i ain't lying

$3.50

Volume 3 Summer, 1983 No. 1

TOP ROW: Patricia Crosby and her younger sister, Joseph Hill, Carolyn Banks, Marhea Farmer, Sarah Crosby. MIDDLE ROW: Wayne Jones, Lena Davis, Jessica Crosby, Veronica Buck and friends, Mary Keller. BOTTOM ROW: Emilye Crosby, Regina Phillips and friends, Jessie Myles, Sharon Windom and friends.

One afternoon last spring Veronica walked into our meeting place with a snapshot of herself as a young child, grouped with some friends in front of a railroad car. We all had such a good time looking at the picture that I asked each student to bring in a picture of him/herself before the age of ten.

A week later we spent an afternoon laughing at ourselves as children and putting the above collage of snapshots together. Since students work on **I AIN'T LYING** at a variety of times, getting everyone together for a group picture is nearly impossible. Even the above collage doesn't represent the full staff of the third issue, and some of those pictured are working on the fourth issue. In any case it is a stylized look at some of us.

As this third issue goes to press, we are seeking the money to continue work this fall on our fourth issue. We wish to thank the people and businesses listed inside the back cover for making a contribution to help defray our printing costs.

Finally, we wish to thank the men and women featured in this issue for waiting so patiently and long for Volume 3.

—Patricia Crosby

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I AIN'T LYING is published by Mississippi: Cultural Crossroads. This issue is available for $3.50 plus $.70 postage by writing:

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Last fall when we realized that we had enough interviews finished for two magazines, I thought all the hard work was over. Then I took on the job of collating the third issue and learned how wrong I was. First, I decided the order of the articles. Number of pages, best side for first page, and information covered in the interview all had to be considered. That done, I renumbered the pages for the last time.

Next I concentrated on photographs, drawing final layout lines, checking reduction percentages, and composing cut lines. I then went on to what I consider the most interesting and enjoyable part. I read the magazine, cover to cover, checking for typos and layout mistakes. I enjoyed reading the articles, some for the first time, and the search for mistakes was a gratifying challenge. I recorded each mistake with the gleeful satisfaction of a job well done. However, when the mistakes were printed correctly and the re-layout process began, I wished I hadn't found so many.

Finally, putting the bulky layout sheets into the envelope for the printer brought a sense of accomplishment, anxiety, and anticipation. Accomplishment because I had a part in it. Anxiety because there might be a typo that I missed. Anticipation because there's nothing like the final printed magazine.

--Sarah Crosby

When the last issue of I **AINT LYING** was finished I was very proud of it. Nothing could have made me happier than the responses that I received from people. My grandmother, who was featured in the second issue, was very pleased to see her life story in the magazine. It was also gratifying to hear my teachers at school say how much they enjoyed reading the magazine and how proud they were of their students who worked on it. But my greatest moment came when my peers approached me and told me how much they liked the magazine. A lot of them said they were interested in working with us on future issues.

I would like to thank the people who agreed to tell us about the way it used to be when they were growing up. I would also like to thank Joyce Stewart, who types our transcripts, and David Crosby, who types the final draft into the computer and is our style consultant. Finally, I would like to thank the students who worked on this issue and those who are hard at work on the next one.

--Marhea Farmer

PICTORIAL CREDITS

The cover photo is of Mrs. F. A. White, Sr.

Photographs:
Cover, Inside Cover, Sarah Crosby; 3 de la Garza; 15,16,17,22,27 Farmer; 29,35,36 Warner; 37,46 Banks; 50 Farmer; 55,58 (top) Green; 58 (bottom) Farmer; 60 Keller; 62,63 West; 64,65 (right) Keller; 65 (left) Butler; 66 Keller; 67,69,72 de la Garza; 74 D. Davis.

Sketches:
4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12 de la Garza; 19,20,21,24,25,26,28 W. Davis; 31 (left) Moore; 31 (right),36 S. Crosby; 38,39,40,41,43 W. Davis; 48,49,51,54,55 O. Davis.

CORRECTION
Our apologies to Artmeasie Brandon, whose name we misspelled in Volume 2.

ELIZABETH McLENDON

Interview by Andrew de la Garza
Transcribed/
edited by Andrew de la Garza

History teachers would like you to believe that you learn your history in a classroom, reading history books and doing worksheets. Not so. In one afternoon I learned something worth two months of history homework assignments. There weren't any books or dates to memorize. The past was coming to life.

One afternoon I went to interview Mrs. Elizabeth McLendon in a little house in downtown Port Gibson. Mrs. McLendon is a very nice woman and was very polite, but at first I was hesitant. I thought the interview might be boring. I was nervous. Most of all, I'd heard some pretty gruesome horror stories about the transcribing that came after the interview, about the endless hours and countless pages and pens that ran dry. I heard transcribing was a sure way to have a nervous breakdown.

Now, as I look back, the transcribing was hard, but the investment paid off. As I listened to Mrs. McLendon and later as I transcribed, I suddenly realized <u>this is history</u>. You could put it in a book. If so, history books would be better things. No more stale dates. No more bar graphs outlining population increases and urbanization. This was the real thing, the "good old days." It was like uncovering a family heirloom in someone's attic--a real discovery.

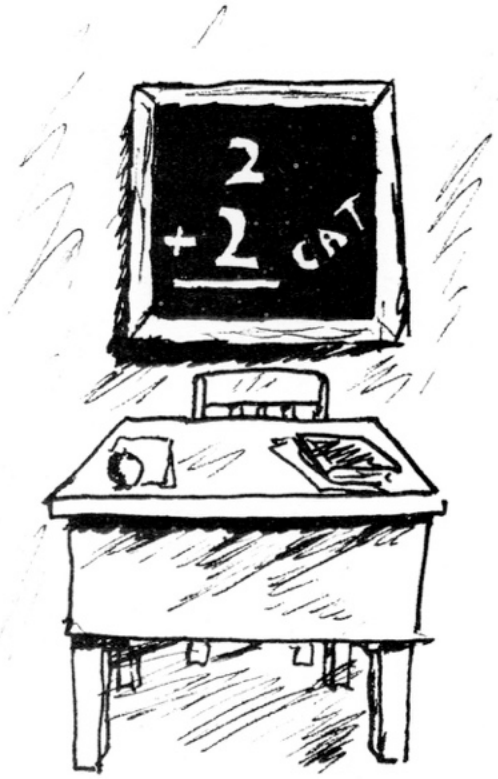
I owe a lot to Mrs. McLendon. She is one heck of a lady. I'm grateful for what I've learned from her and the advice she's given me. I'd like to thank her for an experience worth more than a stack of history books.

--Andrew de la Garza

[I was born] on October 15, 1911. [When I was young] it was different from the way it is today, to a certain extent. We did have an automobile, later, not at first. We rode in a buggy or a carriage, drawn by horses. We rode horseback. Then we had a Model-T Ford, which we thought was wonderful, and gradually had better automobiles. Let's see, living in the country was a bit different. I didn't get to see many children other than my brothers and sisters and those that would come visiting.

I went to school in Port Gibson--first coming in a buggy, then coming in an automobile. It was the public school. Then it was down behind the Presbyterian Church.

I imagine [it was] very much like your schools are today. Of course, when we started in the first grade, we started with ABC's. You know, which very few children do today. The high school, we didn't have as many subjects as you all have, but we had the basics very heavily. Four years of English, four years of mathematics, four years of history. [I] had algebra, and plane and solid geometry, did not have calculus in high school. I did [take] four years of Latin.



[What was discipline like at school?]

Well, it was pretty strict stuff, pretty strict I think as to dress, as to behavior. We were not allowed to chew gum even on school grounds. You better not throw any candy wrappers down either. We did not have a lunchroom in the school, even by the time I graduated. We who lived in the country took our lunch with us. Well, everybody took their noonday lunch with them. We had a regular picnic, everybody swapping up and everything.

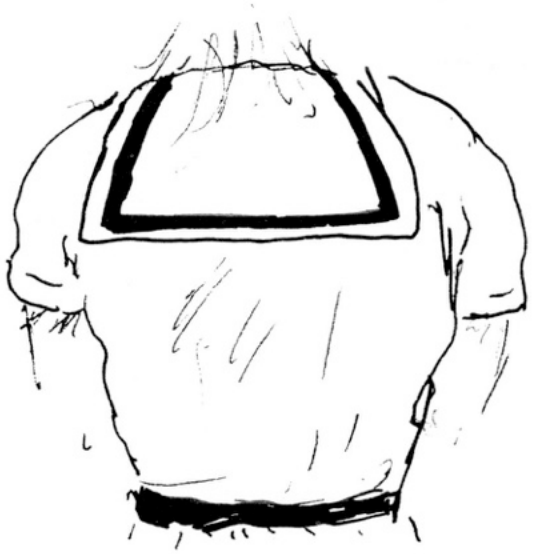
I can remember in the winter that we had sausage and biscuits, homemade biscuits. It was quite a treat, sandwiches and always a piece of fruit. And maybe cookies. But mostly sandwiches and fruit. Great treat to have a piece of candy once in a great while, but again my mother was not very much on us eating much candy.

[How would you be punished at school?]

Well, we had to stay in after school. I never did. But we'd have to stay in after school, had duties around the school. Some of the boys got whipped. I don't remember a girl ever getting whipped. Unusual, isn't it? Of course, the girls didn't misbehave...really as badly as the boys did in those days. They were a little bit more ladylike. See, we were going back to a different era altogether.

[What did you wear to school?]

Dresses. Of course, the day of slacks or shorts came in much, much later. My first recollection of basketball, for instance, the girls played in bloomers. Just before that they played in skirts, you know. But we wore dresses. The girls did, and they had to be the proper length. It couldn't be real short. A lot of middy blouses and skirts, believe it



or not, in those days.

[How long did you go to school?]

Twelfth. I went to Tulane summer school one year. Did some college work. That was it. I went to work.

[Were there many kids in your graduating class?]

Five of us.

[What games did you play?]

Well, you go way back and we played drop the handkerchief and blind man's bluff and marbles, something called "Devil in the Ditch," and I can't figure out how we played it. I rack my brain over that. London Bridge Is Falling Down. Ever heard of that? Oh, we played chasing games. I've forgotten, something about a fox. It's been so long ago I don't remember them that well. We played several different marble games, hopscotch. [We drew] the hopscotch on the dirt driveways [with] a stick.

[Did you make your own clothes?]

My mother did. Mom made all of our clothes even to the boys until they got to be a pretty good size. When they were small she made the little straight leg pants and the little sport shirts for them to wear. It was pretty much a self-contained family in those days. And we weren't alone. We lived out on a farm and there would be many a time that the meal on the table, the only thing that had come from the store would be sugar and salt and pepper. Items like that. We had everything right there.

We had a tremendous garden. On the whole place [we raised] primarily cotton, I think. At one time, went in cattle, and then cotton went to a dollar a pound and everybody went back to cotton, much to the disgust of this great uncle of mine. We always raised some corn on the place. Before, during World War I, daddy raised wheat, and we had the privilege of having our own whole wheat flour, because the old gentleman who lived on the next place to ours had a grist mill. He had a flour attachment, so we put it on and ground the wheat, whole wheat. Black as tar that flour was, but it was mighty good.

We always had chickens. We always had lots of milk and butter of our own. We raised hogs, and they were killed in the wintertime and the ham and bacon was cured. You know, smoke cured. So it was a pretty self-contained family as far as feeding us was concerned.

[Our farm was called] Sunnyside.

And it was pretty much happy and sunny. It had belonged to my great grandfather and his wife, and it was Sunnyside then. I think from the time that he bought it, which was way back yonder, it had been named Sunnyside. The house is still there. It's in--I haven't been in it in years--but I understand it's in a pretty dreadful fix. You know where Bill's Dollar Store is: the long low house that fits back in, just on the other side of that. On the left.

There used to be a grove of oak trees, right on the road. Right in the lower yard. A row of cedars went up the driveway on one side, [and] on the other side were medlars. A quince. They get big and hard, [and] turn yellow when they get ripe. They make good jams and jelly. Very tart. You can't eat it it's so tart. Then a row of pecan trees down this side of the house.

It had developed into a very lovely home by the time we left it. It had started out [as] a very interesting house with four rooms, with a front porch and a back porch and the kitchen in the back yard. Then they added on to it. The porch went across the front and half way down one side. They added on to the back of it, more rooms, put in baths. So we had, let's see, one, two, three, four, five bedrooms. Living room, dining room, and a kitchen in the house. And also a cistern in the house, on the back porch.

We had an overhead tank, too. Maybe we had more rain in those days, but that was the water for the bathroom. It was a tremendous tank. It was built up on a frame and the housing underneath it was where the gas plant was. A tank almost as big as from here to there and just about as long as this room. See, when that got

full of water, there weren't many times we had to have water. Once in a while in the summertime. Everybody who lived in the country had to have water from town. We did not drink the water out of that tank. [We drank water from] the cistern, because it was open on top.

We had one of the first or maybe the first bathroom with running water outside of the town of Port Gibson. About the time of World War I, [in] '17. Something like that. I was six or seven years old. It was fed from the overhead tank. It was up high. That's where you got your pressure from--the height of the tank.

My mother could remember the coming of water in the town of Port Gibson and the coming of electricity. She remembered when the old man went around late every afternoon and lighted a street light. They were gas. Coal oil, I guess. It was electricity by the time I grew up.

[The roads] were dirt, the first ones I remember. And then gravel, then paved. We didn't go to Vicksburg, for instance, until the road was graveled, because the dirt roads could get impassable with a rain. We had a train that left here. It was called the "Bumblebee." It left here at morning, and you could catch the train and go up to Vicksburg and spend the day, and come back in the afternoon, late afternoon.

[How much did it cost?]

A dollar something sticks in my mind. But that was probably one way. I'm not sure. It wasn't terrifically expensive. It wasn't as much money floating around in the world in those days as there is today. Really, people didn't have as much. They might have had better quality things. I think very often they did, as far as clothing and things like that were concerned. They were quality.

[Did you often go to Vicksburg?]

No, it was quite a treat.

[Did you ever go on any adventures, yourself?]

Now what would you call adventure? Like walking out to Sunset Hill and sleeping on the ground wrapped up in a blanket. Would you call that an adventure? We would walk from Sunnyside [to Sunset Hill on Albena.] The Magruders lived at Albena and a lot of us, a whole group of us would roll ourselves up in a blanket and sleep on the ground. We would take our sandwiches for supper with us and cook our breadfast on the fire, open fire out in the woods. We'd go swimming in the various ponds around, and various streams. We were never allowed to swim in the bayou, because several children had lost their lives, and my mother was afraid of it.

[What did you know about your grandparents?]

Oh, that was a lot of fun, to sit around and to listen to them talk about their childhood and what they had been told by grandparents. I wish now I had listened more carefully--we all do. There comes a time when there's nobody there to repeat it to you, and there you are. It was a lot of fun to sit around on the porch in the summertime, or the fire in the wintertime, and listen to them reminisce.

I knew my father's father. I knew [him] quite well, and he did stay with us part of the time. The rest of them--I have a vague recollection of my grandmother Hoops, but it's more of a feeling than it is remembering her, because I was very young when she died. My mother's parents were gone, and my Grandmother Spencer was gone. But we had a great uncle who lived in the household with us, very interesting man, and an aunt, my mother's sister. So when we sat at the table there were nine at the table when there wasn't anybody visiting. And in those days there weren't many times that there weren't visitors.

[Local visitors?]

Yeah, well, faraway too, but locals. I mean the children would gather, you know, to come to spend the day, or spend the night, you know how children do.

[What was your great uncle's name?]

Elvyn Passmore Hoopes. My brother Elvyn's named for him. He was an old bachelor, but very, very interested in livestock. He raised blooded stock. Polled Herefords, which are red all over. I think that's right. And Duroc Jersey hogs that were red, [and] Rhode Island Red chickens. All of them, everything was red, but he was quite knowledgeable. He raised what in those days were called Kentucky Saddlehorses, and oh, they were beautiful things. He went to Kentucky all the time to judge in the state fair, the hogs and cattle and things like that. So he was very interested in livestock. Quite a horseman.

[What stories would your grandfather tell you?]

Oh, he liked to talk about the civil war, the War Between the States. He had been in it when he was like fourteen years old. So he liked to reminisce about it.

[Did he fight in any big battles?]

Missed the siege of Vicksburg by a hair's breadth. I don't know that he really did get into any of the major battles. He carried a rifle. Those boys were all in Oakland College, that is now Alcorn. And they said, in like twenty-four hours it was cleaned out. They all left and went to war. Gosh, there were some of them younger than fourteen in there, the drummer boys, you know. It was a horrible thing.

[Who was the most important person you knew when you grew up?]

You mean aside from the parents? Well, we had some wonderful ones. A woman who was principal of the high school here, Mrs. Ramsey, taught me Latin, a terrific person. Judge Gage, who was president of the Port Gibson Bank here. That most interesting man. You mean locally, don't you? Because I didn't know too many "Big Ikes" out of town.

[Was Mrs. Ramsey the most important teacher you had?]

Probably, probably so. Probably the most strict. She was the anti-chewing gum one and we couldn't step on the door facings. And we could not put our hands on the railings of the stairs when we walked upstairs. Of course, I was taught at home these things too, but she really did give a lot of children a finish that they wouldn't have had otherwise.

[Were the requirements the same for boys?]

Yes. Sit in a chair properly. Ellen Steele Satterfield, who lives around here today, taught me. I guess in the eighth grade. English, history. She was a terrific teacher. I had some very good teachers. Some poor ones, but some very good ones. And I think when you are in school, they're very important to you, teachers are, don't you think?

[What was your first date like?]

Do you know, I believe that the first time I really had a date and went out was to a football banquet at Chamberlain-Hunt. Isn't that funny? I don't remember. We didn't do much dating in my early teens. It was more a question of the gang getting together, you know, a whole big crowd. And nobody went steady in those days. We didn't, under any circumstance. I mean it was more fun to all be in a big crowd. Well, that was the first time I believe I had what you might call a formal date. I remember I was scared to death. I'd never done anything like that before and I think I was the youngest girl there, you know. I knew the other girls, but they were much older than I was, and I just was scared. We wore evening dresses.

[What is the oldest thing you own?]

The oldest thing I have? This ring is pretty old. It belonged to my great-great-grandmother. And it does not belong to me. It goes to the oldest daughter down the line, so it will go

to somebody else. The bed I sleep in came down here from Connecticut with a great-great-grandfather when he came down. He was a lawyer by profession. He graduated from Yale in one of the early graduating classes, and went down and taught in Georgia for a year, and then moved over here with a wife and infant, and his wordly goods, and that bed was a part of it. And we know that's true because the secondary wood in it is maple, and we don't have [maple] so it had to come from up in that part of the world.

[Did you work?]

Oh, always after I was eighteen, yes. I had done pretty much everything. I had waited tables in a restaurant. We had a little restaurant at one time, when we lost everything and moved to town. We had a little hotel and restaurant. But I went to work for the post office department. I'm trying to think. I guess I was about nineteen or twenty, and worked with them until I retired. Forty years. I started out as a substitute clerk at sixty-five cents an hour. Then we could pull you in for fifteen minutes. I'll never forget the first month I earned eighty dollars. I felt like I was the wealthiest woman in the countryside. But then, I worked a regular clerk, assistant postmaster and was postmaster for ten years before I retired. I saw the handwriting on the wall and quit. I knew I could retire on retirement. And I could see the post office department getting ready to go, the way I knew it. I saw it change over the years from being a service organization to being a business that was supposed to be making money. And it just grew worse and worse, really.

[What was a typical day at the post office like?]

Well, it would be more interesting to talk about it back when we had four trains a day each way. Four trains a day each way. These were passenger trains so we dispatched the mail to the trains. And we dispatched into something oh, a big case, but it looked like this with cubby holes. And you

stood in front of it and you knew where to put 'em. All of New York City, all of Chicago, all of New Orleans, all of Houston and then two other trains. We would dispatch to trains over on the main line or trains that ran from Meridian to Shreveport. I think I learned to be a "minute man" then. They tease me about when I'm invited somewhere today, if I'm invited for six o'clock, I'm there at six. Having to dispatch mail to trains did that to me. The trains didn't wait. Now in later years when they started trucking it in, if you weren't quite ready they'd hold the truck for you. Those trains didn't hold for anything.

[Did the train pull up to you?]

Oh, no. We [sorted it] in the office, and then we tied it--there was a way you tied with twine, your bundles. This is the first class mail. They went into a pouch, and those pouches were locked. The mail clerks had keys that would unlock those pouches. Now if there were pouches with money, or something very valuable in them--and I'm sure they use them until today--they had a great big brass lock on them that had a number on it. You had a special key that had to be kept locked in the vault all the time. No, we tied in bundles and put 'em in pouches and locked the pouches. Parcel post used to be locked, but has not been for years. It goes into big sacks. They have three different size sacks, one's, two's, and

three's and parcel post, and magazines, newspapers, things like that go into those. And they're not locked anymore, they're tied. Now, of course, very little of it's done by hand. Everything from here is dumped into a pouch, it's not sorted at all. Dumped into a pouch, and goes to Jackson and is sorted by machinery.

[How did your parents prepare you for life?]

Well, I don't know what you would call preparing me for life. They tried to raise us to be good citizens, to not be selfish, to think of other people, to do for other people. That's what most parents do, I think. We depression children didn't have as much as a lot of others did. We didn't have the educational opportunities as far as college was concerned that the children of today have. Well, there wasn't any such thing as borrowing the money to go to school on back in those days, you know. And nobody had any money.

[Do you remember when women began voting?]

I can remember. My mother used to tell the funniest story about the voting. Then we lived about a mile, mile and a half out of town, but they had to go to what we call Ingleside to vote. [She and daddy] were in the buggy, and it was pouring in torrents. They went all the way to Ingleside, and voted and started home and started discussing who they had voted for, and they had each killed the other's vote, right straight on down the line. They might as well have stayed home.

[How have things changed since you were young?]

We have a lot more conveniences today than we had back in those days. Washing machines, dryers. You don't have to scrub your clothes on a board. In my era, when we lived on the farm, there were black families on the farms who were also friends as well as servants. And that [work] was done by one of them. Usually there was a cook in the kitchen, somebody to nurse the children, a yard man. You know, they were all right there on the place. I know the problem during World War I was [that] all the men that worked on the farm were gone to war, to the service, and the women did the farm work, which meant that mother didn't have any help. In fact, she was even cooking for all of the negro women that were servants. Rough on her, when I look back on it, very hard.

[Have people changed since then?]

I don't think so. I don't think people change that much, do you? I don't really think they do change that much. I would think as far as morals and things like that are concerned it isn't any different.

[Do you have a particular skill?]

I love to cook, and I'm a fair cook. I used to sew an awful lot and make me a lot of my clothes, but it makes me awfully nervous this day and age, so I adjust. Don't have as much.

[What do you like best to cook?]

Well, most anything. I love trying new recipes, don't you? I've just been sitting there pouring over the cookbook that came in last Sunday's Times Picayune. There were new things that were in it. I like to try new things. I like to make casseroles. I like to cook meat. I love to cook wild duck, get them where they really don't taste like wild duck, but taste good.

[How do you fix duck?]

Well, maybe a very unorthodox way. I do not do it like Linden Magruder at all. They have to be cleaned and washed and dried, and then into the cavity I put a part of an onion and a part of a stalk of celery, and sometimes a piece of potato. Then I make a marinade of wine, and the seasonings and wooster sauce and some oil, and pour over them. I have a roaster, an electric covered roaster if I'm doing a lot of them. If I'm doing just three or four, I do it in the oven in a covered baking dish. Real low heat for a long time. I'm a terrifically slow-cook cooker.

