be fresh.

Now during that time we always killed a beef once a year. You put it in a barrel and you pour a lot of salt which was brine salt. Called pickled beef. Well, when you got ready you just reach down in that brine salt and get it. It would be really salty though. You have to boil it, you know, before you could get that salt out of it. But that was the way they perserved their beef during that time.

When we used to kill beef, you take your hide and you tack 'em out on a plank and you let 'em dry. When you wear the seat out [of a straw bottom chair]--but that chair is plum good--then you take and make you a seat, a cow bottom seat in that chair. Which was some good chairs. You didn't throw away nothing.

You kill your cow more so in the fall before it get too cold. You hogs, usually Christmas time, a week or two before Christmas because they'd blow flies, blow your meat. You would take and kill your hogs and you'd salt it down and let it stay there for about two weeks. Then you take it up and wash it in hot water, in a meat box, a wooden box. That's where you kept your meat in the smoke house. I got some grass out there they call bear grass. You take a knife and you cut you a little hole in your piece of meat at the end, and you slip that bear grass through it and tie it and loop it up here on a pole. And after you do that, every evening would be your job you go out and cut china-[berry] blocks and put a light smoke

under it.

[Do you perserve or sell your produce?]

Well, I hadn't been selling. I raise a lot but I hadn't sold none. Always say I'm sell every year, but when that time come you got a washtub and you picking your butterbeans and come in and sit down at night. When I know anything I done shelled 'em all, and getting ready to pack, and putting 'em in bags. I have a deep freezer. It's nine foot. September it's level with my vegetables. I'm going back to jars this year though for string beans and soup, the mixed soup. You use butterbeans, white potatoes, corn, okra and tomatoes. It's gumbo really, what they call it. It is really good.

You first cook your butterbeans a while and make sure they a little tender 'cause when you put your okra, corn, tomatoes, and your potatoes in it, don't take 'em long to cook. Then you pack it in jars. You scalds it. You bring it to a boil, then you pack it in your jars. And you take them out and turn 'em bottom uppers until they cool, then they seal and ready to pack in your pantry.

[Did you do lots of canning?]

Yes indeed. You learn how to make your pickles, your chow-chow, which is your cabbage, your onion, and cucumbers and potatoes together, and then you perserve. You go pick berries. You make jam and jelly and you make quince perserves. We had quince trees. You'd always make pear preserves.

I cans all of my pickles and I never knew what buying pickles was until this year. And I didn't know the price was so high until I went in

the store. But my pickles taste better. It's not just like the pickles they have in the store because I soak mine. Some people soak 'em in alum, but I like the way I pickles 'em better cause that's the hand me down from my grandparents.

[What kind of work have you done since you married?]

Well, nothing but keeping house, and raised five brothers after my mother died of cancer. She was forty-four years old. I raised five brothers. The Lord blessed me not to have no children till I got all of them raised. I was married nine years before I had any.

Well, I garden. And we raised cotton here till cotton was about to go out. So we left. I left my uncle here in this house to see after our cattle and we went to Nebraska. My husband, he worked up there to try to save to come back home. So when they sent him back to Meridian--I just didn't like city life no how--I was glad to come back here.

Now I sew. I takes in sewing, and, right now, I knocked all sewing out and just going all the way quilting. I'll probably make about four dresses for Easter for a lady, but other than that, I'm continuing quilting.

[When did you first learn to quilt?]

Well, I'll say I had to be between twelve and thirteen, because, you see, my daddy got killed when I was ten. My grandparents had us quilting, those that was old enough. At night you had to get on that quilt to help get the beds ready for the little kids. My grandmother first started me on the quilt one night I was standing with the lamp. Most of the time we had a lamp on the mantle piece. Your quilt was at the foot of the bed more towards the fireplace. .e drawed a line and you had to sew straight on that line to begin with. All I can remember is that I had to

sew straight on that line to even start quilting.

See, my grandparents on both sides, they wasn't so easy to get along with 'cause I guess it was so many kids. We thought they was mean, but I guess they was just trying to raise something and help take care of the kids.