[What kind of wine do you use?]

Anything that happens to be handy, sherry, anything I might have. It doesn't have to be an expensive wine.

[What spices do you use?]

I make a seasoning salt that I use myself for meats a lot. I'll give you some one of these days. It's a mixture of salt and pepper, all the different peppers. Has a little chili powder in it, see what else, garlic salt, onion salt. It's just one of those all purpose things, so I use that.

[What do you consider cooking duck for a long time?]

Well, the last time I had duck for the family here I put it on, they were coming at night, and I put those ducks on around noon. I watched them and, along about five o'clock when I looked at 'em I could see the breasts beginning to come away from the bone. Then they're done. Then you can cut it down and keep it warm as long as you want to. By the time I get ready to serve 'em, [I] take 'em out and split 'em up the back. I don't use what I put inside of them.

[What do you serve with duck?]

Wild rice, if I can get my hands on it. I think I had wild rice that night and a spinach casserole.

[Who taught you to cook?]

I guess I taught myself a lot. We used to laugh at my mother. She said she didn't like to cook, but anything she did she tried to do to the best of her ability. And she was one of the best cooks. She could make the most gorgeous desserts you ever saw. Now, I am not a very good dessert cook, because I don't eat them. That makes a difference. Well, nobody seems to eat a real rich dessert so much anymore. I just made for Elvyn a chocolate tart. My mother's chocolate tart recipe. It's so good. When it's hot and comes out of the oven, you spread wild plum jelly on it. And then put your meringue on it and run it in the oven.

[What do you know about the Rabbit's Foot Minstrels?]

I know a lot about that. The people that owned the Rabbit's Foot Minstrel lived on the place that joined our place, just north of town here. They became real close friends, really. They were different people. They had [been] born and reared in Michigan, number one. Mrs. Walcott, Mrs. Katherine, we all called her, was German, a German family. Her father was a terrific musician. Played the violin beautifully. He had his daughter in a convent somewhere in Michigan and she ran away from the convent and joined the circus.

She wound up with practically no education. She murdered the King's English. She was a tight rope walker. I can't remember her that way. She was very small, but very big around, [when] I [knew] her. Her husband had been carnival, I think. When they were first married they had a show. When the carnival would come to Port Gibson they played right on Main Street. They blocked off on that street.

[Where on Main Street?]

All up and down. In today's terms, I would say from the Port Gibson Bank to the Courthouse. They had an act, a carnival act, a little dog that dived, or a high diving dog. I could remember the last one they still had with them after they moved here named Speedy. He was a precious little dog. They had been to Florida, and were driving through here and saw this gorgeous house had burned. And she said, "Fred, I'd like to have that house." By now they had the Rabbit's Foot Minstrel, I think. So they bought it and moved here and the Minstrel then, of course, was based here. It was an all black cast with some terrific people. You said Rosa [Rosa Page Welch] had talked about some of them. A lot of them came back here. There was a Negro man, I was trying to think what he did, named Brown that just died few years ago. When I first went with them a time or two, they travelled by railroad, and they had their own personal car. Of course, they had the tents, and everything they had tossed about, and then sleeping cars for the people that were in it. And then their private car which was very plush, very plush. Then later, of course, they moved by truck.

They played here. At one time there was a vacant lot back there where the Guthrie boy has his implement thing--behind the parking lot, back in there and then down behind where the Jitney Jungle is. It was a good show. It really was. I guess they made a lot of money at one time with it. [It was] just like a minstrel show. Always an "in" man, you know. A lot of singing and dancing and always a good orchestra, good band, jokes. Have you ever been to a minstrel show?

[No.]

Well, [it's] rather difficult to explain. The "in" man was the straight man, and then there was always somebody that could carry on the banter with him, you know. Costumes. Mrs. Katherine used to make a lot of the costumes.

[What did they dress up in?]

Well, the men, for instance, a lot of times would be in striped trousers and Prince Albert coats, you know, a full dress--coats, and hats, always tall hats. Once in a while there would be an act where they'd be in overalls. The women in evening dresses and tu-tus and just whatever.

[Why was it called the Rabbit Foot Minstrel?]

Do you know I don't know. But they gave out live rabbits' feet. Not to everybody, but to some people they did. The show would be over, but then they'd have a concert afterwards. I can hear the men now going through the audience saying, "Get your concert ticket, ten cents to stay for the concert." And those tents would be packed. Let's see, I'm trying to think whether they were here prior to World War I. I believe they were. See, I was born in '11. I know they were here by the time I was ten, which would have been '21. No, they were here prior to that. It's terrible not to be able to remember, isn't it. So much water under the bridge now.

[Did they have people performing along with them?]

No, [their] own people. But they had some terrific people that were with them. Hamilton and I were talking about it not too long ago, and he was saying that they had a drummer one time with their band that went way, way up in the world with that type of music. Uh, and the Negro woman [Bessie Smith] that sang that Rosa was talking to you

about.

[She was part of their travelling group?]

At one time. They had some very, very good performers, very good performers.

[Were many of them initially local people?]

No, they were from all over, all over. As I say, a lot of them stayed here. Well, there was Mr. Gentry that was with them. I don't think his name was Gentry at all. He'd been with Gentry's Dog and Pony Show for years, but he was one of the white men that was not in the show, but worked with them. And he stayed and he died here. Quite a few of those people settled here and died. Some of them left here and then came back here. I tell you who would [know]--she lives down on Church Street. We all called [her] Pie. She was born and raised on Sunnyside, and I still call her Pie, Edna Hackworth. Her husband travelled with them for years. He was an electrician and a plumber, and carpenter. Edna would remember a lot of the names of the different people. She's still living.

[They travelled in] summer, never in the winter. See, it was a tent show, and no way to heat it, really. So it was mostly in the summer. Well, this was true of all of that type of show. They went into winter quarters and they would winter quarter here. All of them wouldn't stay here for the winter. They spread out, you know. And I can remember the big doings going on when the word would go out for the performers to start coming in and they'd start coming back in. Get ready to go out again.

Course, Alg Fields had a minstrel that played in theaters. It was blackfaced. It was all white. The performers were all white with black face on 'em. I got to see that one year. Must have been about in the early 20's.

[Would Katherine take you to the theater?]

Uh-huh, they took me around. In the early 20's they adopted a baby, the one daughter, and she lives up in Ohio now. But up until that time, oh, I was their little girl almost. When it came to doing things, you know, and taking me places and all, places to eat and a lot of things. Little treats that I wouldn't have gotten otherwise. The theatre in Vicksburg. Yeah, because I saw the Ziegfield Follies of '27 in Vicksburg with them and that was, I think, my sixteenth birthday present. That was a terrific experience. Ziegfield Follies. Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Dennis were the primary dancers with them that year, and they were world renowned dancers. I can see it right tonight. That's one thing about things like that, people can't take it away from you, you know. And it was spectacular.

[Did Vaudeville shows ever play in Port Gibson?]

Yes, back in my mother's days. They had a tremendous theatre here. Joe Jefferson, just terrific things here, but not much within my recollection.

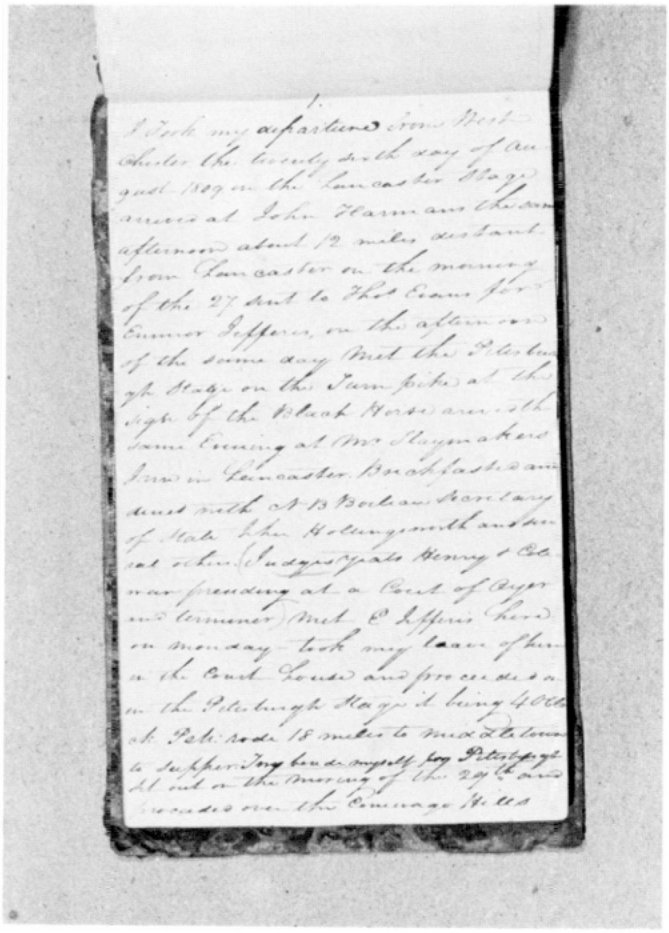
[What advice could you give to young people today?]

That's a rough question. I'm not very good at giving advice. Well, one time I told a little CHA boy, and we used to have a lot of them in our house, I said, [to] use that trite expression, "Hitch your wagon to a star." Strive for something. Don't be content with the mediocre, try, and try, and try. If you fail, try again, but always for something up there, not just anything in life, the better things. I would say, read. Read everything you can lay your hands on, good reading material. Listen to good music. There's no greater joy than a symphony, good symphony orchestra or a beautiful opera.

Editor's Note: Mrs. McLendon showed us a diary written by her great-great-uncle, Jefferis Moore. He lived in Chester County, Pennsylvania, but his brother was already here and had married Samuel Gibson's daughter. In 1809, the brother returned to Pennsylvania and the two started out together on a trip to Port Gibson. They left in August and arrived in December. The diary entries that follow were written during that long and harrowing trip.

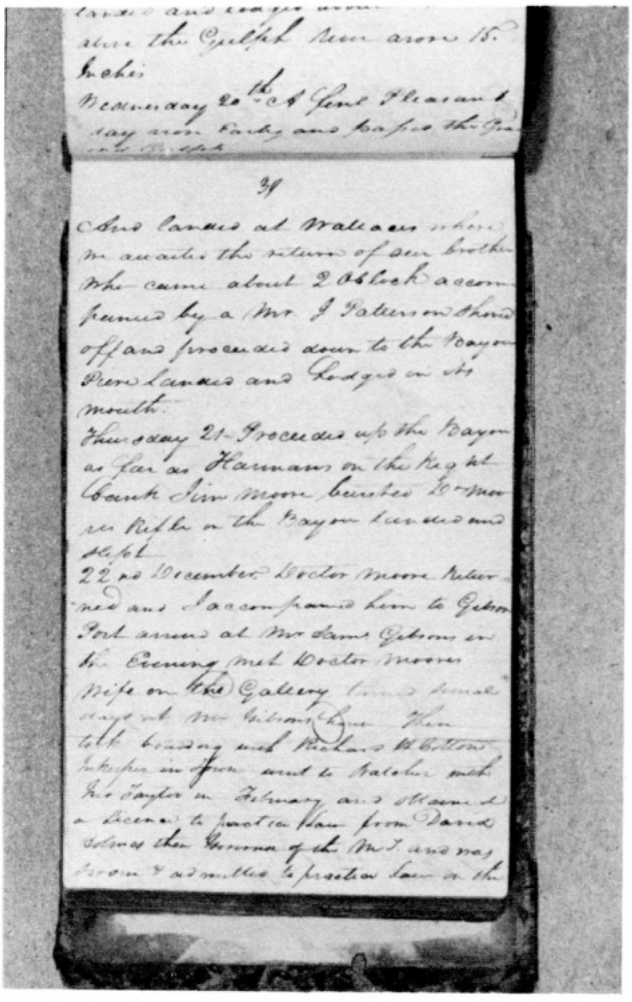
I took my departure from W. Chester the 16th day of August, 1809 on the Lancaster Stage. Arrived at John Harmans the same afternoon about twelve miles distant from Lancaster. On the morning of the 27th, sent to Thomas Evans for Emmor Jefferis. On the afternoon of the same day, met the Pittsburgh Stage on the turnpike at the sign of the Black Horse. Arrived the same evening at Mr. Slaymakers Inn in Lancaster. Breakfasted and dined with N.B. Boilian, Secretary of State. John Hollingsworth and several others (Judges Yeates, Henry and Coleman preciding at a Cout of Ayer and Terminer) Met E. Jefferis here on Monday--Took my leave of him in the Court House and proceeded on in the Pittsburgh Stage, it being 4 o'clock. Peh: rode eighteen miles to Middletown to supper. Two hands myself for Pittsburgh set out on the morning of the 29th and proceeded over the Comwego Hills.

[September] 7th. Employ a Mr. Js. McCullough to build me an Orleans boat 7 ft. long 13 t. wide at 2 dollars per foot. Same day began to saw gunwales and shimes. 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 engaged on bulding boat. On the evening of the 12th Emmor Moore, Doctor Levis, Benj. Taylor, Richard A. Marshall, Seth Robinson, Thomas Marshall, Emmor Worth and John Jefferis arrived in Pittsburgh and quartered with a Mr. Graham. We anxiously awited our brothers arrival. Spent the 13th and 14th and on the 15th, Joseph, James and Miles arrived with 4 negros, one having made his escape. 16th, 17, 18 and 19 Employed in preparing our stores. Our boat was delivered to us on the 19th.



[September] 20th. Set out with Jos. Moore, Emmor Moore, James Moore, Seth Robinson, Wm. Milles, Jos. W. Lambert and Richard Marshall, four negros, three stallions, a gelding and a mare. Scraped the rocks several times. Towards evening landed on Hamiltons Island where we slept.

[October] 25th. A cool morning and foggy river about 700 yards wide. Landed in convenience of a head wind and went a hunting. Found many possums, saw no deer. Returned on board. Seth and myself landed. He shot a wild goose as we returned on board. A large keel boat in sight coming down. Saw them fire and kill a buck in the river. Presently came the Huntsmen on the beach and demanded the buck. The bargemen were frenchmen from St. Geneva, laughed at the hunters and told them they should have the guts. The buck was 6 years old and a very large one. They floated with us all night. Gave us a quarter. Passed one or two islands in the night.



[October] Saturday 28th. About day light I discovered that I had lost my gold broach. I arose instantly and insisted on being set on shore, not withstanding the boat had floated all night and had a fair wind. I was determined to return to our landing the evening before. Seth Robinson and myself were set on shore and we streaked it up the beach. We reached our landing about 12 o'clock. I being some hundred yards before Seth, I found it on a shore we tacked and went to a small house on the bank to get something to eat. We got some mush and milk. Traveled on until we came to West Port a distance of about 13 miles from this place a dam miserable village, got a piece of corn bread and beef. Overtook the boat long after dark. We branched the damdes, snaggest, muddyest, rockyest beach I ever saw for about 5 hours in the night. Supposed we had traveled 40 miles that day. Saw many wild geese. Passed Isl. 57.

[December] Sunday 17th. Arose early. A small distance below the Settlement. Rode a sawyer down which shattered our las board oar. Doctor Moore, Miles and a negro boy left us. Landed and lodged on the head of Island #100 and 100 River 14 1/2 inches.

Monday 18th December. Arose early. A cloudy morning. Passed the Two Island and landed at Doctor Jim Kenses. Met Doctor Moore and Miles here. This man lived on the right bank of the Mississippi in a cabin composed of 50 plotes. He is laying the foundation of a handsome fortune and will reap the benefits of his labor by and by. Landed and lodged below the Walnut Hills. River arose 11 inches.

[December] Tuesday 19th. Arose early and landed at Highlands Gin where Doctor Moore and Minor left us for Gibson Port to meet us again at a Mr. Wallaces where we were to land next day. Landed and lodged about 10 miles above the Gulph. River arose 15 inches.

[December] Wednesday 20th. A fine pleasant day. Arose early and passed the Grand Gulph and landed at Wallaces where we awaited the return of our brother who came about 2 o'clock accompanied by a Mr. J. Patterson. Shoved off and proceeded down to the Bayou Piere. Landed and lodged in its mouth.

22nd December. Doctor Moore returned and I accompanied him to Gibson Port. Arrived at Mr. Sam Gibsons in the evening. Met Doctor Moores wife on the gallery. Lived several days at Mr. Gibsons house. Then took boarding with Richard H. Cotton Innkeeper in town. Went to Natches with Ino [or Jno] Taylor in February and obtained a license to practice law from David Holmes then Governor of the M.T. and sworn and admitted to practice law on the Fifth day of March 1811 in the Superior Court of Law and Equity for Claiborne County in which county I am about to establish myself. My license intended to all the courts with in this Territory.

ROSA PAGE WELCH

Interview by Carolyn Banks
Transcribed/edited by Carolyn Banks

Mrs. Welch is a wonderful lady in her 80's, so healthy and still moving on. She was born in Claiborne County and has many people who live in Hermanville. When Mrs. Welch was a little girl she wanted to be a blues singer like Bessie Smith. As a little girl Mrs. Welch wanted to go to Africa. She even dreamed about going to Africa. She has been all over the world. She has been to Africa, India, Europe, and all over the United States. Mrs. Welch had no trouble communicating with anyone, because she is a kind person. I was glad to know that we have someone who has traveled and can tell us what it is like if we can't make it out of the United States.

Mrs. Welch is the mother of two children, grandmother of five, and great-grandmother of two. She has worked as a teacher, singer, and missionary. Being a churchgoer brought her up to where she is now.

I didn't know Mrs. Welch until someone told me about her. I wanted to go and talk with her. It was amazing how much I found out. Mrs. Welch is a good example: she was determined to make it, and she made it.

--Carolyn Banks

[I was born] right here in Port Gibson, Mississippi, [on] August 23, 1901. I was 80 last August, 80 years young. You don't get old, you just get older. I don't feel that old; my doctor don't want to believe it.

[What was it like when you were young?]

Oh, so different. And I notice the difference in the young people, in the young people, which really disturbs me. There are exceptions to the rule always, but generally speaking, of the ones I've met, they're so nonchalant about school, about everything. During my years and a few years later, there were only two years of high school allowed for black children, so I went to Southern Christian Institute at Edwards, Mississippi, a mission school. It was a junior college, and I finished my other two years of high school there and then my two years of college. What was Southern Christian Institute and later Mount Beullah College merged with Tougaloo.

[School] was wonderful. We liked it. We had teachers who really [were] tough on us. And the parents

supported the teachers. I mean if a kid was naughty in school, for instance, they used to use a switch, and you held your hand out to get some of the lashes according how bad the crime was. And if my mother found it out, I probably would get another when I got home. Now you have parents who go to school and bawl out teachers for correcting their children. That's all across the country. And it's sad because this does not help a child. But no teacher was cruel; we didn't get any beatings or anything like that. They just had a rattan switch. You just held your hand out and you got it. I didn't get too many. I got some, though.

I don't think our [county] school had a name. It was just the public school for black people. They called us Negroes then. It was just one building, a big building on one floor. All the grades went there. That is where I went for my whole ten years.

The principal when I was there was Professor Addison. Lord, I can't remember his first name. Addison, a very fine man. We really had excellent teachers. My oh, my oh, I liked all my teachers. My first teacher was a Mrs. Richardson. She was one of the most precious souls. She loved the children. Oh, they used discipline, but it wasn't harsh discipline. This was discipline with love, and we loved Mrs. Richardson. As a little girl I think most of us cried when we had to leave her room to go to the next grade.

The teacher who really was a terrific inspiration and challenge to me was a Mrs. Bell Green. They lived in a house on Anthony Street there. Mr. John Green was a teacher also. But before I got to Mrs. Green's room everybody said, "Oh, she's a mean teacher." So I was a little bit scared, and I was wondering about her, but when I got in her room she was mean, but she was very positive. You had to get your lesson, and she didn't play with you. So I soon recognized that she was an excellent teacher, and I liked her.

There's a woman here now, I don't know if you all know Mrs. Deetsy Jenkins. She lives out across the bridge, but Deetsy was in school the same time I was. She was one or two years ahead of me, but we were both talking about old Mrs. Green the other day, and what Mrs. Green meant to us and how everybody else was scared of her. But you sure got your lessons.

When I graduated, there was only one person in my class. I think Mrs. Bell Green was one of, if not the first graduate of that school. When I was in fourth grade there must have been 28 or 30 kids in my class, but many dropped out as they got older. They had class day and the graduates had to have a speech that day. I remember my class day speech was "History Repeats Itself," because once before there was only one graduate in the class.

In my graduating class [from the Southern Christian Institute] there was four of us. Oh, Lord, so many of them are gone. Well, a Dr. Sere Myers [is] still living [in] Kansas City, Missouri. He was my classmate. There was a fella there named John Lewis. I was just trying to think of some people around this way. Of course, there was my sister, Lesly Page, my cousin, Ruby Henry. I had an aunt who was there. Did you know Mrs. Willie Jacobs? That's my mother's sister. She was there. The Jennings, some of the Jennings family. Well, from nearly every Christian Church family in this county and the state for that matter. Elder Harris went to Southern Christian Institute. Of course, it merged with Tougaloo and he graduated from Tougaloo.

[What games did you play as a child?]

I liked to play ball. We had a tennis ball. Oh, you know, one of those rubber balls. We knocked the ball with our fist. That's what we played--we didn't have a bat. I liked that. I liked skipping games.

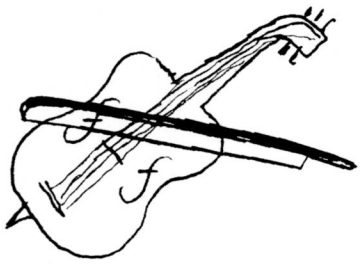
[How did you feel about winning and losing?]

You win and lose no matter what game. Didn't nobody like to lose, but if I lost I was determined I was going to win the next time. I was going to work that much harder in what I was doing.

[How did your parents treat you?]

Oh, my parents were beautiful to me. My mother was a very devoted Christian, very soft and quiet, very sweet. My father was not a churchman. He was a musician and he was also a barber. And he was very alive, liked a good time and all like that. But I loved my parents. My father died when he was just middle aged. I think he was 52. He was a very smart man.

My father's name was Robert Page. My mother's name was Lizzie Heath Page. She was a Heath, and her people lived in Hermanville. My father's people were very agressive and progressive, too. All of them had some education, quite a bit. Practically all of them were musical. My father's special instrument was a violin, played beautifully. He was the head of the string band, what you call an orchestra now. And they [had] the brass band, and he was head of both those bands.



[Do you know any of the other musicians who played with him?]

There was Mr. George Comfort, who I remember very well. I had an uncle who played. Oh, Lord, I wish my sister was here. She could help remember. You know, that has been a long time ago. But there were others, it was a good sized band. They just called it the Port Gibson Band. They played for the older young people. Had dances. You heard about what happens in New Orleans. If there were a man who belonged to lodges, they called them fraternities, who had died, the band played as they went to the cemetery. You know that was used a lot in New Orleans. They used to do that here, too. And they played for the fairs. They used to play for some special thing would come to Port Gibson for white people. And I remember as a little girl these groups of gypsies would come and they would put up a camp just across the bridge, and nearly every time there was a wedding. So they would hire the band to play for this wedding. And we used to want to go down there to see. We used to slip off and go down there and peep.

[What do you remember about your grandparents?]

We used to go out in the country to my grandmother's, my mother's mother. I remember my mother's father, [but] he died when we were very, very young. But my mother was the oldest of 15 children, and they were such a happy family. Poor--they were sharecroppers, but it [was] a lot of happiness in her home. We used to love to go out there in the summertime. One of the things we always looked forward to, they used to have what they called protracted meetings. They were revival meetings, you know. This church had theirs this week and maybe the next one had theirs the next week. And the blessed people would work all day long in the fields and then rush home to get dinner and get cleaned up and dress and go to church.

They never had just one preacher; it would be maybe two or three. I just loved the singing.

One of the exciting things was at the end of the week when the revival meeting was over. Women started to cooking on Friday, you know. They take big boxes and baskets of food on that final Sunday, and oh, we used to love it. Oh, we used to love it. I would go home and have nightmares. I'll never forget, I went to one and all this food and everything. And you know everybody wants you to try theirs. Your plate's stacked, and it made me sick. I mean just to see the food I didn't eat.

I had a wonderful grandmother, and my great-grandmother just died about 25 or 30 years ago. I knew them well. I loved to be with them. As a child I wanted to hear more and more about slavery, but I never could get them to talk about it. Now, my great-grandmother was a slave and my grandmother was a teenager in slavery [at the time of the] Emancipation Proclamation. We discovered [that] my great-grandmother had a very mean mistress who was very cruel to her, and I guess she just didn't want to talk about it. We never could get anything out of her, and I wanted to know about it so bad.

[Did she tell you any stories?]

Oh, listen, they used to. When we'd go out there we'd like to hear them scare us to death. They liked to tell ghost stories. Do your grandparents do that.

[Yes, they do it sometimes.]

Oh, yeah, I never did think of telling my children ghost stories. But I remember we used to like to sit there, and they would tell these stories as they would sound like they were real, and be scared to death. Sleep with your head covered up all night.

[Did you ever have any mystery or adventure when you were young?]

My mother's sister and her family lived right next door to us. [She] had a girl and a boy, and mama had two girls, so we played together all the time. There were certain things that we used to like to do. Once or twice a year there was always a circus that came. And then once or twice a year there was a minstrel. I remember as a little girl we were poor--we didn't have any money. Mama them couldn't take us, but I had an Uncle Dan that I liked very much, and he took me one time to this minstrel. I was just excited 'cause we all sang.

Bessie Smith, I don't know if you've ever heard of Bessie Smith. She was one of the original blues singers. So I remember Bessie Smith sang on the stage that night, the blues. I made up my mind then--that's what I'm going to do too. When I grow up I want to be a blues singer like Bessie Smith.

But anyway, I started to tell you, whenever there was a minstrel, after the minstrel the kids in our neighborhood and my cousins and my sister and I would try to repeat the minstrel. We didn't have anything to make a tent. We would impersonate the ones we liked, and we always had the show out in the back yard. We charged the other kids to come to the minstrel--pins and buttons. And we liked to have a show after it rained because of the fares. After a rain, you see,

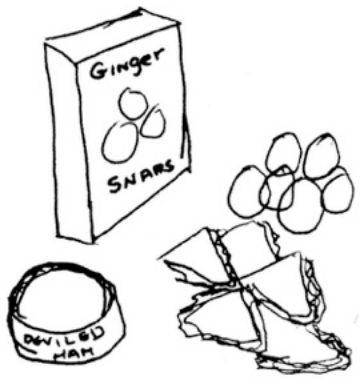
the water washes down the little gully was by the house. You could find buttons and pins like that. So that is what we charged for them to come in.

If it happened to be on a day when mama and Aunt Sissie Henry had to go to lodge meeting, on one or two occasions we dressed up in their clothes. I was always Bessie Smith. Of course in those days black kids didn't have any recreation, so we created our own recreation. We had minstrels, and one of the main things was church on Monday after we'd been to church on Sunday. And we really had fun.

Of course, I changed my mind about being a blues singer. I didn't mind singing the blues, but I had changed my mind. I was interested in church. My mother didn't send us to Sunday school and church, she took us. We practically grew up in the church. The church was really the livelyhood of most black people in those years. We loved our minister, Rev. King R. Brown.

So on Mondays we would have church, and I was always the preacher. I wanted to be. And different ones of us would imitate the elders who prayed. And there was one or two of them who prayed exactly the same prayer, same words, same comma and semicolon and periods. And we learned them and we would see who could do a better job of being Mr. Bradford or Mr. Phelps.

Those were wonderful days. If somebody in the group had a birthday, they'd have a party. Our parents didn't have much to divide, so maybe it was ginger snacks and some other kind of drink or something like that, or deviled ham sandwiches with crackers. We had the best times. You know, it didn't take a whole lot in those days for people to be happy. Most of us were poor, but we were very happy.



[When did you join the church?]

I was fourteen when I was baptized. I'll never forget that experience. And we didn't have pools in the church. We went down to this creek, where that bridge is, for baptizing. Of course, we didn't have a bridge anything like that one. A rickety old wooden bridge. Bayou Pierre. That's how we were baptized. They had the preaching service at church, and [at] the close, as part of the service, everybody in the church marched down to the creek. And they had the baptizing. And that was a very exciting time, too.

I have been very fortunate in my life. At S.C. I had my first formal voice lessons. I could play piano when I went there because I had a great aunt who live here, her name was Mary Johnson, who taught black children to play. So she taught us. We learned on an organ, you know. There was a very beautiful, lovely, Christian white woman whom I didn't even know. Our matron wrote and told her about my talent. A music teacher had come to Southern Christian Institute and had recognized my talent. But mama didn't have anything. My father

had died when my sister and I were in our early teens. So this woman financed or paid for my voice and piano lessons those four years I was at Southern Christian Institute.

I pursued the whole business of singing and I studied in Chicago, voice and piano, but greater emphasis on voice. I [studied] with this marvelous Russian Jewish teacher, Nakutan was his name. He was so precious, and I used to help his wife one day a week in exchange for lesson. This was during the depression. Didn't have any money. [Brahms' Lullaby] was the first song he made me work on. I used to sing [it to my children] because I won a prize on [it] my first time singing downtown. I made my debut in concert work in downtown Chicago. I sang downtown two different times. And then I got started in what I developed as a career.


The Kentucky State College Alumni Association
(Chicago Chapter)
Sponsors in Scholarship Fund

RECITAL

ROSE PAGE WELCH, Mezzo-Soprano

Assisted by Letitia P. Ballenger, Violinist

Sunday, March 22, 1936, at 3:30 P. M.

Recital Hall, Auditorium Building
431 South Wabash Avenue
Direction - E. C. Welch
Accompanists:
Cecelia Hyman Ruth Smith

In 1936 I dared to try out for the Chicagoland Music Festival. There were 59 sopranos on the south side who were competing, and I won third place. It happened to be a representative from our national church board, Christian Church and Disciples of Christ in Indianapolis, Indiana, and he remembered that he had heard me sing at Southern Christian Institute. They needed somebody to sing for youth camps and conferences, lead singing. He mentioned me, and that's how I got started in what I have followed since then. All my first youth conferences were young white people. My very first conference was a student conference in Lincoln, Nebraska. I led the singing for that. Then my work grew by what we call the grapevine. I've had a very beautiful experience using my music in this constructive way, and through the church many wonderful things have happened in my life.

You see all my life experiences come through the church. When I was a student at Southern Christian Institute, missionaries used to come down and speak to us. I had a terrific dream to be a missionary. There were several Africa missionaries who came down. I dreamed about Africa as a little girl. Never thought I'd ever get there. This was only a junior college, and you had to have four years of college to qualify to be sent by your church board. So I started working in these youth camps and conferences. I do more speaking than I do singing now, but singing has been my profession, and I started doing this work that just took me all across the United States. I decided, well, maybe the United States is as much of a mission field as any place else in the world. More. After I had been abroad I came to the conclusion, more than some places I went to.

So for several years I was just going in my music. You know, I figured maybe this is what God had for me

to do as a missionary. I was satisfied. Because I work with different denominations, my work has been freelance. I was very active, and led the music in many outstanding church conferences for the National Council of Churches. I did several times for Church Women United.

Some years ago, when Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune was living, she spoke at this big North American Baptist Women's Conference which met in Columbus, Ohio, where there must have been 4000 or 5000 women, Baptist women, white and black, and I led the singing for that. And then in my travels I worked with E. Stanley Jones, who was internationally known as a great evangelist of the same category as Billy Graham. He held conferences across the country called ashrams, and I helped in those for over 20 years. I also sang as a soloist at the World Conference of Christian Education which met in Toronto, Canada, some years ago.

Well, at this world mission conference a very wonderful Presbyterian friend, Margaret Shannon, and her close friend, Margaret Flory, had the idea of sending me on a mission of goodwill through music. I literally sang my way around the world in 1952 and '53. I was in seventeen different countries in seven and one-half months, visiting mission stations where there were schools, hospitals, and churches. It was a tremendous experience, because I [had] heard so many speakers talking about different parts of the world and [had] met a lot of foreign Christian people, and here I met some I had met before plus all of these new people.

I had four weeks in Africa. As a child I used to dream about Africa, and here I found myself, and in practically everyplace I went in Africa, I think I was the first American black person the Africans had seen. I had been a curiosity from Japan all the way around, and was shocked and almost hurt when I got to Africa to discover that I was more of a curiosity [there] than I was anywhere else I'd been. I hadn't expected to be a curiosity in Africa, but here I was. Oh, if I had time to tell you the questions that Africans asked me.

I will never forget the first place I stopped in Africa. I didn't know I was going to be stopping in Stanleyville, it was not on my schedule, but in those days in developing countries the plane just didn't fly at night. So if you got in some place late in the evening, then you stay all night. I didn't know that. And lo and behold, we came down in Stanleyville.

We were going through customs, [and] I'm the only strange black person in there. When we got to the customs officials, this fellow spoke only French and I didn't know enough French to talk it. The other official did speak English, and [he] said, "Your plane flies tomorrow morning at 7:30," and my heart sunk. And I said, "Where will I stay?" That was the first time since I left the United States that I had to wonder. These two guys [were] talking together in French, which made me sensitive and suspicious and worried, scared to death. This is the first place I had stopped where nobody met me that I knew was a missionary or somebody.

So I wondered. I was saying, "Lord, where will I stay." There [were] places in the United States where I had to sit up in a station all night long because there were no hotels open to me. See, I started doing my traveling and working in '36. In those days you had segregation all across the country. Wasn't supposed to be, but it was.

I thought, "Well, Lord, maybe they'll let me sit up in the airport station." I looked, [but] I didn't know any Africans. I didn't know anybody, and I thought I'd be scared to stay in it, but I'm just praying, honey, praying! And when I asked, "Where will I stay, then," these two guys started to talking together, but they were speaking in French, so you wonder. You know they're talking a-

bout you, but you're wondering what they're saying. And so finally, just as they were trying to decide about me, I heard a voice say, "Mrs. Welch?" I looked around and here was this white man dressed in khakis. I said, "Yes," and then he stepped up and he said, "Mrs. Welch will go with my wife and me." The Belgian chaplain--Congo was still a colony of Belgium. [The] Baptist missionaries knew I would have to stop, and they had made these arrangements. Oh, I just felt like having a prayer meeting right there.

They took me home that night and had dinner. The fellow who worked in the house, cooked and served the meals, he was as excited as I was, 'cause he was just grinning. I can't talk to him because I don't know his language, but I learned on that trip that there are universal languages: the use of eyes, the use of your hands and a smile, and love in your heart. Everybody understands that--it's amazing how you can get along like that.

I was four weeks in Congo--it was Congo then, Zaire now--and I was two weeks in the Cameroons, and I had five days in Liberia. Then I was in Europe, too, on that trip. I had almost two weeks in Britain and England and Scotland, and I was in France and Switzerland.

Then I went back to Africa for two years. I realized my dream to be a missionary in Africa. The Church of the Brethren sent me out for two years. I never had two years to pass so fast in all my life. We were way up in northern Nigeria. I was the first black missionary. There was a missionary couple, [but] his health had kind of broken and he worked in the bible school, so I supplied for him. It was three months there. And then I taught in the school on the educational compound. The last six months I was there I served as a dean of girls in the boarding school.

[When you taught, what language did you teach in?]

Oh, they used English there. See, wherever Britain [had a colony in Africa,] they spoke English. They already knew their native language, and some of them had a terrible time with English. But to hear educated Africans speak English, one who came up there, they spoke Oxford English, real British English, which is beautiful. I wish I could speak it.

I was at a place in Nigeria and I met a girl who is married to a Nigerian, a very outstanding Nigerian. Lovely girl, a graduate of Pineywoods. I was so glad to meet this girl, a pretty, brown-skinned girl, and I started talking to [her], and she's just pouring out this Oxford English, you know. I said, "Honey, how long have you been out here?" She'd been out there about two years. I said, "How in the world did you learn to speak this English like this?" So she says, "Mrs. Welch, when I first got here, everybody else, even the least African who worked around here, spoke that kind of English. My English was so pitiful, I had to learn how to speak." She was such a charming girl. I met two or three other black girls who were married to Nigerians. Also I met quite a few American white girls and European white girls who married

Nigerians.

[What kind of music did you sing when you did concerts?]

I did some classics, a few arias, and always did some spirituals. Sacred music, I do mostly sacred music. I have done some programs of nothing but spirituals. I give the historical background. Then I lead the people in singing. I teach them to groups. I like leading singing. I'm leaving on the 7th of February, going back to Denver. Two white girls and I are doing a benefit concert for [the] Mother-to-Mother program. I belonged to [that] organization when I lived in Denver.

I did a benefit concert at a wonderful Catholic Church in Brazzaville, Congo. They were building a new cathedral according to African architecture and using a lot of archways. It was the most beautiful thing. One of the priests accompanied me. "Would you mind leading my men's chorus?" "I'd love it." He had this large African men's chorus. They had all ages. These little fellows down here. I did solo parts with them and one or two hymns that we did together. The harmonizing--that brings back a lot of memories.

[Have you noticed many changes since you returned to Port Gibson to live?]

To be living today to see the changes that have taken place and are still taking place is one of the most exciting experiences I've ever had in my life. You know, I was down here year before last, and the minister of our church, Elder Harris, told me about the observance of race relations Sunday, three years ago now. He invited the young minister [Larry Maze] of the white Episcopal Church to speak. He said only one or two white people came. The second year there was quite a nice group, and then last year they had it and Mr. Hamilton from the bank spoke. When he told me about half the choir were whites and at the communion table there were two whites and two blacks, I have never had anything to thrill me. I said, "In Port Gibson?"

I came down here almost three years ago to do a prayer retreat in our church. Elder Harris was taking me around town, cause so much is new here. He took me to lunch out at the

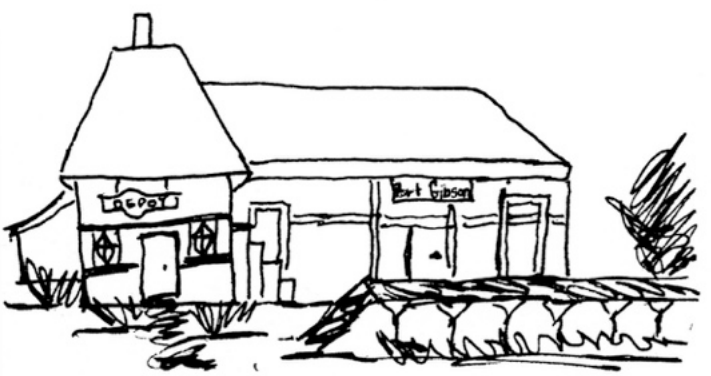
railroad station. We passed by there and I saw it and I said, "What are they doing with the station?" So he told me, "That's our nicest restaurant now." I said, "Can black people go there?" He said, "Oh, yes." So he took me to dinner there on that Saturday.

When we got to the door, there was a young white couple coming out, and there was this young white fella standing at the door. Well, I sort of hesitated 'cause I thought he was coming out. He was smiling. Elder Harris took my arm to help me up the steps. So this young fella I discovered was the steward.

When we got in he said, "Where would you like to sit?" So nice. I'm so shocked I don't know what to do.

See, I was born and reared here. I said, "Let's sit by the window." He took us over to a table and he went around and pulled the chair for me to sit down. I just dropped down in my chair. I can't believe I'm really awake, 'cause I never dreamed I'd ever see this happen in Port Gibson.

I was sitting there looking out the window, remembering, remembering. The only recreation when we got to be teenagers, kinda courting, you know, was to walk over to the railroad station at five o'clock on Sunday evening to see the train come in. There was a waiting room for whites and a waiting room for blacks. And here I am sitting up in this restaurant. Here white and blacks--a white fella and a black fella over here, perhaps business people. Then pretty soon I'm sitting there thinking, "Lord, is it true," and just thanking God.



Then someone said, "Mrs. Welch," and I turned and looked and here was this tall, stately, lovely, white woman who was speaking to me. Addressing me, "Mrs. Welch." You know when I came up here they wouldn't think about a title for a black person. And I said, "Yes?" She said, "You probably do not remember me, but I'm . ." (She called her name.) "I used to be in the post office. I wanted to tell you I saw your picture in the paper." (That was the first shock I got when I got here--Emma had the paper, the Reveille, open and here was my picture and a column this long about my being here to church, and I just couldn't believe that.) And she said, "I just want to tell you we're proud of you. It's very interesting to read about you." I said, "Oh, thank you."

Well, I tell you, that dinner didn't mean a whole lot to me. I mean I was just so overcome. You know, I got to thinking about it and thinking about it. I said, "Lord, you let me live all these years, I been giving my life for this cause. You let me live to see so many changes. And here you've let me see this in my own home town where I never expected to see it. And that's when I decided I wanted to come back down here and be a part of the happening. That's the main reason I moved back here. And I'm enjoying it.

The thing that interests me is the white people seem, the ones I have met, more interested and responsive to the change than black people. Black people act as if they aren't bothered whether white people change their attitudes or not. I get the feeling that white people really are glad the time has come and the situation has allowed some of them (I know it doesn't mean every single one feels like that), but that the new law, and the new things that are happening, have given them an opportunity which I think deep down inside they would like to have done it before.

But you know, in the whole field of that kind of thing, there's a possibility of losing friends, or losing relationships within families. I knew [it] during my years of work where white people, an individual in a family, decided they wanted a change, and the rest of the family were not in agreement with them. I mean, all of us on both sides have come through a whole lot. I find this nonchalance about it more among my people than I do white people. There are exceptions to all the rules, it is not true with every black person. I'm speaking in general terms, you understand me. Times have gotten better for black people so they don't care whether white people change or not. A lot of them. And they figure, well, they have these opportunities, this is what they wanted and should have had all

the time. So they aren't bothered.

The thing that bothers me is that a lot of them aren't interested in improving themselves, with the new opportunities that we have. What we need is compulsory education. But young people like these who are coming up are going to be a new shot in the arm in education. I'm expecting that out of you, you hear.

[What advice could you give young people that could help them lead better lives?]

First of all, I would say that you be willing to listen to your parents, when they advise you. Be willing to accept discipline, because all of us need discipline all the time. Nobody ever gets too old for discipline. Be willing to accept the discipline and heed the advice of your teachers and of the church. And remember that the church is not perfect. The church is you and me, those of us who are in it. Not a building. The building is to provide a place for the church to gather together in fellowship to listen to God's holy word, for prayer, and for teaching and learning, and to go outside the four walls better equipped to really be the church in the community. You can do a lot of talking but people watch what you do, the way you live. The way you live and treat your fellow man is the best sermon anyone can preach.

Someday you girls will get to do more than I have done. Stick to it. Use the gifts God has given you. Thank him for it. Use them for good. The world waits for you.

ROBERT MOBLEY

Interview by Della Davenport
Transcribed by Patricia Morris
Edited by Marhea Farmer

I wanted to interview my uncle because, when I was about nine years old, he used to sit down and tell me bedtime stories and jokes. I enjoyed them very much. I was so used to him telling me stories that I wanted to hear a story everytime I was with him because he would make me laugh no matter what kind of mood I was in.

He is very funny and everytime I see him he has some kinds of riddles or stories to tell. He still makes me laugh from the time I am with him till the time I leave. I enjoy him very much. That's why I wanted Mrs. Crosby to meet him and I think she also enjoys him.

--Della Davenport

[I was born in a] place call Carlisle, on the Richmond place.

[How old are you?]

Well, I'll tell you when I was born, I won't tell you my age, but I'll tell you when I was born. 1905, March the third. Now you count that.

[Did you all play games?]

Oh, plenty of 'em. We played ball games, basketball, football, and then played ring play. We had one:

Suzanne,
What's your name?
Suzanne,
A saddle man.
Suzanne.

Suzanne,
Papa kill a bear.
Suzanne,
Didn't give me none,

Suzanne,
But the head and tail.
Suzanne, ah ha ha,
But the head and tail.

Suzanne,
What's your name?
Suzanne,
What's your name?
Suzanne,
A saddle man.

[Do you know any ghost stories?]

Might tell you some 'em. I might tell you. This a joke sure enough. There was a fellow once--old fellow. He stayed in the house to himself. Didn't have no where to stay, so he was walking. He walked up on a fellow, he was cutting wood for his bossman. He asked him, said, "Uh, can you tell me where I can move?" This fellow told him, said, "Oh, yeah," said, "What! you wanna move?" So he said, "Yeah, man I wanna move," Said, "The boss got a house up there, big ole four room house." Said, "When you wanna move?" He said, "I'll move today." "Well, let's go to the bossman."

He went on up to the bossman, talked with him. Said, "Now, what's your name?" He said, "I'm John." He said, "Well, John what you want?" He said, "I wants a place to stay." He said, "Well, I got a four room house over there. I give you all what you make on it one year." He said, "Well, that's the man." He said, "Well, how many in your family?" He said, "Ain't nobody but me." He say, "But John, you can't work it." He say, "Yes, sir, I can work it." He said, "I made a crop last year but just me self."

He said, "Well, all right, I'll be glad if you will." Told the fellow catch his mule and hitched him up to the wagon. Went on and he moved.

So he got there to the house that night. It was night, you know. He made him a big fire and carried the wagon on over to the bossman's house.

He said, "John," he said, "put your gears back on the wagon and turn the mule loose, you know, the stable." He said, "Come on round to the back, the madam'll fix you some supper. You won't have to cook none." He said, "All right." She fixed his supper and he went over there and sat down and went to eating.

He said, "John," he said, "I hope you can stay there." He said, "Oh, yeah, Cap'n, I can stay there." He say, "I hope you can." He say, "What the matter." He said, "It's spooks stay in that house." He said, "Oh, ain't nothing like that."

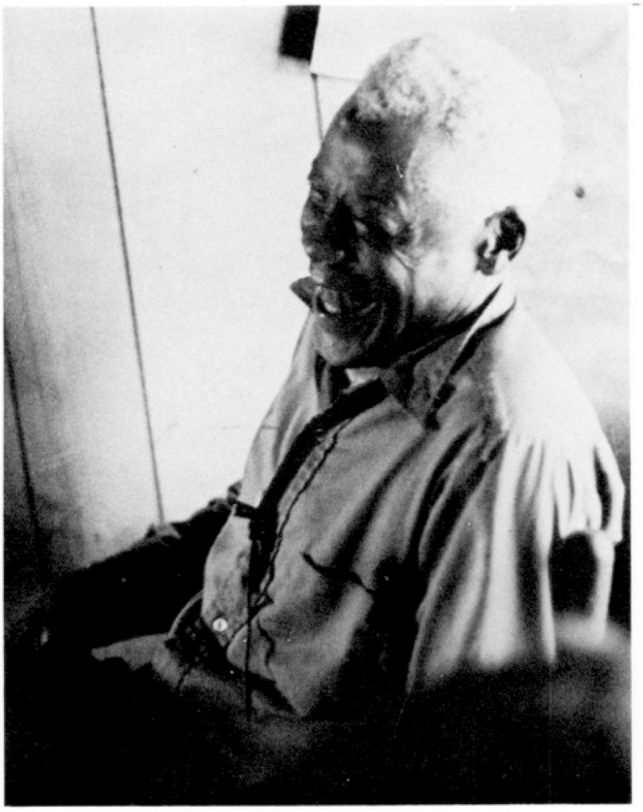
So he got through eating and he went on and he went home and he said, "Well, Lord." Got ready to go to bed, he say, "Ain't nobody here but me and you tonight." He laid down and went to sleep. He felt something tickling his toes. It was a big, black cat a-sitting on the foot of the bed. He said, "John, ain't nobody here but me and you tonight." He said, "Yeah, when I get my clothes on, it ain't gon be nobody here but you." So he got his clothes on and the cat wouldn't let him out the front door, so he broke to the back one. He wouldn't let him out the back one. He broke back to the front one, couldn't get out. Went out the back one.