The winter we'd quilt. You'd piece your tops. Everybody usually had little boxes. They would teach you how to put your little scraps in --what the older people wasn't using. They tried to make me learn how to crochet, but I sit up and nod. I just didn't like crochet, and embroidery on pillow cases. We didn't have no time to just sit at home and [be] free. You didn't have no leisure time for being free. I guess if my father had a lived maybe it wouldn't have been like that. But see, with eleven kids being around, and no kind of welfare checks--no nothing but my mother teaching and making that little winter money--and the grandparents making the older kids help see after the next children. It might not been that hard if he had a lived.

[How did you get cotton for the quilts?]

When we get through ginning your cotton, you go back through the field scrapping, and you take the scrap cotton. Take it to the gin and have it ginned and bring it back home in sacks. You may have five or six sacks. When you got ready to quilt your quilts, you take something like a limb or switch and you whip it till it get fluffy. Then it's easy to spread out level on your quilt.

[When you quilted, did you design your own pattern?]

Yes. If you see a pattern you kinda can look at a quilt you want and take it and keep cutting till you get that pattern just like you want it. And then you put it together. Sometimes it's tedious. Sometimes you have to pick it a-loose a little while, but once you make one square

you can go from there.

[What are some of the different quilts you make?]

Well, right now I have the star quilt, string quilt, the nine patch and the flower garden. And this quilt out there on the front, I guess it's between a diamond. It's not exactly a diamond quilt. I sit down and I just kept drawing. I wanted a little square to put this burgundy in it. I kept drawing till I just kinda seen what I had. And I taken the scissors and cut it and started. Baste it up and I seen that would make a pretty pattern so I just started on that one.

[Could another lady see your pattern and do the same?]

Yes, she'd ask me to give her a little scrap, a piece of paper and cut it. And she'll go home and start the same thing. Or if I went to her house and seen a pattern I like, I'd get a little strip from her and I'd stand

and look at the quilt and then I'd go on home and finish mine.

[Why do you quilt?]

I quilts to have cover for the beds to keep the family warm. Just like I runs seven beds, I look to have three to four quilts per bed. Well, if it's real cold where they have plenty cover for the bed.

[What happens when you have enough?]

Well, with a big family, you don't hardly have none too many in storage. All my children, if they grow up and enter college, I usually give 'em a new quilt. Some of 'em come back for the second quilt. Like the boys, they always like two quilts with the blanket. Now most of the time, by the time you think you got enough, you look and you see one needs covering, or, if it's on the boys' bed, it may be past covering. But most of the time I covers on my hand. I don't put it on the frame. I put it on the back of the couch and I roll as I go along sewing, because it's more easier to cover than to make a quilt.

[Did you ever sing while sitting around quilting?]

Yes, indeed. I can remember we was talking the other day about singing, and my grandmother, you know, she hummed. My grandmother hummed all the time. And you'd sing them old time songs during that time. One of my main ones I can remember good was old "Way down yonder by myself,/ Couldn't hear nobody pray./ On my knees, on my knees,/ Couldn't hear nobody pray." I'm not a good singer, I just remember when Sunday come, wasn't no saying when you went to church you wasn't gon sing. I don't care how young, like you all young ladies. Your grandparents would say, "Sing." They remember they done taught you how to sing different songs, and you'd better sing. Then you'd have to pray, which was nothing but your Lord's Prayers.

You'd get down and say them.

[You remember any other songs?]

Well, there's "Peace in the Valley." I'll say this, when we were singing in the choir, wasn't no music during that time. We had the leader would say, "Do sa me do." You know, getting your voice ready. Now I sung at Little Zion. I was a Christian. I was a Methodist first, but when I moved down to my grandmother, down in the hills, I joined the Christian Church, and then a Baptist. I'm still a Baptist. I been from Methodist, Christian, to the Baptist. Well, you know, wherever you went you was at that church.