So he was running, looking back. A big pine log was in the road, and he looking back, and he fell over there on his back. And the cat jumped up on the log and said, "John, well, we's going some, wasn't we?" And he said, "Yeah, when I rest up we going some more, too."

Well, I'se seen two ghosts in my life. I heard 'em, I didn't see 'em now. I heard 'em.

[Do you believe in 'em?]

Yeah, I believe it. Well, I know it musta been something, cause wasn't nobody else around, but couldn't been none. I didn't see nothing else but that.



[What happened?]

Well, I coming home one night and I got off my horse--gon open the gap--and something told me, say, "I dare you!" Told me, "I dare you." And I looked and I didn't see nothing. The moon shining just as pretty and bright, and all. It was a big opening. I stood there a few minutes; didn't say no more. I didn't take time to put my foot in the stirrup. I jumped up on it, so went on home.

So next when I got to home something come 'round to the house with a lot of chains and I thought it was my daddy. He was in there in the bed. And I went back, turn my horse loose and all them chains, and I broke and run back in the house. And I knew wasn't nobody there. Now that's the truth. Yeah, it was--you could hear them things.

Me and another boy was coming long one night and a big old shabby dog, just 'bout that tall--moon shining just as pretty and bright--just walked between me and him. Walked 'bout from that door there, disappeared. Ain't seen it no more.

[Do you ever hear anybody else telling ghost stories?]

Well, I heard a plenty folks tell 'em--ghosts, you know. Older folk, they told 'em. Well, they say it's for a fact in that time.

[Do you know any other stories?]

Well, I know another one. There was a preacher and a deacon wanting to see who had the most women at the church. So he said, "Now we gon have church tomorrow night. We want all the members come out there." All of 'em come out and he tells the fellow standing at the door, say, "I want to count my women when she come in and I want you to count the deacon's women." So the first one come in, the old preacher say, "Mark her." Next one come in, the old deacon say, "Mark her." Next one come in, the old preacher say, "Mark her." The deacon say, "Hold it, Reverend," say, "that's my wife." Say, "Damn that--mark 'em!" That was the preacher saying that.

[What's another one you know?]

Well, I got so many. Well, there was another old preacher once, he went home with the deacon's wife. He got there and they all went to bed. The deacon had a little old boy--he laying down on the floor--and the little old boy say, "Papa been stealing old Jones' hogs." And Jones was the preacher, you know. "Papa been stealing old Jones' hogs, and Jones know nothing 'bout it." Kept a-saying it. So the old preacher told the deacon's wife, say, "You carry that boy to church tomorrow. We want him to sing that song."

So she got the boy ready and she carried him on to church that night. The old preacher got up in the pulpit. "I got a little boy here, he sings a song here." His daddy was there too, you know. He say, "Boy, come down, I want you to sing this song." The little boy got up, "Papa been stealing old Jones' hogs, and Jones don't know nothing 'bout it." His daddy say, "Boy, hush!" The old preacher say, "Sing it, boy!" The little boy tried it down again. "Papa been stealing old Jones' hogs, and Jones know nothing 'bout it!" His daddy say, "Hush, boy!" The old preacher say, "Sing it, boy!" The little boy turned it around, you know, say, "Jones been sleeping with papa's wife and papa..." The old preacher told him, "Shut up boy, don't sing!" His daddy say, "Sing it, boy!"

Well, I can tell you again on the preacher. It was an old preacher once. He was a great big preacher. He just come in and he told 'em he could call Gabriel and tell him to blow his trumpet, and Gabriel blow his trumpet. Everybody wanted to hear that preacher that night. Two boys--they was awful devils--they slipped in the church 'fore anybody come there and got in the loft of the church.

The old preacher didn't know the boys was up there. He say, "Oh, Gabriel, blow your trumpet, Gabriel." The boy say, "Umm, umm." Everybody looked. "Oh, Gabriel, why don't you blow your trumpet, Gabriel. The boy, "Umm, umm." The boys had gone up in the church. The old preacher walked down out the stand, you know, and walked in the alleyway. He said, "Oh, Gabriel, blow your trumpet, Gabriel." The boys went to blowing. Everybody broke and ran out the church, come 'cross the church lawn, you know. Old preacher was last one out. Big old hog on the lawn and he run into it. He say, "Look out, Gabriel, god damn it. I'm in my own church and I'll do it."

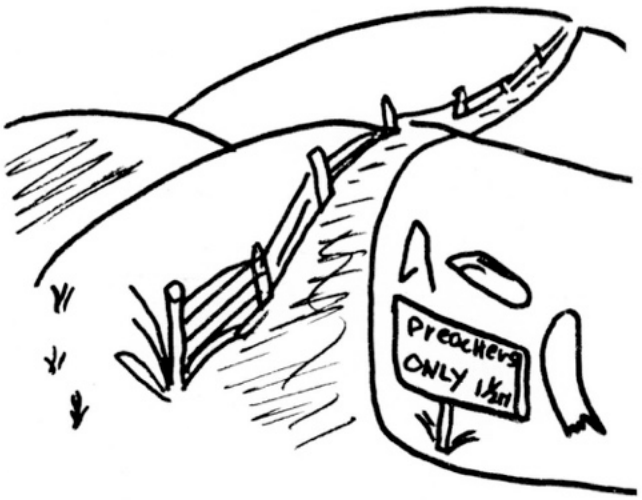
Preacher all right in his place. But the preacher is a rascal:

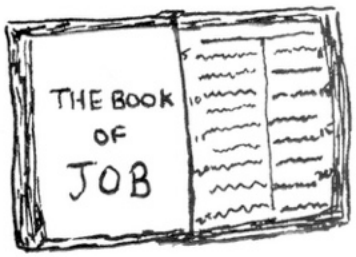
If you wanna hear a preacher sing,
Just kill the chicken

And give 'em the wing.
If you wanna hear a preacher lie,
Kill the chicken
And give 'em the chicken thigh.

That preacher is something. One fellow went down there. He wasn't coming back. He went down to hell to stay. When he got down there, he didn't see nothing but preachers. He asked the devil for some land to work. He just had worlds of land. The devil asked him, say, "Is you a preacher?" He say, "No." He say, "I got ten thousand acres down here, but I'm saving it all for the preacher."

He went on around. He couldn't stand it down there. It was hot down there. He come back. Fellow say, "Man, I thought you wasn't coming back?" He says, "Well, fellow, I got down there, so many of them preachers around the fire I couldn't get to it.





[Preach for us, Uncle Bob.]

I get pretty happy now, I want some help. You see if you want to be a child of God you got to be's right, ain't you?. And the onliest way you can be a child of God is to live the life. All right, then, you know Job, Job was a upright man. [Yeah] One day Job and the Lord was talking, [yeah] and the devil got jealous of Job and the Lord. [Yeah] And the devil told the Lord, "I'll make Job curse you to your face." Jesus told the devil, say, "I'm gon tell you 'bout Job. You can test Job's body, but do not test his soul."

And all afterwhile, Job and the devil and the Lord went over to Job's home. When he got over to Job's home the devil told Jesus, said, "Let me test Job's body. I'll make him cuss you to your face." Jesus know what the devil was up to, but Jesus has Job in his own hand. Oh, yeah, Jesus had done made a vow with Job and Job had made a vow with Jesus. When they got over to Job's home that evening and they begin to walk round Job's home, went out in Job's pasture and began to see Job's cows. And his cows was fat and fine. And he looked in Job's barn that day, and Job's barn was full. And he went on in Job's home that evening and looked in Job's home that day. And it shone like a fattening calf.

And Jesus was it with Job and when he touched Job's body and saw Job was going to cuss God to his face and Job laid there, broke out with sores from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. And he laid there till his wife got jealous and got uneasy and told Job one day, said, "Job, why don't you cuss God and die?" And Job told his wife, "You talking now a foolish woman. Certainly, I brought nothing and certainly I carry nothing from this world. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Way by and by, they tell me, Job lost all his, but Job didn't give up God, and I'm so glad today. Anytime a child of God get with Jesus and get on Jesus side, all devils in hell can't do him no harm. Stay on the field and work for Jesus. There's a pay coming one day. I'm looking for that pay day when it come. We all going home one day. Tell the world farewell.

[Do you know any stories about the devil?]

A fellow, he wanted to go down in hell. Had a good looking wife. His wife died, some 'em told him she went to hell. He wanted to go down there. He had some chilluns. So finally, they let him down there. He got down there in hell. Everywhere he look nothing but iron, just hot. Looked over there and saw a big old black preacher sitting up there wanting to speak. He said, "Say, Reverend?" He knowed it was a Reverend. Say, "Where the boss at?" Said, "He be through here directly." Said, "What you want?" Said, "I wanna talk with him."

By and by he looked. The devil come with horns like a cow and a hayfork full of fire. He walked up to the fellow and asked him, said, "Say, Captain, is there a telephone down here?" He said, "Nah." "There a bus station down here?" He said, "Nah." "There a train station down here?" He said, "Nah." Say, "What you want with it?" He said, "I wanna call my chillun back up there." "What you want with 'em?" He said, "I'm gon tell 'em don't come down here." He said, "Why?" he said, "This a helluva place!" The devil said, "Nah, this hell. You in there!"

I want to ask you a question. If it's a hundred ears of corn was in a corn crib, and a rat was going in there toting three ears out at night, how many it take to take that hundred ears out that crib?

[A hundred ears of corn? Three a night?]

He carry three out at night. [How many] it'll take him to carry that hundred ears out? I'm asking all of y'all. Asking that lady over yonder in the corner, asking her too.

[Well, I have this suspicion that he wouldn't get to take three out a night. But if he did it would be thirty-three nights to get him ninety-nine, but I have a feeling that there's a catch somewhere. But I don't know what it is. He can't carry that much.]

Oh, yeah he can.

[Unless he eat it up. Take it off the cob.]

No, no he won't. It wouldn't take him but a hundred nights. He take one ear out--ear of corn in his mouth and carry his two ears out.

[Well, you got us that time. You got another riddle?]

What is this here? The man who made it, he didn't want it. Man he sold it to, he didn't want it. Man who bought it, he didn't want it. The man who wore it, he didn't know it,

That was a casket, coffin.

What is this: got eyes and can't see, a mouth and can't talk, a tongue and can't talk, and a soul you can't save.

[I don't know.]

Ain't your shoe got a [tongue, got an eye, and a mouth?]

What is this here? Round as a biscuit, busy as a bee, and carry his hands before his face all the time?

Ain't you got a watch?

[We're not doing real well.]

No, but I can tell you what, you can get a black cat's bone and put it in your purse and you'll have good luck.

[In your purse?]

Yeah, you'll have good luck if you put a black cat's bone in your purse.

[Where you gon get one from?]

You have to kill it and get the black cat's bone.

[I ain't killing nothing.]

Why, you'll be getting good luck, and you can just sit at home. You wouldn't have to worry 'bout, you know, your boyfriend. When he come he'll tell you where he been. Black cat bone make him tell you where he been.

Well, let me see. I wanted to ask you something too. I'll ask the whole house. What is this? Four foots up and four foots down, soft in the middle and hard all the way a-round? Four foot up and four foot down, soft in the middle and hard all the way round?

[What is it? We give up.]

That's a bed. What this: got four legs, wears an apron, and smokes a pipe, and got four eyes?

[A stove?]

That's what it is. Somebody told. Well, tell me this. How come you go to bed at night?

[To go to sleep, I guess?]

No, you don't. Cause the bed can't come to you. What just go all day long, and come in and sit in the corner with his tongue hanging out?

[A dog?]

Uh-huh.

[Do you know any songs?]

Let's see now. I got two, three different ones on my mind. Now let's see one must I sing.

Shining Billy, Shining Billy,
Did she ask me in?
Yes, ask me in,
And she rest my hat
And she hung it on the rack.
She's a young girl,
Too young to leave her mother.

Billy,
Can she sweep up the floor?
Yes, she can sweep up the floor.
Yes, she can sweep up the floor,
And set the broom
behind the door.
She's a young girl.
Too young to leave her mother.

Billy, shining Billy,
Can she cook a cherry pie?
Yes, she cook a cherry pie,
Quick as a cat can wink his eye.
She's a young girl.

I reckon I sing this here:

Every round go higher, higher,
Every round go higher, higher,
Soldier of the cross.

Do you think I make a soldier?
Yes, I think I make a soldier.
Yes, I think I make a soldier.
Soldier of the cross.

Prayer, honest,
Will make a soldier.
Prayer, honest,

Will make a soldier.

Prayer, honest,
Will make a soldier.
Soldier of the cross.

Every round go higher, higher,
Every round go higher, higher,
Soldier of the cross.

[Sing me another one.]

Wait, let me see:

This train don't carry no liars,
This train.
This train don't carry no liars,
This train is bound for glory,
This train.

This train don't carry
no drunkards,
This train.
This train don't carry
no drunkards,
This train.
This train don't carry
no drunkards,
This train is bound for glory,
This train.

This train don't carry
no dancers,
This train.
This train don't carry
no dancers,
This train.
This train don't carry
no dancers,
This train is bound for glory,
This train.
This train is bound for glory,
This train.

This train don't carry
no snuff-dippers
This train don't carry
no snuff-dippers
This train is bound for glory,
This train.

This train don't carry
no 'bacco-chewers
This train.
This train don't carry
no 'bacco-chewers
This train.
This train don't carry
no 'bacco-chewers
This train is bound for glory,
This train.

This train don't carry no liars.
This train.
This train don't carry no liars.
This train.
This train don't carry no liars.
This train is bound for glory.
This train.

[Sing us some more songs.]

Too many of 'em just popping in mind all at once. I don't know which ones to get together.

[Sing us some blues.]

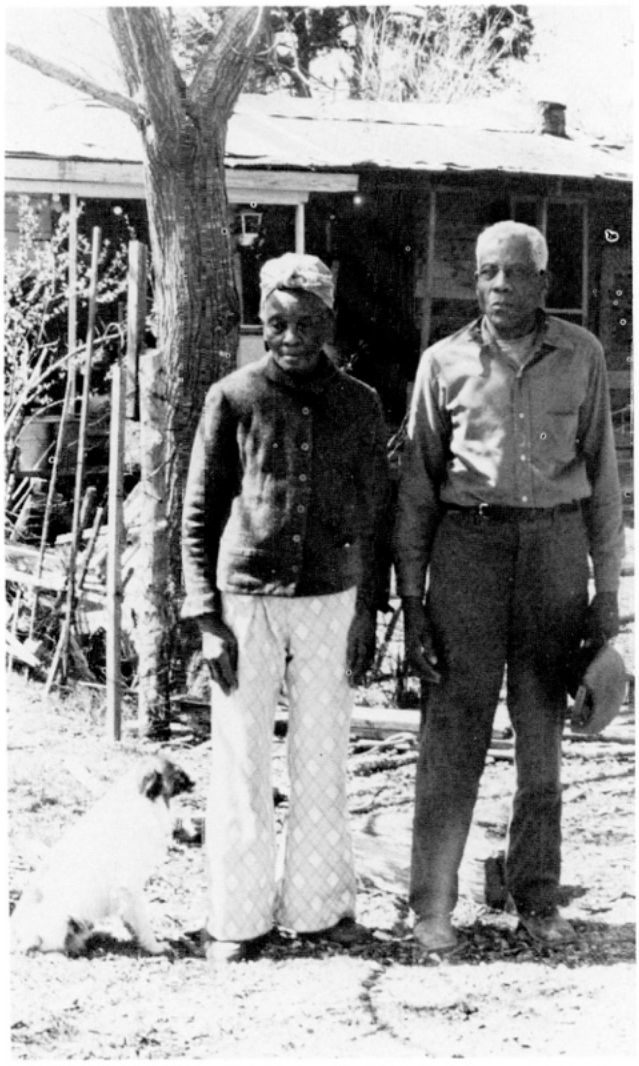
Nah, we never did sing no blues. Cause you get to singing them blues, get you stirred up and you wouldn't stay at home then.

[I wonder why you don't like to sing the blues?]

Well, the blues will put you to studying. Get your mind all tore up. I get to singing them blues, I may walk off and leave my wife sitting here. See, my wife don't like me to sing that cause she know 'em. Think I'll be going somewhere watching them young gals there.

[Just sing one.]

One? One will call for another one. I'm kinda like the boy [and] the girl once was going along. They was riding in a buggy. Them days you ride in a buggy. And she was riding along, and then, every little while, she looked back. So last time she looked back, he caught her and he kissed her. She jumped. Went on down the road further. Got right by the house. She say, "Why don't you scare me again?" The boy said, "Did I scare you that time?" She said, "Yeah, come on and scare me 'fore we get to the house, cause you can't scare me when you get to the house." So he hauled off and kissed her again. She said, "That's two times you done scared me." Better not sing no blues here.



[How did you meet your wife?]

When I met her I thought she was the best looking girl I ever saw, you know. I hadn't courted many girls, and so I run up to her. First time I asked her about comng to see her, she said, "Now, I'll see 'bout it." I said, "Well, now, how long it gon take you?" She say, "I don't know." I said, "Well, take you three or four days?" She said, "I don' know!" I said, "You gon tell me." She said, "Yeah." I said, "What you gon tell me, no or yeah?" She dropped her head. I said I was about to burn her now. She said, "Don't hurry me now." I said, "I'm gon let you take your time." I said, "I'll be over there tomorrow night." I said, "You gon tell me?" She said, "Yeah."

I didn't go that night. Wait till the next night. I was trying to find did she have another boyfriend. So the next night I went. She said, "I thought you was coming last night." Say, "Well," I say, "I didn't get here last night." Say, "Was you looking for me?" She said, "Yeah. I was looking for you." I said, "Well, you ready to tell me what I asked you?" She says, "Ah, I woulda told you if you'd have come last night. But you didn't come." I said, "Well, you ain't gon tell me?" She said, "No." I said, "Now listen, baby, I'm gon tell you like this. Now, I want you to do this:

I want you to go up on that mountain,
And fall down in the deep blue sea.
You won't fall in no water
Till you fall in love with me.

Take my picture, baby,
Hang it up side the wall,
Everytime you look at it,
You say that's my all and all.

Set my table high,
And set my table low,
Set my table in the middle
of the floor
So I can eat some more.

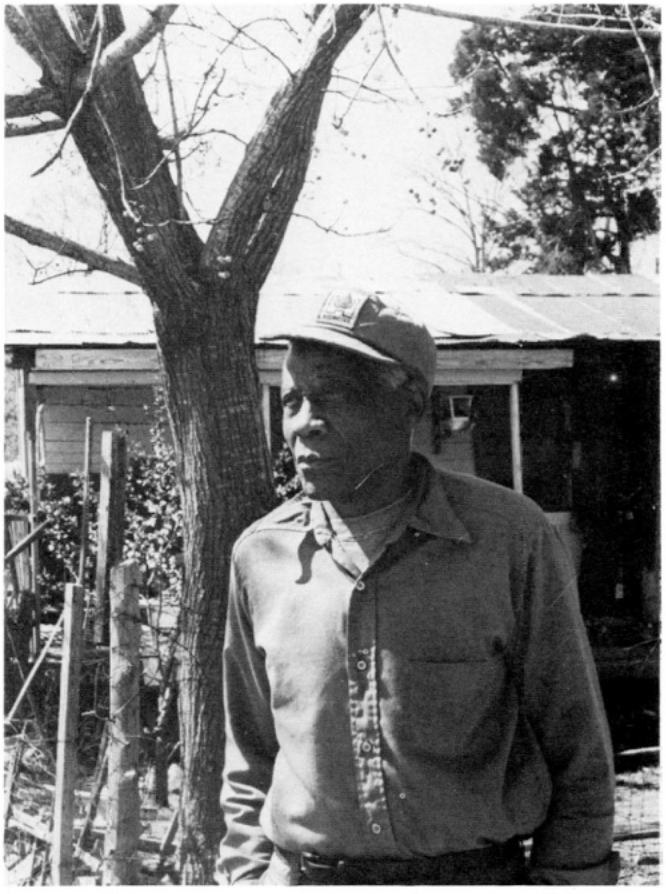
The times done got hard,
And the money done got scarce,
If the times don't get no better,
Baby, I'm bound to leave this place."

See she know I was gon leave then. I told her, I say:

Peaches in the summertime,
And apples in the fall,
If I don't get you now, baby,
I don't want you at all.
Going away, baby,
I won't be back till fall.
If I don't get no hint from you,
I won't be back at all.

What I told her, you see, I told her like this:

Paper is paper
And tin is tin.
Baby, the way I love you
Is a dog gone sin.



[What did she say? Did she give you an answer?]

Oh yeah, she told me, she said, "Baby, let me tell you one thing," she says, "I have loved a many one, but I ain't love nar' and I fell in love like I did with you." I said, "Baby, look," say, "I'm a tell you what I'm gon do." She said, "What?" I said:

Sugar is sugar,
And tin is tin.
Now sure as the grass grow
Round right on the stump,
You oughta be my sugar lump.
Sure as the grass grow
Right on the ladder,
You oughta be the girl
God sent me after.

[My first wife], she kind of wild. I let her went, you see. We stayed together about year. I told her, I say:

Gee you got a little slow,
I got to bundle up and go.

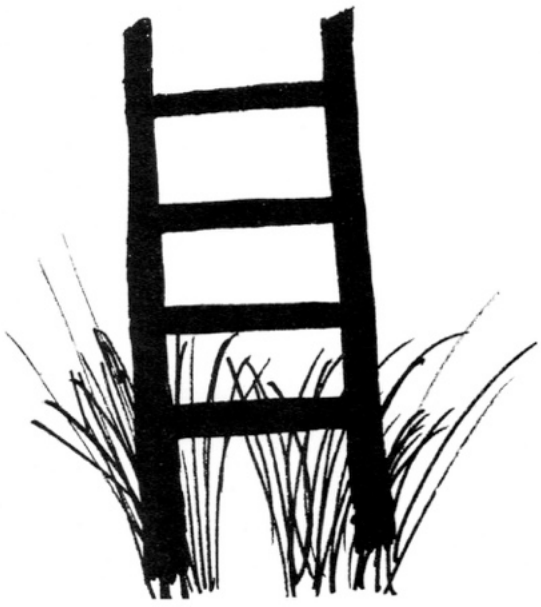
I told her, I said, "Now listen," I said, "Listen now, I'm gon tell you right now." I said, "You gone, ain't you?" She said "Yeah." I said:

Your shoes gon wear out,
And you gon come walking back.
Baby, please don't wear black,
Cause I ain't gon take you back.

Well, it's another gal right over the road that way. If somebody got that one there's another one right up the road from her. Cause the train I ride eighteen coaches long, and baby, I can love 'em. I maybe just now leaving home. I got nineteen of 'em. I only want nineteen more. When I get the right one I'm gon let that nineteen go. So I ain't got the right one yet. I gotta get the right one. I know I got thirty more years here. I know that. Yeah, I got to court a hundred womens.

See my mama told me six months before I was born I was gonna be a boy child and I wasn't gonna stay at home. So I'm gots to steady go. Now, you better not, you better not fool round cause the gate you got a little too slow, baby. You better bundle up and let's go.

Maybe you all come back again. I got a whole lot of 'em. I just don't want to put 'em all out today, better save some.



JULIA JONES

Interview by Marhea Farmer
Transcribed/edited by Marhea Farmer

Julia Jones is a woman who possesses great strength, not just physical strength but inner strength. It's the strength that makes her think positively when she gets a symphony of negative answers. After completion of the eighth grade she desired to go on to school. However, at this time she decided to get married and raise a family. She never lost her desire to go to school. After many years of delays she took and passed the G.E.D. test and enrolled at Alcorn State University.

In my personal opinion she is the creation of diligent labor, self-motivation, and a will to go beyond what is expected. When there was an obstacle in her way she would either go over it or around it. Somehow she managed to get past that obstacle.

A new era of political thinking for Blacks was created through the Civil Rights marches. As Mrs. Jones began to think positively about entering politics, at the same time she was hesitant. She felt her lack of business courses would be a hindrance to her. She overcame this small obstacle and ran. She won the position of Circuit Clerk for Claiborne County in 1971.

Mrs. Jones said that the greatest pleasure in running the Circuit Clerk's office is seeing people come in and register to vote. Her door is always open to the public. She feels that voters should come in at any time and see how the office is being operated. She wants to share this office with everyone. Apparently this approach to the office has been accepted by the voters of Claiborne County because Mrs. Jones has held office for eleven years.

--Marhea Farmer

[I was born in] Claiborne County in the Westside Community on January 12, 1920.

[What was it like when you were young?]

Oh, boy, it was rugged. It was rough, but we had a lot of fun. We were very poor people, and farmers, of course. There were a lot of us, I think nine of us in the family, but, of course, all of them didn't stay [with us] while I was growing up. We had a lot of little grandchildren, my nieces and nephews, and, of course, there was always a lot of kids. We had a nice time. We had a lot of fun playing. Sometimes we were hungry a little bit, but we played a lot and forgot about it.

I started to school at the Bethel, what was it, it was Rosenwald I believe at that time. Bethel Rosenwald, I think, but it was in the Westside Community. The principal at that time was Mr. Weddington, Mr. L. T. Weddington, Sr. He's deceased now.

[Do you think that schools today are different than they were when you were growing up?]

Yeah, because in those days we had just one room. I think we had about four or five grades in one room. I think at one time we had all ages, all eight grades in one room, but later on we got an assistant and so they divided the classes up. I think she had from one to four, and then we had from five on to eight.

We walked every step, everyday. We never rode a bus. At one time we lived about two and a half miles or three from the school each way. At one time now, I've lived farther than that. I've lived at least seven or eight miles from the school at one time. We would have to walk both ways. In the snow [sometimes] if we wanted to get there. It was just recently that the buses came.

We didn't celebrate [the end of school] but we were always glad that it was over and glad that it started again. Sometimes we would have to leave school because we had to hoe the fields. We had to go to the field. I think we had six months, something like six months of schooling. We didn't have the nine months, because the cotton was in the field and we had to pick the cotton before we could go to school. Our school was postponed until the cotton was taken out of the field. And the white kids were going by on the buses, going to school everyday, and we were in the field picking cotton.

My mama used to wash at night. She washed our one or two dresses. She had to wash at night and dry the clothes by the fire for us to go to school the next day. My mother's name was Rosie Cadney Smith [and she] was a midwife. She talked about working with several other ladies in the county and I remember her having to get up at night and go out and wait on various ladies who were in childbirth.

[Did you have any interest in following in her footsteps?]

No, not really.

[How did your parents treat you? Do you think they were stricter than the parents are today?]

Definitely. We had a lot of fun, of course. They were not severely strict, but we didn't give them any back talk. We didn't argue. What they said was law. That was just that.

[Did you do any work besides working on the farm?]

Not really, just help with the housework and work on the farm.

[Did your parents ever tell you anything about your grandparents?]

Yes, my mother always told me about her mother and father. You know, our father was never in the home with us. I'm illegitimate and so we never had a father in the home. Of course, my mother used to tell me about her mother and father all the time. We never had a chance to meet [our] grandfather. I always saw my grandmother and she talked about happy times when she was at her home. Even then her home life, early life, was stricter than ours at that time.

My mother always reared us to believe in God and the church. We were reared in church. And she told us right from wrong. She told us when we would do wrong and what would be the result of it and everything. So we were reared to believe in the Bible and when you believe in the Bible you will try to do right. We went to church quite often.

[What were the holidays like when you were growing up?]

Oh, they were the happiest times in my life. And I think all of us adhered to all the holidays and we had a big time on those days. We never left home [on Christmas.] We were always at home and my mama would go to town and she would buy the toys and whatever we would have for Christmas. She would save for that time and we had a glorious time. I remember when I was a little girl she would wake me up in the morning maybe about 4:30 or 5:00 and she'd say Santa has been here. I would be so excited. I would be screaming and jumping around and she would lead me around and show me what Santa had brought me. And boy, that was a happy time. Beautiful, those were happy days.

The Fourth of July was a big holiday for us. Thanksgiving wasn't too much of a [holiday] but the Fourth of July, we always celebrated it. And I don't know why. We had ice cream on those days. Homemade ice cream, and it was the best.

You wouldn't believe it. We didn't have refrigerators. There was an iceman coming by and during those times we would buy the ice and we would keep this sawdust. We would keep a tub full of sawdust and then we would wrap the ice and put it down in the tub and pile the sawdust over it and keep it. And we didn't have a freezer, an ice cream freezer. We had a pail and my mother would get a gallon bucket and make the custard, and she'd put that custard in that gallon bucket and beat the ice and put [it] in that pail. And we would take that bucked and turn it. She would scrape around the bucket and the ice cream

would freeze. Talking about delicious. I wish I could make some now, it really does a job. It's slower than a freezer, but you know at that time we didn't worry about the time involved in it. We just wanted the results. And they were fantastic.

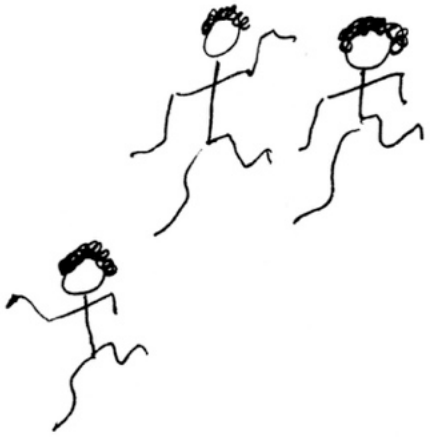
[What kinds of games did you play?]

We played ball, mostly baseball and catchball. Oh, I forgot now the name of the--dodgeball, that's what it is. And we played a game we called "Goosie, Goodie, Gander, Fox in the Mander." Have you ever heard of that? Oh, boy, we had a glorious time.

We would be on each end on the base and there would be a fox out in the opening, and he would say, "Goosie, goosie, gander, fox in the mander." (I've almost forgotten it now.) "How many have you got there?" And we would say, "More than you can handle!" And he said, "Well, meet me halfway," and we would meet him, and then if he would catch anyone, [that person] would become a fox. And then you would have to help him catch the rest until everyone was caught.

Then we had all of the little ring plays that you play. "Lost my handkerchief yesterday, I found it again today, I dropped it in the buttermilk, and then I threw it away." I've forgotten now how it goes, but anyway, that was one of our little games. Then we had, let's see, the counting game, "Ten, ten, double ten"--is that it? "Ten, ten, double ten"? No, we had someone blindfolded and we would get behind a tree and count. But I have forgotten now how it is, how it went. But anyway, everyone would go and hide and then you had to find them. Hide-n-seek, but we didn't call it that. "Ten, ten, double ten," that's the way we did it.

I met my husband early, way earlier than when we started dating. I think I might have been about 12 or 13 years old when I first met him. The



first time was just a little on the other side of where we live now. I'd gone over there to visit his sister, and I saw him coming across the back of the house. He saw us, of course, and he tried to cut us off. I didn't want any company--we didn't want any company, so we got out of the way. We didn't let him see us that day; he didn't get to see us. But we saw him later on. We saw him at Beechland Church several times.

[What was it like when you first left home and went out on your own?]

You mean when I got married? It was a little better than my home life as far as economics were concerned. We never had to--well, he only made a small salary, but it was something magnificent beside of what we had prior to that time. I never was hungry after I married. He always kept a steady job, even though the salary was small. After we had been married maybe one or two years, he started farming on a small basis, and I helped with the farm. I didn't do any other work, I never did any other work. I

had been brought up to work on the farm, so I was used to it.

[When did you join the church?]

I joined church when I was about 14 years old. I joined at the Beechland Baptist Church, but I was transferred to our home church, Mt. Olive. A major part of my life is based on religion. I believe in the Bible now more so than I did when I was young. I think it's the life to live. I don't try to put my thoughts on everyone else, but if they ask me, I think that's the kind of life I would want for anyone I'd have any influence on.

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

Actually, in those days we didn't know too much about heroes. We didn't have television [or] radio, and world figures were unknown to us. We never knew anything abut those things. We were always concerned with church, our little get togethers after school, or something of that nature. The one person that played a part in my life apart from my family was the principal, Mr. Weddington.

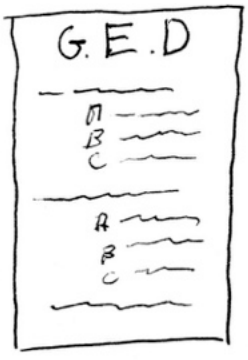
I always looked up to him. He was very strict. He would beat you if he came by your house on Sunday afternoon and saw you playing ball or marbles. He would get you Monday morning. But that didn't matter, he was a hero in our community. Our family looked up to him. And if we were playing in the yard or something like that and he happened to be coming, our mother would always say, "O.K., Mr. Weddington is going to see you." And when he did, he wouldn't say a word, but Monday morning we caught it. But he was always fair: he never beat one child and let the other go. Even his own children--he would beat them just like he did us. He was a fair person, but he really didn't spare the rod at all.

[Did you go on to school after you graduated from this school?]

I had planned to go to school before I got married, but I said, "If I don't get my husband now I might lose him." So I went on and got married. When my husband went to service, we had planned for me to go on to school, but I said, "No, I'm going to wait." We always wanted to buy land and we wanted a home, so I said I'll wait till he comes back and then I'll go to school. So I put it off then.

Later on, after we had two kids --not, you know, kids of my own, we adopted two kids. At first they were foster children, and later on we adopted. But anyway, later on we decided that I would go back to school, and I think the girl was about 11 or 12 years old when I decided to to back. We needed the money first. I wanted to go to school, period, but we also needed the money. So we planned for me to go back. We planned that about the time I got out of college the kids would be in high school maybe or something like that, and I would be able to help them out. And so that's what I did. I went back.

I went to Alcorn State and took this G.E.D. test. Really, I hadn't planned to go at that particular time, but after I took the test and passed I just kept on going. I graduated in 1964. I started in '59 and graduated in '64. I would have graduated ear-



lier, but I started work. I majored in elementary education. I wanted to major in home economics, but I chose elementary because there was a better chance of getting a job at home. I didn't want to leave home to work, and so that's why I went on into elementary education. I also liked nursing, but that would have taken me away from home too much. [I got a job] in 1961 at Russum [school]. You see, I went to school at night sometimes, and then during the summer.

At one time when I was in school I was a Brownie leader. That was at the Richardson Primary School. They met in my room and we went out on the campus at various times for little get togethers. Sometimes we would walk uptown or sometimes we would go off on excursions like get the bus or something and go off on it.

[How do you feel about life in general?]

I feel like life is wonderful. I think it should be lived--I'm quoting now, someone, but I really agree--I think it should be lived to the fullest. I don't think you should trample on anyone else, to get ahead, but anything you can do to advance yourself, you should do it.

[Life is different now] in some ways--economically, yes; morally, yes. Now I'm not saying that everything was just right when we were coming up, but people had more value. I believe they attached more value to their behavior than they do now. You know what I mean, is somethings you can see now that you didn't see when I was a girl. Now that is not to say that it wasn't going on, but we didn't see it.

[What advice could you give people which would help them to lead better lives?]

I would say reach for the stars, but I'd say don't trample on anyone else to do it. I would say be what you can be and I think you can be whatever you want to be. If I were young now, I'd be going back to school. So I think every kid ought to just set his goal high and go as far as you can.

[When did you decide to run for Circuit Clerk?]

I had thought about running in 1967 or '68. I don't know, that first year after civil rights marches came into town and a lot of people started to thinking politically. I had thought about running; in fact, I was advised to run, but I had never taken any business courses, and I thought that would be a hindrance and therefore I didn't run for office at that time. Later on, after the first election, I started thinking more seriously about it. I said I was gonna run the next election around, and so I did.

[The office is] important in a lot of different ways. Had I not run, there are so many things I never would have known that I do know now. Basically I ran because--and I don't mean this evilly, in any evil way--but blacks were kept out of the political structure a lot. A lot of blacks came to register and could not because of this. They hadn't passed the Voting Rights Act at that time, and a lot of them were turned around because of the severe test that they had to undergo.

My husband, for instance, took this test. I think the fourth time before he passed it. The people who gave the test, I don't believe could have answered it any better than he did. I saw some of that, you know.

We got a Constitution [to study], and that was rare, you know, for us to get that, but we were able to get one. Some of the things that he was asked on his test he explained them to the best of his ability. I don't see how it could have been explained any better. And, of course, he was turned away and could not register to vote, and so that is one of the reasons I wanted to run.

Another reason was that during

the civil rights marches a lot of us had marched, and those who did not march had gone to the Court House to go the bonds for several individuals who were in jail. And after the people were let go, our property was still bound as far as the bond was concerned. Now we didn't know at that time that from court time to court time, if you pass a court time, your property is released when that person is released from jail, unless the judge stipulates it. There must be some factor to keep it. So we didn't know that our land was really released, and a lot of people who went to the banks to try to get loans and different things were turned away because they said your property is still bound by the bond that you signed for this and so. And so we thought our property was really bound.

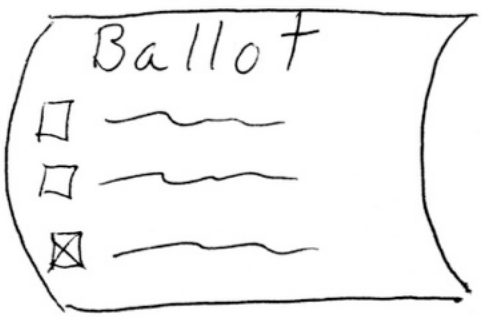
It was not until I got into the office to find out there was nothing to it. We didn't know how to do it, we didn't know what to do about it. But after I got my first turn in office and checked around, then I knew our property was not bound. And a lot of people who needed loans on their lands could not get them because of that fact. They had gone bond for someone who was involved in the civil rights marches, and that' happened to a lot of people, a lot of people.

[Had there been many black officials before you?]

Not really. There were about--well, Mrs. Collins, Mr. Collins, Mr. Ross--maybe six or seven had gone in the first election and had won. [The first time I voted] was in the year that Mrs. Collins was elected. I think that was 1968. I believe it was in '68--that was the first time I had voted.

[Do you advise people to vote today?]

Definitely. Yeah, I would strongly advise it. I think everybody should vote. I don't think one person ought to be turned away and another let vote. That is for white and black. I think everyone should have the chance to vote because that's the way you elect your officials who will represent you.



[How did the civil rights movement begin in Claiborne County?]

It was, I believe, in 1965 when the first person came. Let me go back a piece. During the earlier years, like in 1941, '42, '43, we had heard of the people coming to Port Gibson. I was not involved. I never came. But sometimes my husband would come up to Port Gibson and he said that he met someone who was selling the NAACP cards, and he would buy one for the both of us.

At that time it was definitely a tragedy if you were caught with a civil rights card. You might lose your job, or you might get beaten up, or both, you know. And so when he would bring it home, I would be frightened about it because I didn't want anyone to catch him and beat him

on the way. And this was definitely true. They would beat you about those cards. Anyway, he would--everytime he got a chance--he would keep us in. He wanted to be a part of it even though it was not in Claiborne County.

So later on some people came and tried to organize the blacks in Claiborne County, but they had one or two meetings and then the police would start coming around, and they would hear about it, and they'd start driving around town and that would disperse the people. They would get frightened and let it go.

But there were one or two people who were really determined to keep it alive in town, and so they would keep abreast of it. Even though they didn't have an organization as such, they still kept abreast of it. It was in the year that Medgar Evers died, I think it was in that year Mr. Evers came. It was probably about 1965 when he first came. Now I had not kept up with it, but my husband must have known about he was coming. When he came we organized round at the Methodist Church. I believe it was the first meeting we had down at the Methodist Church. I was not there, but I understand that's where the meeting was and many people joined. We had a large following at that time.

[There were] a lot of marches, picketing and marching. I never engaged in the picketing, because I was in school, but I did march on several occasions. I never was arrested or anything, but I did march on several occasions. I never marched during school time. But during the Saturdays or whatever I would march occasionally. I was definitely in accord with it because we wanted to vote and participate as any other person. So I think those marches [helped us deal with] a lot of the fear that was present in even me during the early years. It got a lot of that fear out of us. I don't know why we were so fearful, but I guess it was just a time, and the marching, seeing the courage in other people, gave us courage.

[What changes besides voting have come to Port Gibson as a result of that?]

Prior to the coming of the marches, all blacks were just Sally, Jane, and Sue, you know. And every white, be he fourteen or thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, was Miss Ann and on and on. When the little girls got to be ten, twelve, and thirteen, we had to start saying Miss to them. Because we were taught that, you know. The mother would always say Miss Ann, Miss Sally, or Mr. Barber or whatever, when he got to be just a little tiny before he got a teenager. And so all of the old folks did it, and we were brought up to do it.

I don't mean it disrespectfully, I think anyone should be Mr. and Mrs., but I think--I feel like--by the same token I'm Mrs. also, you understand. And even now it's not too many that will do it, but I feel like everyone, if he reaches that age, is a Mr. or Miss, and I feel delightful when I can say it like that. But I don't think that--that respect is still there yet, but it's much better than it was during those days. It's much better. And then I'm not afraid to say Sally anymore to a teenager. Now if you're eighteen or something and have a job and working in a professional place or something, whatever, I don't mind saying Miss, but when she is a little tiny something like ten, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, I don't think I should be made to do that, and that was prevalent here in this county, and I guess across the nation. I guess it was. In the early sixties.

[What about jobs? Has there been an improvement in jobs?]

Yes, there has been a large improvement in jobs. Well, a lot of people are still unemployed, but dur-

ing those days we had no jobs except just the jobs that no one else wanted, like working in the fields or cutting timber, and I'm not saying that disrespectfully. If a person needs to cut timber, I think he should, but I mean he should be able to get any job he qualifies for other than that, if it's available. I think that we are gonna always have some people who work in the home, and I don't think that's a disgrace, but if a person aspires for something different and goes to school and acquires an education for it, I think he should get it.

There is a definite change in the schools now here in Claiborne County. I've noticed that there are not a large enrollment of whites in the public school, but I see across the state there is a lot of different schools who have a large percentage of whites and blacks going to school together. Unfortunately, Port Gibson is [not] one of those counties. I don't know what is the reason, but still in all, they don't adhere to this public education policy too well.

But there has been a definite difference [for young people], because, as I said before, the children aren't afraid anymore. They used to be afraid. I don't say they are doing everything I would like from them to do. With this new-found freedom, sometimes it's not too good. I see a lot of things that I would like not to happen, but still, in other ways, they do have the choice, they have a choice now and they can be what they want to be.

I love education. I think everyone should go to school and get whatever you can. Be a doctor or whatever. Now everyone is not going to go to school. Everyone is not cut out for school, but if he's not cut out for a college education he ought to definitely go to some kind of Vo-Tech school and get some kind of trade. I'm for it 100 per cent.

[What does your job as Circuit Clerk involve?]

The main portion of the job is the courts. I am the clerk to the Circuit Court. That entails filing and marking all the court records that come into the office. Now they can be brought in by attorneys or they can be sent through the mail. Each day I go to the post office and might have a case, a new case, or I might have papers involving other old cases or what have you. I've got to stamp and file those cases within the jackets we have for various cases.

It is demanding, at times very demanding. It depends on the number of cases, and the length of the case, or whether the person is going to appeal the case or not. This time we have two cases that we think will be appealed.

We also have all the registration to do for the county, that is to register to vote. We sell the marriage license for persons who want to get married in the county. We docket, we file, we notarize, we file dentist certificates, doctor certificates for anyone who practices in the county. We also give honorary hunting and fishing licenses to persons who are too old to buy them, or who is [declared] disabled by the Veterans' Administration or Social Security Administration, and persons who are under sixteen.

[Is there a high voting percentage in Claiborne County?]

It's not as high as I would like it to be, but it is nice. It's comfortable, but it's not as high as I like. I'd like for everyone to vote, to register and vote. And there are a lot of people that's not registered to vote, really, still.

[Do you think it is important for the Voting Rights Act to be renewed?]

I certainly do, because now a person has to have permission to change a precinct. At the spur of the moment, in those days prior to the Voting Rights Act, you could be voting here this time, and next time you could be anywhere else you chose to be. The poll tax before the Voting Rights Act had to be paid by persons who wanted to vote. Definitely a lot of people just couldn't get registered. And now they don't have to go through that process of paying poll taxes or taking this literacy test and all of those things. And if they are not guaranteed that Voting Rights Act, as in 1964, '65, whatever, they'll go right back to where they were before, and I certainly don't want to see that happen again.

[What's the most exciting thing that has happened to you on your job?]

It is seeing people come in freely and register, that's one of the excitements that I've seen. I've seen a lot of people who came in, pleased with the office, and see smiles and things on people's faces. They come in and sit down and they are definitely at home. I like that. I don't care who it is, I think they should come by their elected offices and check in at least once in a while and say how do you do, or how are things going, and just be part of the office. I think they should be, because they put us there. That's one excitement that I've had. I want to share it with them, with everyone.

MARHEA FARMER AND JULIA JONES looking through Claiborne County record books in the Circuit Clerk's office.

NATHAN JONES

Interview by Timothy Bennett
Transcribed by Timothy Bennett
Edited by Emilye Crosby

After Toby Bennett transcribed his interview with Mr. Jones last year, he went back to Chicago to school. Since, like Toby, I think Mr. Jones is "a gentleman full of knowledge that I look up to," I edited the interview.

Mr. Na (as we all call him) was one of the first people I met after moving to Mississippi. He drove the school bus that I rode for an hour everyday. Riding a bus was a new experience for me, but Mr. Na helped to make it fun. I remember always trying to sit as close to him as possible; we'd take turns sitting there watching him drive. Every once in a while he'd give us candy from Our Mart. We were sad when he quit driving the bus.

Mr. Na was active in civil rights marches, in establishing the local NAACP chapter, and in the boycott against Port Gibson merchants. He is also one of the founders of the black owned and operated community store, Our Mart. Mr. Na is definitely someone to listen to.

--Emilye Crosby

[Where were you born?]

I was born in Claiborne County, west of Russum. April 17, 1914.

[What was it like when you were young?]