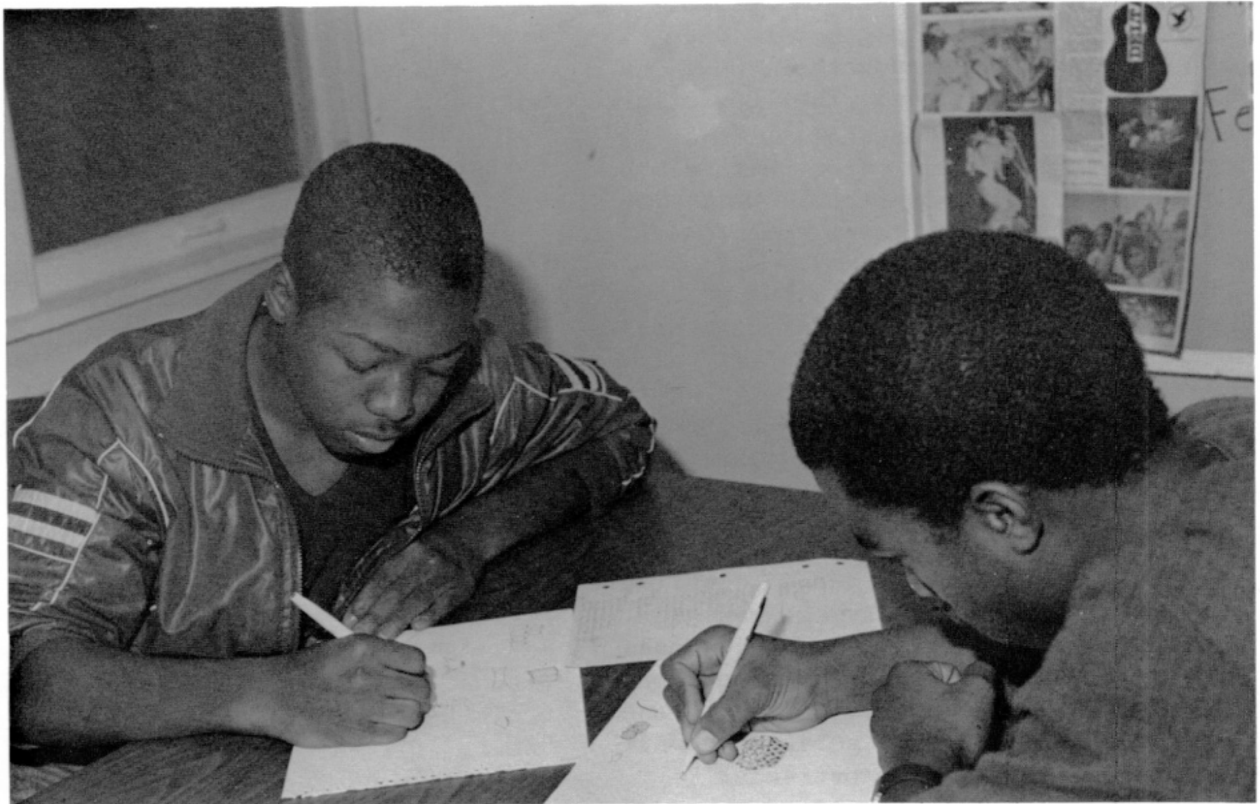
[Where did you meet your husband?]

Well, that's kind of a funny thing. I didn't even know him. I was in Brookhaven and, after my grandmother died, I moved. He was down at Alcorn in '38 and '39. He said then he tried to volunteer and go in the army in '40, but they say he had flat feet. But when war broke out, then he had to go. Three brothers went at one time, which was Albert, Grover, and him. He came back on a leave. All the other brothers went overseas.

He came back on a leave, and I was down to my uncle's house. He went to revival meeting at Zion, and he said to my mother, "Well, you know Miss Lilla, you have some beautiful daughters." But she say, "Yeah, but I want 'em to go to school." And he say, "You really have some pretty girls, and that's a beautiful little girl there." That was me. I was fifteen.

So he went back in service and he wrote my mother and ask could he write me. And he wrote me letters. I say I was about fourteen, 'cause he wrote me for two years and in '46 I was in Fayette going to school, and he came out of service. He gave me a watch, and I thought that was the prettiest thing. He had asked my mother, my great uncle, and my geat auntie for me before he asked me to marry him. So that was the way--they really give you. Mama said, when he asked her, say, "You gonna have to ask Uncle Levi," 'cause Uncle Levi was the boss over the girls, 'cause my daddy was dead. There was always a man to see after the children. She say, "You have to ask Uncle Levi." And he say, "I'm scared of him." So Uncle Levi had some home brew he was passing around. When he asked for me, well, Uncle Levi sit there a while and said, "Well, I'll tell you one thing, he said, she really is smartest. She cut wood. All you got to do is throw it over in the yard."

Students at work on **I AIN'T LYING:** Roderick Red and Derwin Moore drawing sketches for the magazine (top); Carolyn Banks enlarging a photograph (bottom left); Sarah Crosby and Marhea Farmer laying out a magazine page (bottom right).



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