Well, when I was young, it was a large family of us. Around fourteen of us in the family. We had to work. Work out, not sharecroppers, one-fourth renters. We were farmers. Very poor people because there were so many of us in the family. During the time of my youth, must have been around six years, our house burned. That had a little impact on us. But we had a real happy life. We stayed way back, which was about six miles from Russum and thirteen miles from here [Port Gibson]. So we stayed way back in the rural, and we was farmers. First school I went to was Egypt.

[Where is that located?]

In the same area I stay, six miles west of Russum. It was just a one-room school. We had around about twenty students at that time.

[Who was the first teacher there?]

The first teacher over here at Egypt was Mrs. Annie Martin and this is Reverend Martin, Mrs. Odessa Martin mother. Mrs. Odessa was a baby at the time when she taught. At Beechland was Professor Watkins, Henry Watkins. He was my teacher until I finished the eighth grade. Beechland was located near Westside. It's a big church there now. It was a one-room elementary school.

I liked to study. We wasn't getting over two to three months schooling. We had to go to the field and most time in January if the weather was good we'd start plowing. You plowed mule. Anytime it would rain or snow then that's the chance we got to school. We had three miles to go one way and three miles to walk back. But we had a good professor. He would send my assignment back by my sisters everyday. When it rain I would go out and I would have to start at the foot of the class. Most the time I made it to the top before I left that day.

We mostly went to school in December. It was after November when we got through picking cotton but we couldn't go until we got through picking cotton that was just the rules of the landlord. We had all of December to go to school then. And if January was wet and had snow we would go all of January. School was out in March. We wasn't allowed nothing but six months of school until fifty-nine. They built Addison down here. We were on probation then. If we hadn't got enough children to go regularly, they would still cut it back to a six month schooling.

[Were there enough children then to go to school regularly?]

Yeah, it was enough.

[What kind of games did you play when you were in school?]

We just played marbles. That's the only game that we had at that time, that we know'd about. And then spinning top. That was another game we played.

[Did you ever win or lose?]

Oh yeah, we'd win some times. Had some boys that was much better than I was.

[Who do you remember as being the best person at marbles?]

Clark Wood. He was just one year older than I was. He was the best. I always tried to win. I never could beat him.

[Were there ever any fights over the game?]

No, in those times we never did have any fights because you see the one that win would get knuckled, you know. We would take the punishment. What I mean knuckle, you have to ball you fingers up like this and then he would shoot you as many times on the knuckles as there was marbles in the game. There always was six to eight marbles in the game.

[How many times did you get your knuckles bust?]

Well, I got mine nearly everyday at noon.

[Did you know your grandparents?]

Well, I didn't know too much about my grandparents. I saw my grandmother twice and my grandfather once because, see, we stayed back here and they moved from Yazoo City to Belzoni. I didn't never go to Belzoni, but she came down to our home twice. I can say this that she had seven boys and one girl. They were grown men. They mind her just like children did. That's much as I can remember of her. My granddaddy he was around in his eighties when I knowed him. I didn't know too much about him, he passed on. I seen him one time in 1936. 1937 he passed on. I was told that my mother's mother lived to get one hundred and ten. I never did get to see her.

[When did you join the church?]

Well, I was fourteen years old when I joined church.

[What's the name of the church?]

Morning Star Baptist Church. Pastor now [is] Reverend James Beverly. This is the third pastor. They kept one--that was before I was born--he stayed there thirty some years. One passed on last year--he stayed there thirty-three years. So this is the third pastor.

[What was the pastor's name when you joined the church?]

Reverend Ernest Moore.

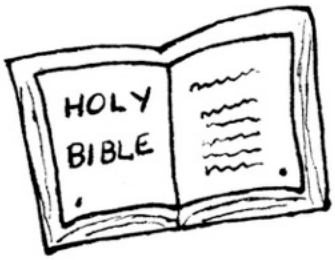
[And where is this church located at?]

In Jefferson County. It's a long story about my religious life, a very long story. Well, it's a good confession alright. From the time I was nine years old until I got fourteen I would sit on the front seat and I would observe everything the preacher said. It was just something to go back home and mock the preacher, you understand. I wasn't concerned about joining church or nothing like that.

So I joined at fourteen years old cause they would hear me in there mocking the preacher. Didn't care how many preacher I could mock, say everything he said. My parents, finally they heard me and they stopped me from doing that. So as I was fourteen, I joined church.

[And has it played a big part in your life?]

It played a big part in life, but I wasn't saved when I was fourteen. I wasn't saved. You know the preaching and I had to learn for myself. It was a lot of things I was taught and would hear, and it was wrong till I decided when I got twenty. I believe it was twenty, twenty-two before I just actually took to reading the Bible. I started reading the Bible, then I started searching for something to change my life. I was twenty-six before I was saved--twenty-six years old. I was hunting for something that I would be sure. Then after I was twenty-six years old I come in full knowledge of what my role as a Christian would be. It was mostly what I had been taught. I searched and searched and searched till I prayed and got off to myself and concentrate, and found out what it really means in serving God. I come up with this conclusion: that God equipped us with five senses, and he give us a conscience. I went on from there. Right from there, because you're equipped with everything if you got your right mind.



[Do you still have something you used as a kid?]

Well, I got most of my books. See at that time my daddy had to buy books. I got my elementary school books. I kept my books.

[What kind of books were they?]

Spelling. I had a John Keetwell, health book, a regular health book, geography, history, the reading book. We had two or three types of reading books. We had arithmetic. We called it arithmetic. Later called it math you know, but it was arithmetic in our time. Most of it was about four books what I studied when I got about six, or seven or eight grade. I had to repeat. Didn't care how smart you were you had to repeat seven or eight grade because you wasn't getting nothing but six months of school, that's all you was getting and they didn't let you out unless'n you repeated. I repeated the seventh grade because I know I couldn't graduate out of eight unless I repeated one of the two. I was around sixteen years old then. You wanted to get grown quick. I wanted to make sure that I didn't have nothing in the way when I got to the eighth grade.

[Why did you save these books?]

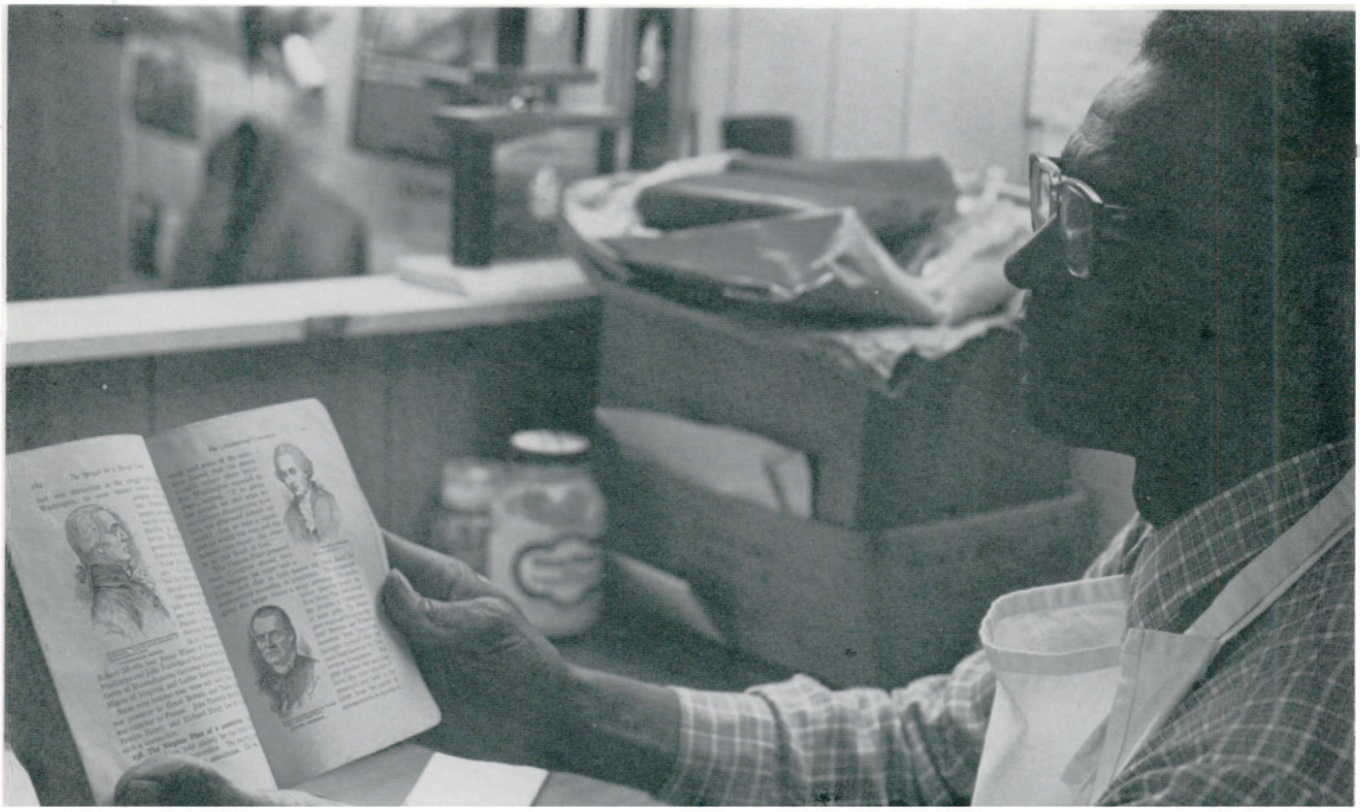
I treasured them. See, I always wanted to go to college and I never had the chance.

[Which subject was your favorite subject?]

Well, arithematic and geography. I was excellent in geography.

[Were your parents from here?]

Well--about my parents--my daddy came from Yazoo City, and my mother from Lexington, Mississippi--up there in Holmes County. My grandfather he was a farmer, and they were poor too. It was a small family of them. It wasn't but two children. Daddy never was a farmer until he moved down here in Redlick. He always was a steamboat man. He worked on a steamboat. His father was a farmer but he never did farm. When he got large enough to go to the steamboat--which is sixteen years old--he was on a steamboat until he married, and that was around twenty to twenty-one, he said. Twenty-one




SOUTHERN STATES

years old when he married my mother. And they moved from Holmes County to Jefferson County to Redlick, and that's when they start farming. My mother passed when I was seven. And my daddy married again and it was ten of us and my stepmother had five. That's why it's so many of us in the family.

[How did your parents prepare you for life?]

Well, we had a lot of religious instruction and they trained us to work. In other words, we was trained to get up in the morning at four or five o'clock. We had to do our homework, milking and so on before we go to the field. I say about six o'clock we'd be eating breakfast. Seven o'clock we was in the field and got one hour for noon. We worked till sundown. And you could study until nine o'clock. At nine o'clock you had to go to bed.

[What kind of light did you study by?]

A regular oil lamp, kerosene. That's the reason I wear glasses now.

[Do you still have some of these oil lamps?]

Yeah, we got to keep them because we stay in the rural, and if the lights go out we got 'em in nearly every room.

[How did your parents treat you?]

Our parents were real nice to us. We had good times, real good times. Of course, I don't know how they managed with that many children.

[What did they do to you when you were bad?]

Got a whipping, got a good lashing. In those days any elder person could whip you if you do wrong. They didn't have to be your relative. If you would do wrong in the face of any of them, any of them could whip you at any time, and if you were mischievous or disobedient at school you got a whipping there and then you got a whipping when you got home.

[Did you ever learn to quilt?]

Sure, I quilt and sewed and pressed. I could press my own clothes and I could sew on a sewing machine in those days. They were wearing the big leg pants. You see the pants with the piece up the side, I use to put them in there. I used to do a lot of seamstress work, shoe repair at home. You had to do it cause you didn't have but one pair of shoes. You had to take care of that shoe until it got warm enough to go barefooted.

[You say that you've been hunting, when did you learn to hunt?]

Well, my father was a trapper before I got big enough to hunt. He trained us how to hunt. I could go hunting the time I was ten years old, but wasn't allowed with a gun until I was thirteen years old.

[What kind of gun did you carry?]

Shotgun, a single barrel shotgun, twelve gauge.

[What did you kill?]

Well, at that time fur, racoon, possum, mink and so on. Was one of the main living that we had to depend on. We made more out of fur than we did out of cotton in those days.

[Is the hunting different now?]

Yeah, in the days when I was hunting there wasn't any deer in our

area. This makes a big difference now because they have different sporting in these day--deer, turkey--which didn't exist when I was young.

[What did you do with the fur?]

We would sell them to a company in St. Louis, Missouri. We was trained how to stretch and kill the fur before we would ship it out. It brought a good price. Some night we would go out and might would make forty to fifty dollars. One night maybe one hundred dollars. When a bail of cotton wasn't bring nothing but twenty-five dollars. We just turn to different things to survive.

[Do you garden?]

Yes.

[What do you garden?]

Mostly everything. Potatoes. Both type of potatoes, white and Puerto Rican potato. Cabbage green, collard greens, mustard, turnip. All that. Would grow beets, tomatoes. That's how we lived on the farm. Raised our own beef and own pork.

[And did you plant by the moon?]

No, I didn't believe in it. I would plant in the ground. I never did condemn anybody else but when I got ready to plant, I got my ground ready. I planted. It was something I couldn't understand about that. Anyway you planted it would come up on the quarter of the moon.

[Where did you meet your wife?]

It's a funny story when I first met her, we was a distance. She came near my house. It was a pond behind my house, and the road went across another ravine. Had to go across a ravine to the road and I could see her over there. I heard a lot of talk about her before I had a chance to see her. I saw her a distance. I said more than a block away. I tried to slip around and cut her off where I could get a little near her, but they ran. When I did see her again it was at a commencement at Alcorn. That's when we really met and talked. She was sixteen then. I believe I must have been nineteen. No, she must have been fifteen 'cause I'm five years older than her. Two years later she finished eighth grade. And when she finished eighth grade she was supposed to go to high school at Alcorn. That's when I wanted to marry her. I had a choice to marry her or either let her go to school. I choosed to marry her. That's the way we met.

[Back then Alcorn was a high school?]

Yes, see it had a high school. They had elementary and high school at Alcorn. Then you'd go on up to college.

[So your wife was sixteen and you and she married before she went to high school?]

She was seventeen when I married her.

[What was it like when you first went out on your own?]

It was really tough, I tell you. A lot of people don't believe it, but I was [a] reliable person when I was seventeen years old. The one back there in the market and me. He's about one year older than me.

[Who would that be?]

Mr. Kelly Duffin, that's my stepbrother. See, he was eighteen and I was seventeen. We tend to most of the business of our father. Our father had four sons in the woods cutting logs. We tend to the crop. We would haul it to the gin and gin it. We were reliable. When I went out I was a man at twenty-two. I'd say at seventeen. I was just as dependable as I was when I was twenty-two. I got a job down at the NRA [National Recovery Act]. I worked on the NRA when I was eighteen. That come under the new deal, President Roosevelt. After NRA, TNA. I can't pronounce what it was then but I know the NRA was the first salary boost I got. I had been working for forty-five cents a day for thirteen hours or fourteen hours. It was sawmills, Ecker Eaton Sawmill. He came in here from Alabama and he started working. I got a job at the sawmill for one dollar and ninety-two cents a day and that was high wages at eight hours. It was back-breaking

work, but I stayed there. Sometime you'll have ten or fifteen men waiting on one man to burn out. See, they wouldn't fire you unless you just wouldn't work. If you would get to the place that you would get too hot and burn out, well you lost your job. So, another man standing there ready to take your job. But, I say the Lord was good to me. I had strength enough to stay there. I worked for him ten years straight and part-time farm.

[About how many men would you say lost their jobs?]

I just can't count them. Some of them couldn't stay until ten o'clock according to how hot it was. It was groundhog sawmill, with a big fire that burning the slabs and that was double heat.

[What kind of sawmill?]

I called it groundhog. You had to lift everything.

[Do you know any ghost stories?]

My daddy didn't tell those ghost stories, but I would like to hear them from other folks. I used to go and sit I don't know how long just listen at other folks tell those ghost stories. Yeah, I remember some. So many were told and got me kind of wound up. One, especially that kind of got next to me was this person, which was Cadney. He was Sam Cadney, but he was an old man not the one living in Westside. He said back in slavery time just after the War Between the States that the master left some money. [It] was hidden in [a] certain place on the plantation. These people lived in an old shack. He came to them in a form of a goat with his head turned the opposite say and he was jumping, jumping forward with the head. See, he was backwards, but his head was turned toward the back. The man got afraid and said why do you come to me like that. He said, "I couldn't help it, I just had to come to you this a way. I want to tell you where a treasure is." And frightened him off. He never did get the treasure. He ran. That was one of the stories that almost got next to me.

Another what he told, this was a different man. We called him Getloose. He said they went out to this man, went out to his girlfriend's house one night and he came back where his master stayed in a old big house, but he had passed, had died. And said he always wanted a good drink of water out that cistern, a deep well. A cistern you know, where you had them bucket you let down with a chain. Since the man was dead he thought he could go by the big house and get him a drink of water, cold, cool water. He let the bucket way down in the cistern, and he drew it back up. Just as he aim to get the bucket said the man, the ghost grabbed the bucket and poured, dashed the water out. He say he just turned around and walked on off.

Getloose told another one. They went fishing on a creek and came back that night. They stayed till it got night. The moon was shining bright. They had come to a gate just before they go to the house. It was a haunted house they thought. Just as they aim to open the gate something grabbed him. So the man had a string of fish, white perches, a long string, they said. And this fellow ran off and left them. They could see the fish glittering where he dropped them all the way. And he [Getloose] went on and picked up as many as he could, but that fellow was gone. It so many tales they told, ghost stories.

[How do you feel about life in general today?]

Well, I feel this way. The world don't hardly owe me anythng. I owe the world so much. I feel that my life have been a pretty good life and now I enjoy it more than ever because I've lived long enough to enjoy life. We might be a little worried about our livelihood. If you have faith you can survive. Things will come easy to you, but you got to have the faith. You got to have the truth, believe in

yourself that you can make it. Believe in God. This is where you get your strength. I believe in a good life. I don't believe in no rotten life. I don't believe in a lot of things that I see. I'm not saying I'm no saint, but I believe. If you lead a good life, you'll have a long time up on the earth. I go by the rules and regulations of the Bible. Mainly, I didn't use any alcohol, but a little alcohol in my life time. As I mentioned, I dedicated myself as a ball player, from the time I was fourteen until I got thirty-six years old.

They said I was one of the best in this county, maybe in the south, but yet and still I was too old for the opportunity that Jackie Robinson and them got.

[In baseball, who was your idol growing up?]

My idol, it was Joe Gordon. I would buy those books. Joe Gordon was with the St. Louis Cardinals, wasn't he? That was my idol. That's the one I most wanted to be like. But in our community, we had a young boy played ball was Roosevelt Hall. He be in our community. He was older than I was and he was the first young man I seen doing good pitching. I was a pitcher. So after I started playing I had two idols. Bill Foster* was one of my idols because he helped train me to play. Bill Foster used to be at Alcorn. We used to go down there to see 'em play all the time. He helped to train the boys in Westside. We used to go over and see 'em play.

[What was the name of the team you played on?]

Westside. We played Newton, Louisiana. We played good teams after I got on the Port Gibson All Stars. I was pitching for the Port Gibson All Stars when I was sixteen years old. Hazelhurst, those were good teams. We played Vicksburg, Natchez, places like that, you know. Towns the size of this one or larger.

[Did you ever play the Port Gibson Ads?]

I played before the Port Gibson Ads. At that time we had a team in Westside just as good as the Ads.

[Who were some of the other men that played on the team with you?]

Matthew Burk, the fellow what cut hair over here. Willie Anderson, Rudy Shield, two of my brothers, Kelly Duffin and Eddie Duffin, my brother, Allen Jones. Might near a family thing. We played everyday. The four of us at home. We practiced everyday at noon, within that hour.

[Do you remember your record?]

I don't remember my record, but I didn't lose too many, even when I was in the Navy. I didn't lose no games when I was in the Navy. I pitched in the Navy. I pitched against professionals. Some St. Louis Browns' men was in the same outfit I was in. We had two clubs that played against one another. I was supposed to go back to Honolulu and play that team just before D-Day, but I liked that D-Day better.

*Editor's Note: William Foster played for 15 years in the Negro Baseball Leagues, from 1923 to 1938. He was considered by many to be the best left-handed pitcher ever. After leaving professional baseball, he returned to his Alma Mater, Alcorn A. & M. College, and served as Dean of Men and head baseball coach for 10 years. He died September 26, 1978, at the age of 74.

[You were in the Navy during the war?]

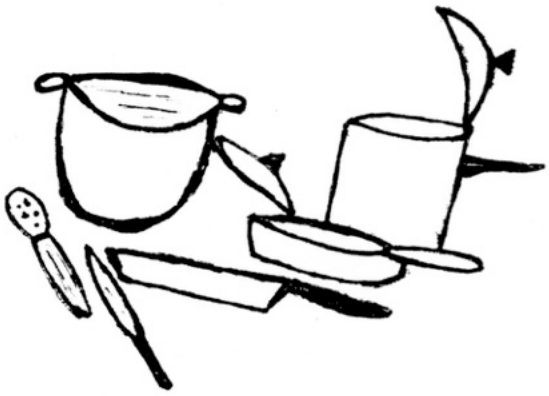
Yes.

[Where did you serve?]

I was stationed in Majuro and in the Marshall Islands, just a little atoll twenty miles out. It looked like a freight train.

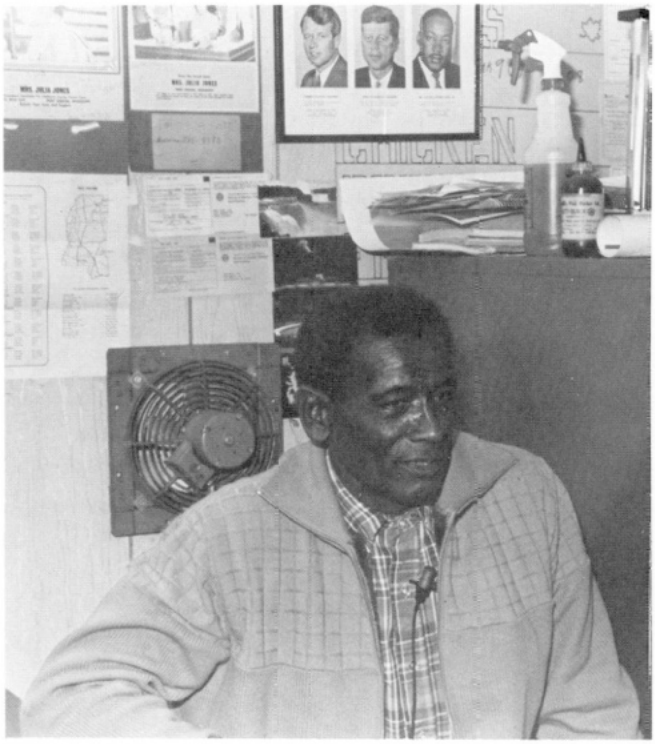
[What kind of job did you have in the Navy?]

I was a cook. I was cooking for Naval Officers. I had three hundred flight officers. I was drafted. I was a farmer. I didn't think I would go, but they got me.



[Mr. Jones, I was looking at your wall. When was this NAACP Freedom Day?]

That was last year. I don't know what day it was, but we held a freedom drive. I wore [the button] it was all day and we was raising some money. You know we're still in a suit, a million and a half suit.



[What brought up the idea of the bringing of this suit?]

Well, they said it was secondary boycott. We had a boycott on in 1967. We had so many grievances. I think it was thirteen grievances. You know, people working on the cash register, and people on the police force, some in public offce, and so on. We had so many grievances and they didn't agree to give us the grievances, courtesies and all. So, we had a demonstration down at Alcorn and the patrolman had tear gas down there. That was the last of March. We marched on April the first. We had that first boycott.

So a little later on, some of them complied to our grievances and some didn't. We started going in the stores that complied--filling station and so on--but we hadn't lifted nothing. So it got tight and people left here and went other places to buy grocery. It got tight and they brought up a suit against us because we stopped buying in their store. This is what the suit come all about. 'Cause they say we deprived them of their profit. I don't understand why they would try to sue us to make us go

back to their store. I still can't understand it so far. But that's what it was all about.

[Who else was in on this?]

Well, it was a hundred and thirty people. Now so many died, and then they relieved so many, it's down to ninety something now. And these are the people mostly with property.

[How were people listed initially in the suit? How did you get involved in it?]

I don't know how they come by it. I don't know if they just went out and named people who just had a little something. They must have known about the bank accounts. They knowed about land property and those are the ones they listed.

[You said there was a march on Alcorn. Were there marches in town as well?]

Yeah, we had a demonstration down in Alcorn that was on Patton's property. We was trying to march on Alcorn. That's when they teargassed us. Didn't never cross the line there.

[What made the men and women of the community decide to boycott the stores?]

Because you know, we didn't have the privilege to go to a public restroom like we should. We had to stand in line to go into grocery stores until all the whites were waited on, and the same way when you go to the banks. We go to the courthouse for any type of business, you had to stand back until whites got waited on. And to the clinic it was the same way. It was discriminating open and signs was up, black and white. This was what we were trying to eliminate. These was in our grievances. They said they would go along with some things but for toilets and working on the cash register, they wouldn't do.

So, I was on the executive committee, first NAACP committee formed here. I still am first vice-president. I know what was said. They try to involve this store into the suit. We had this in mind before the suit because we had been meeting and trying to get something of our own. When they had the first law suit, it lasted about six months. They subpoenaed all Our Mart records and me too, along with the records. Three days.*

[What year was this?]

I think it was seventy-three.

[Mr. Jones, how did you come to get his store?]

My wife, Mrs. Julia Jones, [the] circuit clerk, is the founder of this store. We agreed to take one hundred dollar pledge. We had in mind one hundred people to take a hundred dollar pledge. We had a meeting at First Baptist Chruch. We went along about three months trying to get pledges. Finally, it was getting kind of late. We decided we'd call the pledges in. We thought we had 'em. We had a hundred names. We called the pledges in. We got sixty pledges out of one hundred. That was for around six thousand dollars.

When we got six thousand dollars we didn't know what to do. We didn't figure that was enough to even start. So we was in a meeting one day, just about ten o'clock. We decided we had to get a charter from the state. Then we had to get a board of officers. So, we went on and got a board of of-

*Editor's Note: Litigation in the 14-year-old Port Gibson boycott case ended Friday, July 2, 1982. The United States Supreme Court ruled unanimously (8-0, with Thurgood Marshall, former NAACP lawyer, abstaining) in favor of the NAACP and the remaining 91 individual defendants. In doing so it upheld the right of citizens to stage non-violent political boycotts.

ficers. They went down to Natchez to Lawyer Berger to set up and get our charter. One man went and all the others were all women, Mrs. Marguerite Thompson, my wife, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Bessie Buck, and Mr. Rosco Johnson took 'em down there. They decided to set up the officers. They had to have the officers to get the charter. So, the lawyer said, "It's too bad you got all women here, why don't we get this man." He refused. My wife was treasurer, and she told him, the lawyer, "I give up my part and yield to my husband. I believe he will accept it." This was in Natchez. They came back and I accept of course. That's the way we got the charter.

After we got the charter, it cost around six hundred dollars lawyers' fees, and the charter from the state and our license, we had a little money left--about five thousand and some dollars left. So we were sitting down there alone wondering what we would do. Well, I don't believe we got enough money to get started, and at that Mr. Evers came up to the barbershop, Mr. Collins' barbershop. I went up there and told Collins, "Come down here. We're in trouble down here." He came down there where the meeting was and he asked them, he said, "How much money [you] got?" We said, "Five thousand dollars." He said, "That's enough. Get started now." And that's how we got started, just on a shoestring. Just five thousand dollars we got started.

[Who are the owners of Our Mart?]

We got shareholders. See, when we got sixty people to pledge, we got the sharebook. We decided to sell shares at twenty-five dollars a piece per share in order to reach out in the community to involve people who didn't have much money. And we had in mind that if we got forty thousand dollars worth of shares sold at twenty-five dollars a share, we'd had a lot of thousands of people in this business. We wind up with two hundred and some shareholder and that's the way we got started.

[Did you build this building new?]

It was renovated. This part here is new. This was an old garage and we renovated it. It cost us nine thousand dollars to renovate it back at that time in nineteen seventy-four. We started renting from Mrs. Thompson down in that place near the clinic. We renovated that place and we stayed down there around five years. Then we moved up here after we bought this building place and bought that one.

[Could you name your employees at Our Mart?]

Yes, sure can. Mr. Grover Rankin, Mrs. Ethel Liggans, Mrs. Ethel Curry, Ms. Odessa Ross, Ms. Glenda Jones, Mrs. Rita Beasley, Mr. Kelly Duffin, part-time school kids on Saturday, Nathaniel C. Jones, Jr., and Darrin Duffin.

[Does a board of directors run Our Mart?]

Yes, thirteen members. And we have a certified accountant as our bookkeeper. He's in Jackson.

[Do you think the community has changed much since the boycott?]

Well, it has been some change since the boycott. Talking about relationship, I don't see too much difference in the relationship between white and black. Far as business it's been a big difference. But for social it's been no difference, no difference. It may be a little worse than it was before the boycott. I certainly would like to see where we could work together and have a better relationship--feeling--toward one another, and better respect toward one another. We have good and bad on each side.

I would like to see it where we would be able to live together a little better, especially on a religous part. I certainly would like to see where we could go to their church just

like they is free to come to ours. White is free to come to ours anytime, and welcome. I would like to see that more than ever. Course, I would like to see the children go to school together. I would like to see that too.

[Do you see any hope of that happening in the near future?]

No, I don't see any hope of it in the near future.

THE WORKERS AT OUR MART: (front) Ethel Curry, Rita Beasley, Glenda Brown, Ethel Mae Liggans; (back) Kelly Duffin, Grover Rankin, and Nathan Jones.

MRS. F.A. WHITE, SR.

Interview/transcription by Sophie Bell
Edited by Sarah Crosby

Dr. F. A. White, Jr., of Port Gibson High School asked his mother if we could interview her about making hats. On December 13, 1981, we went to her home. When we arrived that evening at about 4:00 p.m., Mrs. White was making a hat. We learned a lot of things from her, besides how to make hats.

When Mrs. White was young she was the pet of her family. When it came to working in the field, she didn't do that, she only carried water to her father to drink. When she went to Archer School, she had to walk three or four miles to and from school every day. She went to the tenth grade at Claiborne Training School. She still owns the land her father owned when she was a child.

My older brother was one of the many students Mrs. White taught during her 14 years of teaching in Claiborne County. It was really nice interviewing Mrs. White. If I had to do it all over again, I would like to. Thank you, Mrs. White.

--Sophie Bell

[Where and when were you born?]

I was born in Claiborne County, [and] I'm sweet fifteen. I've got to tell you that. Look, my grandbaby would be tickled to death if she was standing here and I could tell you that. She would be tickled pink. I say, if you pay me I'll tell you. So you all will have to buy me a coke, Christmas. I don't want it till Christmas, if I tell you when I was born. Look at my son. Brother, he nearly knows because his daddy always tell him his age. He say, "Well, I'm three years older than your mother," and that's how they half way can tell my age. So, I was born in 1904.

[How did your parents prepare you for life?]

They gave me the foundation. And I appreciate it till today. They taught me how to live, how to conduct myself, and that goes a long ways with me. I can't do wrong if I wanted to, old as I am. There are principles that have been instilled into me, and I just couldn't depart from them.

My mama was nice. She didn't think it was anybody like me. And at that day and time they say girls couldn't get socks and stockings and things like that, but I wore two dollar stockings then.

My daddy was a big farmer. He farmed, made plenty of cotton, plenty corn, really. He got out and got [his land] paid for, and he died in '60. We were all grown and that place had been paid for. My brothers asked my husband why we didn't buy it, the land, so we bought it and we have 115 acres. I didn't do much in the fields, but I [carried water from] the house [when] they would call for water.

I had three sisters, but one died. But I do remember her, she died with diphtheria. One sister, she's retired and lives down there at Columbia. She was the baby girl. Dr. Trevillion's mother [was] the second sister, the sister next to me. You all know him, don't you? [Dr. Joseph Trevillion is Superintendant of Schools for Claiborne County.] Well, that's my sister's boy.

I have one brother living. As my son said, I was the pet of all of them. You know, I stayed in town. They were living on the place out [there,] but my auntie lived right [here] by the Jewish Cemetery. That's her son's house now. And every afternoon papa would say, "Well, you got to go to town so you can go to school." I just hated to leave my mama, but after I got here I made it all right. I had to come over here and finish tenth grade at Claiborne County Training School. That's all the further we went.

[Who were your teachers?]

Mrs. Evelyn Watson, she was the home economics teacher. Mr. Joe Watson, he was the principal that day and time.

[Did you get books at school when you were a young girl?]

Yes, and had to pack 'em. We had to buy our own books. See, you all are blessed and then don't be thankful. My daddy had to pay seven to eight dollars for my books at times.

[How far did you have to walk to school each day?]

When I was [at] Archer, it was at least three or four miles [one way.] And go back in the afternoon and had to walk. We didn't have any bus. The only time I would ride anything would be when we came over here for a field day or something.

[What were holidays like when you were young?]

Oh, I was so happy to get a holiday when it come. I didn't know Santa Claus. I knew him but I didn't know him until I was grown just about, because I wanted to be little. And wanted to get Santa Claus [to] come. But these children now, soon as they get to be ten years old, say, "I don't want Santa Claus to come to me. I don't want Santa Claus. I know who it is." I would be happy. My mama would put Santa out. I wouldn't be sleep, but she would think I would be sleep, and when Santa Claus would leave, Lord, we would get up. We would get out just before daylight to go show our dolls. My sister and myself, we both have dolls.

[On the 4th of July] my mama would have big watermelon cutting, ice cream, and what not. Just year before last my niece said to me, "Aunt Ceil, we ought to have a family reunion." So she started out having a family reunion out there on her place. She say our children don't know their

people. They never get together so she started having a family reunion out here on her place.

[When did you start teaching?]

I started teaching in the tenth grade. We had normals at that day and time, where you had to go and make your license. I taught out there near my daddy's home place. I started teaching under Mrs. Georgia Franklin, [and] I taught there three years as assistant teacher. Then I went to Issaquena County with my mama's sister's daughter. I would go down [to Alcorn College] each summer getting my degree. I didn't get my degree until after 1954.

And let me tell you about this. Dr. Trevillion over there, he was my sister's child, and my daddy reared him. That's why he's such a good man, because he had some good training. He was down there going to school everyday, going to college. So I told my daddy, I said, "Papa, would you let Joe ride with me, so that will help me with my expense." Papa said, "Yes, I'll do that." And Joe cried. See,

he didn't want to leave the gals down to Alcorn. He cried and cried. Papa said, "You have to do that or nothing." So sure enough we would go to school. It tickled me. We had a truck, and papa would let me go in the truck. Trevillion had so much pride he didn't want the gals to see him going to school in the truck. "Aunt Ceil, would you just park down here?" But I would park it right up there in the president's place where I know they'll see him. But, you see, he had so much pride that he didn't want the girls to see him riding in a truck.

[Where did you meet your husband?]

I was teaching school in' Lula, and he was up there. He was the bell ringer. There was a little Creole woman, she was crazy about him. He was the book director there, too. When I would go in there, look like he would be nervous to death. This little Creole girl had long hair, come long down here. Mine was pretty, but it wasn't quite so long. But when I would walk in that bookstore, she had to get back. She would get back out of my way.

Let me bring out this about my courtship. Now you young girls, I declare, I wouldn't like to come along like you all are coming along now. Because I believe if I was young, it be something in me that couldn't live the life that some of you young people enjoying. Really, I couldn't make it. But I'm going to tell you how I was brought up.

I was out teaching school. A boyfriend take us out, we couldn't stay out till night. We had to go to that teacher's home and back inside. That's right. And when I started teaching, my mama had me clad in such long, (you don't know anything about that,) long drawers. I caught the train right here in 1926. I went on to the restroom and started put my long panties up above my coat, and I started strutting. We had to wear those clothes. We couldn't go like you girls--half-dressed--no, we couldn't do that. Mama would have me with them long old clothes on, but after I got up there where I was, I pull them off. I did that. She didn't know it though, I didn't let her know that.

[What was it like when you were first married?]

Oh, the happiest times of my life. I thought I was somebody when I was young. And after I got married, that was the grandest time, I thought, that I could do. At that time we were teaching in Lula, Mississippi. My husband was principal of the Lula school. We built a two-teacher type to a twelve type school. And I have taught all the way. I have been in all grades, all twelve of them. Anywhere they put me I was there, and I didn't have any trouble with children.

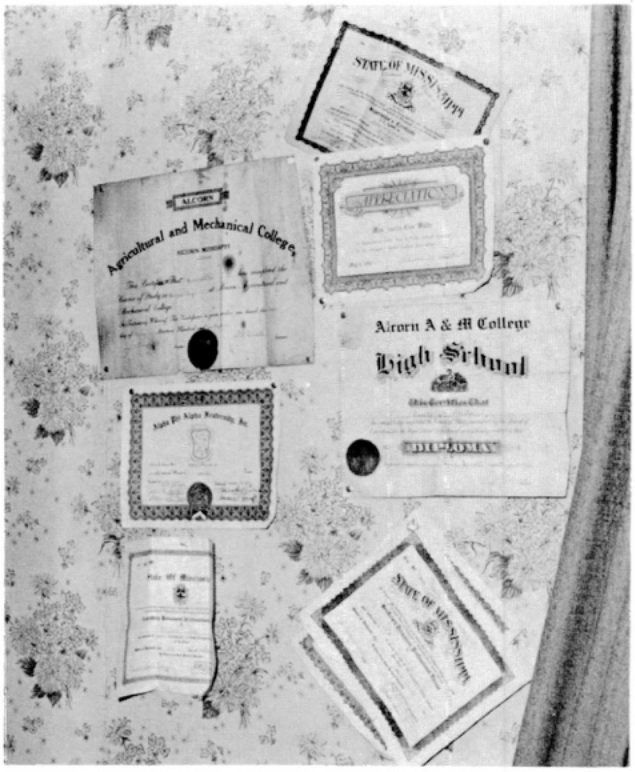
[Can you recall how much money you got paid when you first started teaching?]

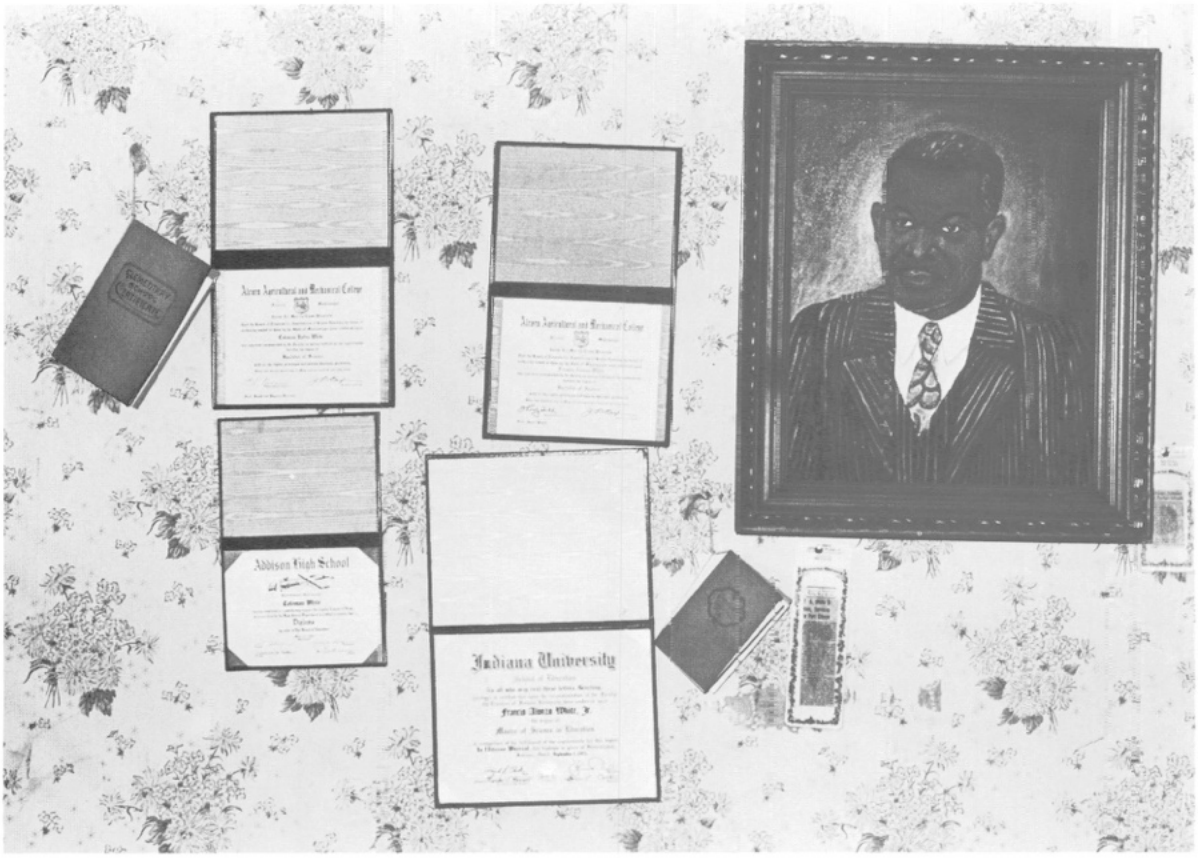
Yes, indeed. Twenty dollars a month. Pine Grove was the first place. My salary there was about twenty dollars. After leaving there I went up to Lula and I think they started paying us about seventy-five dollars a month.

[Did you have programs at school?]

Yeah, piano playing, singing, solos and quartets and duets, and what not. We had it. Looks like we had a better time than you all are having now, cause you don't hardly have programs at your place now. And we would be so happy when that night come for us to go out. We had a big time. Each teacher would dress down to try to see how pretty she would look that night. We would work with our children so and see who would have the better program. [The children would do] dialogues, speeches, and they would have to get those speeches. It was just fun. We would charge fifteen and twenty-five.

TOP: A PORTRAIT OF Mrs. F. A. White, Sr., done by the late J. D. Boyd, and the diplomas of various family members. BOTTOM LEFT: A PORTRAIT OF the late Coleman Thomas, Mrs. White's grandfather, also done by Mr. Boyd, and a graduation picture of Mrs. White. BOTTOM RIGHT: VARIOUS DIPLOMAS earned by members of Mrs. White's family.





TOP: A PORTRAIT OF the late Mr. F. A. White, Sr., done by J. D. Boyd, and various family diplomas. BOTTOM: THE PIANO TOP with photographs of Mrs. F. A. White, Sr., Grace W. White, F. A. White, Jr., Coleman White, and Ermin W. Johnson.

A lot of folk say, "Mrs. White, you stop teaching because the children are so bad?" I say, "Uh-uh. They wouldn't be bad with me." One thing, if you want to have respect, you have to give respect. They had both white and colored over here when I was serving. And those white children was just as nice. I would meet white children on the streets after I stop teaching. They would be married. They would take time out and say, "Mrs. White, I want you to meet my husband." They just natural was nice to me and I was nice to all children. Couldn't be anything but nice. Now I have never had a problem, talking about going to send children to the principal. Uh-uh, no, I didn't have that.

I'm going to give you some quotations. If you remember some of these quotations, they'll take you through life. Are you ready?

--There are five things that you should observe with care:/ Of whom you speak, to whom you speak, how, when, and where.

--One thing at a time, and that's done well,/ Is a very good rule, as many can tell.

--If a task is once begun,/ Never leave it till it's done.

--Be thou labor great or small,/ Do it well or not at all.

--In the night time, at the right time, so I've understood,/ 'Tis the habit, also habit, of the rabbit to dance in the wood.

[Have you accomplished anything over the years?]

Have I? I accomplished four grown children out in the world, didn't have to hit a lick at a snake. Didn't borrow any money to send them to school. And you ask me have I accomplished anything. I think I have done excellent for myself, yes.

[Mrs. White showed us how to make a hat out of cornshucks.]

I have been doing this since I was a child about you all age. We had a Jeanes Supervisor* teacher. She would go to and fro over the county teaching this, see.

I would make enough hats for my mama to keep her in baking powder and what not. She would sell those hats for about 75 cents or a dollar twenty-five apiece. My mom used that money to get the things she needed in her kitchen.

*Editor's Note: In 1908 Miss Anna T. Jeanes made available funds for educators to work with grass roots people in rural areas. The first Jeanes Supervisor worked in Henrico County, Virginia. According to Bernice Green, in Claiborne County the Jeanes Supervisor visited schools once or twice a month, helping teachers with their lesson plans and yearly calendars. She also helped with art work and often taught homemaking skills, such as making picture frames from corn shucks. She was inbetween the teacher and superintendent, often recommending to the superintendent who should be rehired and who should be moved. Eunice Gibson was the Jeanes Supervisor who taught Mrs. White to make hats from corn shucks.

Now this as simple as simple can be. Over one, over two. If you need to you may thread. Now always thread from under beneath. Turn your straw around. Now you do the same identical thing. Over one, over two. Now we're ready to thread again. Always thread from under beneath. The straw will be straight out to our right, straight out to you left. You add a piece where one gets short. Over one. Over two. It's just as easy as, poppa say, spitting when you once learn it. When you learn it just as easy as spitting.

You gonna get all kind of shuck but you kind of pick the inner shuck, 'cause the one on the outside be too stiff.

When I get several yards I roll it like this, keep it from getting tangles, and breaking. I roll it like that until I get about fifteen yards. Then I make my hat.

Cut the little rough edges off your shucks so they lie easy to thread.

[To begin the hat] take it and twist it around like that. Take your finger and hold it down. Okay put your thread underneath there so you won't see your beginning of it. Make real small stitches. I don't use a very long thread because it will tangle so much.

Now I have painted these hats. It make 'em very, very hard. But if you leave it natural it stay soft. I don't know the name of the paint. It be's a liquid in a little bottle and a little brush, and go round painting red, blue, black, any color you want.

I been wearing this one picking up pecans out on the place, and what not. It has gotten wet. It been made about two years. I made one for Mrs. Boyd. She told me she was gonna put a lining around there. You might think this [inside edge] would pull your hair, but your head get used to it.

I been selling 'em for three dollars and seventy-five cents, but I think if anybody wanted one, I think they give you ten dollars for this hat.

SAM MAGRUDER

Interview by T. C. Kelleher
Transcribed by T. C. Kelleher
and Jessica Crosby
Edited by Jessica Crosby

Sam Magruder was born two miles south of town. He attended Port Gibson High School. For college he attended West Point Academy. He is a retired colonel in the U. S. Army. His family owned Windsor when his mother was a little girl. He and his brothers and sister gave it to the state so people could enjoy the ruins. He felt that the state could take better care of it than his family could. I enjoyed interviewing him because he is witty and tells good stories.

--T. C. Kelleher

I was born here in Claiborne County on the 15th of March, nineteen and seventeen. We lived about two miles south of town, in the country. We had a farm. We raised all sorts of animals: cattle, pigs and sheep, goats, chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks. That provided us with a lot of our food.

[What was the name of the place you grew up on?]

Albena.

[Did you have running water and electricity at Albena when you were growing up?]

No way. We got electricity after I went off to college, when REA came in.

[What was life like then?]

When I was growing up, I had two great aunts that lived in the house with us, and my mother's first cousin, an old maid. She didn't get married until after she was forty. But my great aunt Priscilla Daniel Magruder was more of a disciplinarian. Not so much punishing you, but she would bring down the wrath of God on you. We were rather closely watched, and if one of us ever--any of us, our brothers and sister--ever said "nigger" in the house, it was as bad as if we had said a cursing word. We were jumped all over. "There is no such thing." We were subject to not harsh, but strict discipline. My father could handle a switch pretty well, and we tried to keep from giving him any opportunity to use it.

We were not a very mobile population back in those days. The only roads out of Port Gibson were gravel roads. I can remember when they paved the Port Gibson streets, which was in the early 30's. I guess Church Street was gravel when I was a young fellow. Vicksburg was thirty miles away on a winding gravel road. Natchez was about fifty on a narrow gravel road. I did go to New Orleans at times. First went by train. There used to be four passenger trains through here daily. Went from New Orleans to Vicksburg to Memphis along this line. All our mail came by train.

[New Orleans] was a lot nicer, I think, than it is today. It was a very beautiful, uncluttered city. There were all four-lane highways going through the middle of it. We lived from time to time on St. Charles Avenue and various parts of uptown New Orleans.

[What were the main businesses in Port Gibson?]

There was Weil's store. There was Frishman's store. There was James Ellis' grocery and George Ellis and Michael Ellis' dry goods. A couple of drug stores. A theater--movie theater. And Claiborne Hardware. It was in the building that Carter's furniture is now. Byron Levy had a store there on the corner of Carroll and Farmer, which is a safety equipment place now. That was later the Ford Motor Company.

[What school did you go to?]

My first year we had first grade here right across the street from the Presbyterian Church. You know where that garden is there with an iron fence around it? There was a house there. That was where I went for the first grade. I started in '23, must have been. First we came in a buggy. We did have a car, though. Then in second grade and until I completed school I went to the Port Gibson High School. There was an auditorium on the second floor.

School was school. We had our various subjects, we had our recitations. There was, I think, a little harsher and quicker discipline in the schools in those days than there is now. A lot of things that are smiled at today were not tolerated in those days. For instance, if one of us was caught smoking in school, we were subject to disciplinary punishment. We were kept in after school if we were late or tardy. We were kept in after school if we misbehaved in class.

I had a teacher in fifth or sixth grade, I think, Miss Mary Mason, and she was a disciplinarian from way back. She had a long switch which she could reach behind her and get anyone on the front row. There were benches in the front of the classroom, and when we recited we sat on the benches. Miss Mary could reach out and would say, "You ill-mannered, contemptible brat." Whop! I didn't consider it unusual punishment, but today it would be called brutal.

[Did you have a favorite teacher in school?]

No, I can't say I had a favorite teacher. Katie Headley, who compiled a history of Claiborne County, was my

history teacher for four years. I liked history. I read it as a story, mainly. I was always six, seven, eight or ten lessons ahead of our assignments. I'm not a serious historian, but I did reasonably well in all subjects: math, science, and Latin.

[After high school] I attended two years of junior college [at] Marion Military Institute, Marion, Alabama, and then I went four years to West Point.

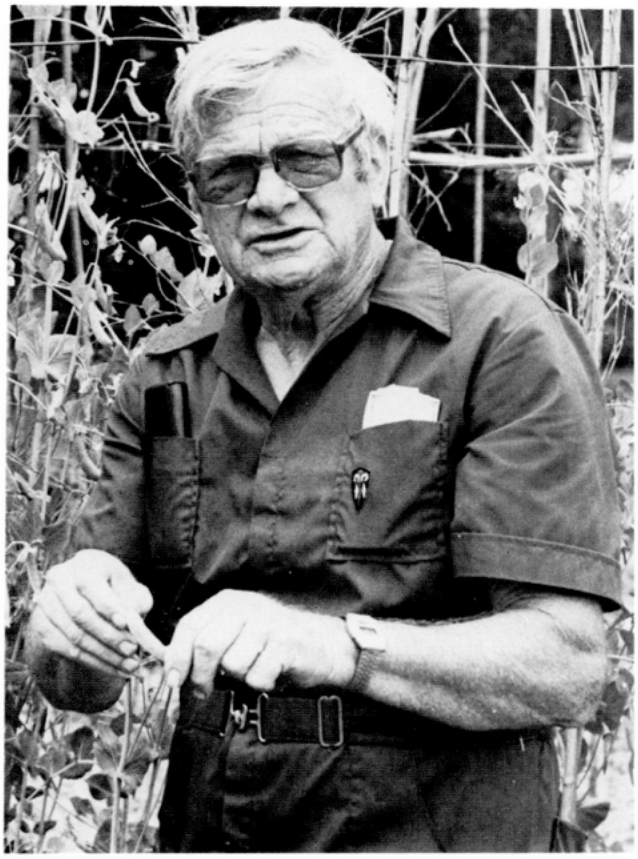
[Did you have any mystery or adventure when you were young?]

Oh, we made our own recreation, so to speak. We had horses. We had the goats that we could catch. We had a big pond that, when it was warm enough, we would spend most of our days swimming. We'd come home to eat lunch, but most of the other time we were swimming in the pond. We all learned how to swim in that pond. Now people need a swimming pool. We swam where the cattle watered. It had a mud bottom, but where we swam we kept most of the mud out because we were going in and out. The bottom was slick and there were a few snakes and frogs and things like that. We were used to them and they were used to us.

[Did you work?]

We had our chores to do at home. We had cows to milk. We let the calves run with the milk cows during the day, then we would put the calves up at night and then milk the cows in the morning. We had cows to milk, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys to feed, wood to bring in the house, water to bring in from the cistern. We had our chores to do.

There was a veneer mill in Port Gibson--wood products. They called it the box factory. We worked there in the summer. It was in the early thirties, and we got a tremendous pay. We worked from seven o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening with an hour off for lunch, and were paid seven and a half cents an hour. So we made seventy-five cents a day. And were very happy to have it, though, to be able to make money. We worked there ten hours a day for five days, Monday through Friday, and on Saturday was pay day. We worked only eight and a half hours that day. We got off at 4:30 and then stood around while they called our names out and handed us our envelope with our money. Cash, no checks.



[When did you learn to hunt?]

When I was ten years old. I used to hunt with my brother. I wasn't allowed to hunt with a gun myself at that time. As soon as I was twelve I got a shotgun and I hunted. Back at that time, in the early thirties, late twenties, we had very little game here. We had quail and squirrels. There were practically no deer. We would go out and hunt possum and get

the skins and sell them. Oh, in that day we got seventy-five cents for a possum skin. That was a good price. You could ship them in to Sears Roebuck and they bought them. You would take the skin off--straight off--and then stretch it over [a] board and hang it to dry, then cure it. Put a little salt on and packed them up. They bought them cured in Port Gibson. They were used for coats, women's coats, mainly. Possum has a very nice fur.

There was no deer hunting when I was growing up. There were practically no deer. I went on one [deer hunt]. One deer was seen, but not by me. Oh, we were thrilled to death when we went out hunting if we saw a deer track. Now they started bringing deer back into Mississippi from other areas.

[In those days] every little half acre or two--a ridge where you had any flat land, or in the bottoms, any two acre tract that was level--all of it was [cultivated by] hand labor with a mule. Cotton was picked by hand. Those small plots could be farmed economically. But when the war come and we started using machinery--big tractors, combines, cotton pickers--you couldn't turn a cotton picker around on one acre. Whereas you could walk a mule across a creek, you couldn't take a cotton picker across to get to a piece of land. Therefore a lot of land, particularly in the hills between here and the river, has been allowed to grow up into forest. You can't farm the land economically. [But] it provides a wonderful habitat for deer.

[What is the oldest thing you own?]

I have several very old things. We have some cups that were a part of the family china at Windsor. My wife has a bed that her grandmother was born in. My son has a shotgun that was my grandfather's that I used when I was a teenager. I let him have it. [It's] a double-barrel side-by-side that my grandfather bought, and I hunted with it, and when he died I inherited the gun.

[What did your parents tell you about their parents and grandparents?]

Well, I had no grandmother, because both my mother's mother and my father's mother died in childbirth. So I never knew a grandmother. I knew both of my grandfathers. [Once] we were driving on the road that goes from Bethel Church to Beechland, north, going down the hill, and I was driving my grandfather. We went down this big hill toward where the bridge is over James Creek. The road, of course, has changed considerably. It used to go down through very, very high vines that were beautiful. He says, "I was going right along here when I proposed to your grandmother. She looked up and said, 'I wouldn't marry a common drunkard.'" He said, "I reached under the buggy seat and took out the pint of whiskey and threw it over the bank there and never touched another drop. Before we got to the bottom of the hill, she promised to marry me." And he said, "I never touched another drop as long as she lived. About two years." That was around 1880.

[How did your parents prepare you for your adult life?]

Well, they tried to give me a sense of values, and, most important in life, the fact that I had to make decisions. I can remember when I started out in college, I asked my father which he would prefer, me to be on the dean's list or play football. He said, "You are eighteen, you've got to make a decision for yourself. You have to make the decision. A bit of self-reliance."

They gave me a deep religous background and sense. They taught me how to eat properly, to handle my utensils properly so I would not be an embarrassment to myself or them eating out. Well, then, you could go on and on, things like that. That anything that belonged to someone else was theirs, and if I picked up anything

belonging to anyone else, that was stealing. And, by golly, that would not be tolerated--not for anything.

[Where did you meet your wife?]

At her home. It was in Kaplan, Louisiana. Her father was on the board of directors of a bank that my father was the head of, and they were very close friends. I was stationed at Camp Polk, Louisiana. It was then I would go down to meet my father there for the weekend. This was after the beginning of World War II, early 1940's. She had two older brothers, and we ran around together in the bayous of Louisiana. She followed along as a fourteen-year-old, and her brother threatened to throttle her if she didn't quit following us around.

[Windsor Ruin is a famous landmark from Civil War times that once belonged to your family. When was the house originally built?]

Windsor was completed in 1861. The family lived in it until 1890, when it burned. Then it became Windsor Ruins. It was a very, very large home. My great aunt, who was due to inherit it, remarked after it burned that it was better to see it go all at once, cleanly, than to see it slowly deteriorate and fall apart for lack of moneys to be able to maintain it.

No one can say exactly [how the fire began], because no one saw it start. But they feel it started from someone throwing a match down, or a cigarette either, into some wood shavings. Carpenters were doing some repair work on the roof in the gutter. Those were the theories that came to me.

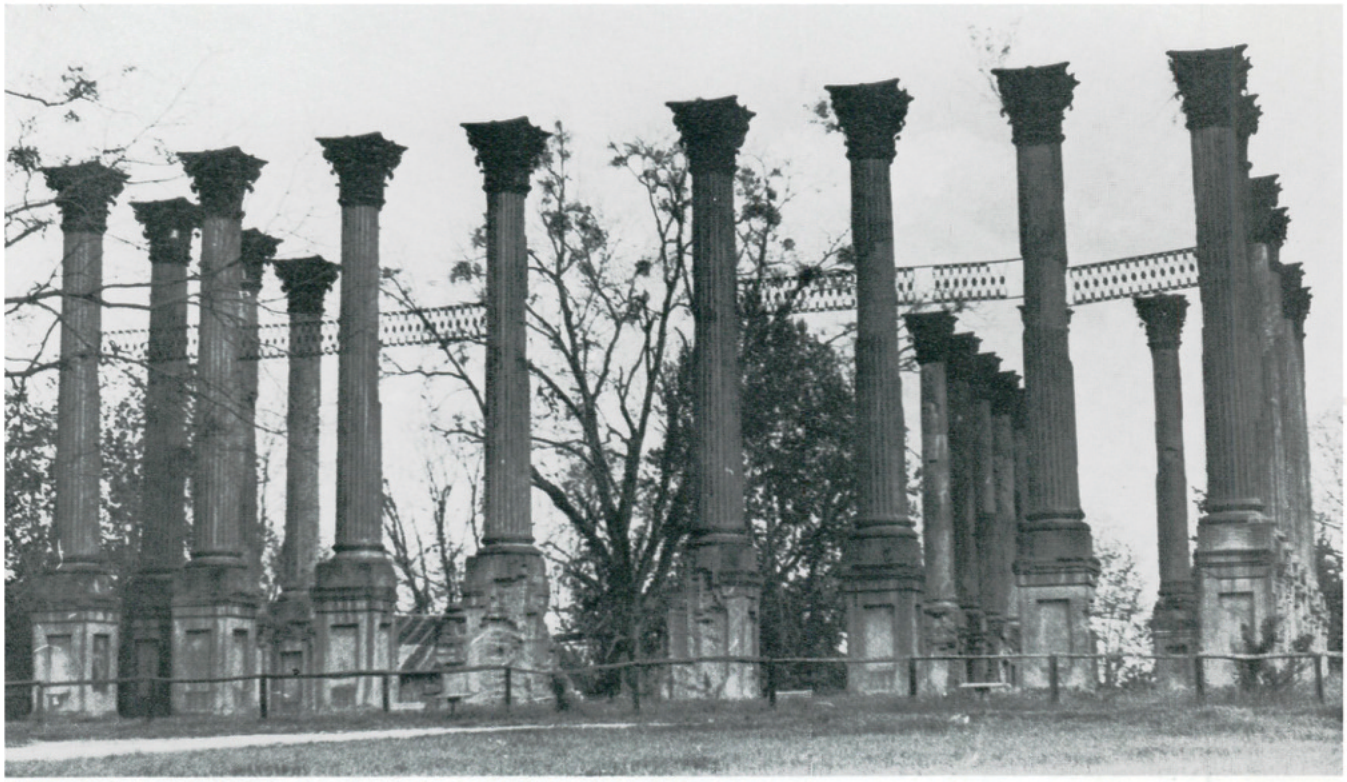
There's one man, Lindsey Evans. He was one of the guests at the house party, [and] he was a smoker. He said they went up to the observatory, which was on top, and sent my mother, who was an eight-year-old at the time, down to get some matches because he wanted to smoke a cigar, cigarette, whatever. And he, at least as passed down to his people, his family, was the individual that burned Windsor. His great nephew has been here. He said, "Oh, my great uncle was there. Says he's the SOB that burned it down."

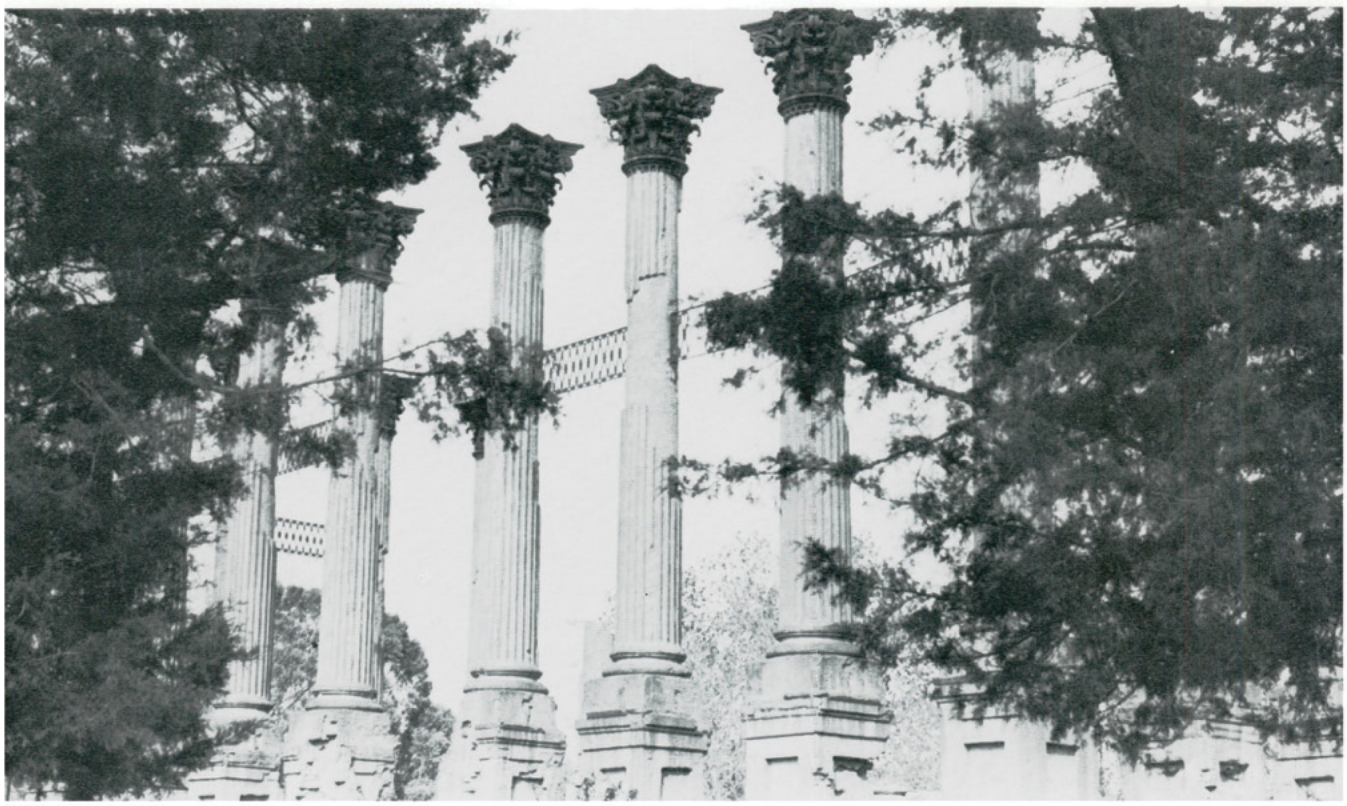
[Do you know any stories about Windsor that have been passed down?]

Well, my grandfather was eight or nine years old in 1863, and one of the federal generals took his horse Saladin. Confiscated him, appropriated him. My grandfather had, even at that young age, a very complete vocabulary in profanity. He called this general all sorts of ugly things, and was yelling at his horse to throw him in the pond. "Throw him in the pond, Saladin." This general wrote in his memoirs there was only one time in his life he'd ever been called a thief, and it was the only time he ever felt like it, when he took a horse of a little rebel boy.

And then, after the battle of Port Gibson, they used Windsor as a hospital for the wounded. They had a sentry, a day sentry on and a night sentry on. The man that was the day sentry went in every evening to family prayer with the family. Bible reading, family prayer. One evening--it was after dark--they were coming out of the room from family prayer. The Union soldier went out first into the dark hall; my grandfather was right behind him. A shot rang out and the soldier fell. My great aunt told me, said, "Your grandfather cried, he cursed, and he prayed. The soldier was his friend." To my grandfather's dying day he had qualms about walking out of a room with a light in it into the dark hallway. He hesitated.

They threatened to burn Windsor, but when they found the family had no complicity in it, why they relented. Well, they didn't want to burn it anyway. It was four or five hundred





wounded there. They buried the ones that died out on the lawn. Lincoln disinterred them.

The family cemetery is right there on Windsor. Yes, just as you come up the hill on James Creek, get up to the top of the hill and look and you notice the Indian mounds. There's one on the right side of the road, there's one on the left that's grown over. In the back is the Indian mound and the family cemetery.

[So your mother had lived there as a little girl?]

My mother was born there. And was eight years old when Windsor burned. She stood under that great big live oak out in front and cried because her doll was burning up in the fire.

[When did you give Windsor to the state of Mississippi?]

We [had] sold the farm land and kept about two acres around the ruins. When I returned here in '72 I got into historic preservation and I started working on my brothers. The fact is that it was a hazard to us, because the way things are now somebody could go down there and even dig the bricks out of the columns and pieces of cast iron fall on him, and he could sue the daylights out of us. And so we gave it to the state of Mississipi for preservation and interpretation.

[What can you tell us about the house we're sitting in, that the Chamber of Commerce uses as a visitors' center?]

This house was a second home of Samuel Gibson, the founder of Port Gibson. He was buried down on Marginal Street, two blocks over from the town library [and] city hall. In a survey of historic properties here it was so grown over around it that it was completely missed. It was covered with ivy and there were bushes all out in front of it. It was just a path going back in. Someone happened to stumble into it. They couldn't sell it or anything, and it was scheduled for demolition. They were going to put a HUD playground in, and we had some state moneys that were allocated to establish a new visitor's center. So Archives and History got with the park commission and they found a man that could move it. They moved it from where it was--the brick house--in one piece, more or less, and built new foundations over here. Rolled it in and lowered it down on the foundation, and then restored it.

It's the original, [built in] 1805. And it has been restored as true as they could. This room in the original house definitely had brick flooring. When they started to move it, they had to dig under it to put these big steel girders to raise it up. I said, "Oh, my goodness, that's a concrete slab under the floor." And then they found it was brick. The state historian insisted that the little dependence was a dairy or an office or something. I am convinced that was the kitchen.

[I thought that part was new. I didn't realize that was part of the original.]

Ah, well, it is new in that when we were getting ready to move it, something happened. They were going to have to move a big pecan, and the man who was going to move the pecan tree, Prince Coleman, dug around it with a bulldozer, getting ready to do it the next day. And then came rains and rains and rains and rains, and then a big wind came and it blew the big pecan tree over and it demolished it. But they had pictures of it and everything, and saved the bricks. The outside course of bricks are the bricks from it.

[How do you feel about life today? Is it better or worse?]

Well, that depends on one's point of view. I enjoy it. I try to enjoy it as much as possible. I think that the individual growing up today misses a lot of the things that we had. Be-

ing out in the open. There are too many pressures today. We didn't have that much peer pressure. We enjoyed ourselves, enjoyed simple things. I think [people were friendlier then] because we had to be closer. We had to depend on each other more. You can have your home here, but you don't have to live here, so to speak. You can go to Vicksburg, or hither, thither, and yon. You don't have to take part in the social life here because you could go somewhere else. You had to then because you couldn't get anywhere. And then again I envy you because of the opportunities that are available to you.

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

Well, it's always been a source of guidance. You have your ten commandments as the basis of all law. All the laws we have on our books and the thousands of volumes and law books and codes, acts of congress and so forth, all they do is try to define in other terms what is in the ten commandments. Or as Christ summarized it once: love the Lord thy God and love thy neighbor as thyself everyday.

[What advice would you give young people which would help them lead better lives?]

An old general once remarked to me--I was writing a letter for him. One of the subordinate commanders hadn't done his job as well as I thought he should. I wrote a kind of nasty letter. The old general looked at me and said, "Now, Magruder, tone that down a bit." He said, "You know you catch more flies with sugar than you do with vinegar. Be friendly and responsive to your fellowman."

I think the most important thing for the young people today is an education: to apply themselves seriously, both from a technical part and a cultural part. Know where you've been. Study history so you'll know where you'd like to go.

The most important things in life are other people and your relationships with other people. A world without other people would be a rather boring world. And your relationships with your fellowman, your interrelationship is more important than anything else in life.

RICHARD HASTINGS took this photo of Windsor Ruins in 1924. Pictured are Bobby Magruder, Helen Moore, Benford Spencer, and Mary Lee Hamilton Trimble. Some years later the steps were relocated to the front of Oakland Chapel on the campus of Alcorn State University.

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