i ain't lying

Volume 1 | Spring, 1981 | No. 1

Several years ago Mississippi: Cultural Crossroads was organized to help provide opportunities for students to explore their heritage while developing skills in photography and related media arts. Growing out of an initial NEH planning grant was a project, funded by NEA, to survey and document the folk arts in Claiborne County.

During the summer of 1980, as research progressed into the folk heritage of the community, the conviction grew that we should publish the interviews and photographs, to share with the community the stories, songs, advice, and remembrances that people were sharing with us. As our determination to publish grew, so did our need for help, which brings us to a need to say thank you.

Our thanks to Sherrod Reynolds and Eliot Wigginton and everyone else at Foxfire for a two-day workshop on putting together a magazine and for the great fun we had visiting them at Rabun Gap.

Our thanks also to Worth Long and Paula Tadlock, who have spent time teaching us, talking through possibilities, and always being there to give advice when it was needed. Our thanks to Joyce Stewart, who typed transcripts, to Alcorn State University for the use of an office and a darkroom during the summer of 1980, and also to Sheriff Frank Davis for the use of office space in Sheriff Two on weekdays after school.

Thanks to Sarah Chambliss and James Miller for their support, encouragement, and advice as we began our interviewing and worked our way through laying out I AIN'T LYING.

Thanks to Linda Cox and Roy Shelby of the Mississippi State Employment Service, who made the arrangements for six students to be employed by M:CC through the YIEPP program.

Special thanks to Jerry Bangham for the use of his computer for most of our typesetting.

Our deepest debt and our greatest gratitude is to the people who talked to us and shared their lives with us. They tolerated our inexperience and helped us through the uneasiness of doing something new. Throughout our work on the magazine the students have hoped to honor the people of the community while beginning to tell their history. The people speak in their own voice, their own words, and their own language. Rather than rewrite each interview, the students have confined their work to transcribing, editing, and writing an introduction.

Last my thanks to Octavis, who repeatedly took on tasks no one wanted and always followed through, and to Dave, who has gone on field trips, helped write proposals, given us advice and suggestions about interviewing people and writing articles, who typed the entire manuscript into the computer, and taught us all how to lay out a magazine.

We hope this issue will be the first of many issues of I AIN'T LYING.

--Patricia Crosby

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Volume 1 Spring, 1981 No. 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

JANIE BRECKINRIDGE 3

WILLIE ALFRED WILSON 9

MALISSA BANKS 13

FRANCES PEARL LUCAS 19

REMEDIES 24

HENRY EARL JENNINGS 27

JOHN DUNIGAN'S STORE 30

MINNIE LOU BUCK 34

GRONETTA WOODARD 46

SARAH CARPENTER 50

ISRAEL BUCK 54

CHILDREN'S GAMES 56

LENORA WELLS 58

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While sitting under a tree one hot summer day, we decided to start our list of people to interview. The first person to come to my mind was the lady who helped to bring me into the world. I had heard many a great story about Mama Janie, who was an outstanding midwife in Claiborne County. So the first name was on our list. The more we began to write names, the more names kept ringing in our heads. Before we knew it, we had a whole list of names of outstanding people in the county.

Interviewing these people and printing this magazine, we feel, is an important project. Not only was it an opportunity to honor the people interviewed, but it was also very educational for the group of students who worked to put this publication together. The people who were interviewed for their articles were very happy and thrilled to be able to share their experiences and histories with us. They not only felt that it was a great experience for them, but useful for us. They even gave lectures about their experiences which was a part of our learning.

After interviewing the people the real task began. We had to improve our writing, punctuating, and even our spelling skills while transcribing. We learned to photograph people, to lay out articles, measure dimensions for pictures, and even get the percentage of reduction for pictures. Before we knew it we had everything we needed for our first publication. All we needed was a little will power to keep the momentum going.

With the advice the people we interviewed gave us about being strong, and with our own strong feelings of confidence, we will put forth all effort to see this publication through and hope and pray to print many more publications about our community.

--Octavis Davis

PICTORIAL CREDITS

Cover design by Octavis Davis
All drawings by Wilbur Davis

Photographs
3,4,5,6 Jenkins; 7 O. Davis; 8 Jenkins; 9,11 Goods; 17 Morris; 18 Mitchell; 19,20,21,23 Goods; 27,28 Jenkins; 30,31,32,33 Goods; 36 O. Davis; 38,39 Ham; 48 Thomas; 50,51 Goods; 52,53 O. Davis; 54 Ham; 55 O. Davis; 59 Clark.

Janie Clara Breckinridge

Interview by Octavis Davis
Transcribed/edited by Octavis Davis

I had heard my mother and many relatives talk about Mrs. Janie Clara Breckinridge, who had delivered many babies in Claiborne County. For instance, she delivered my brothers and sisters, many cousins, and me. This is why she is admired by me, my mother, and many of the people of Claiborne County.

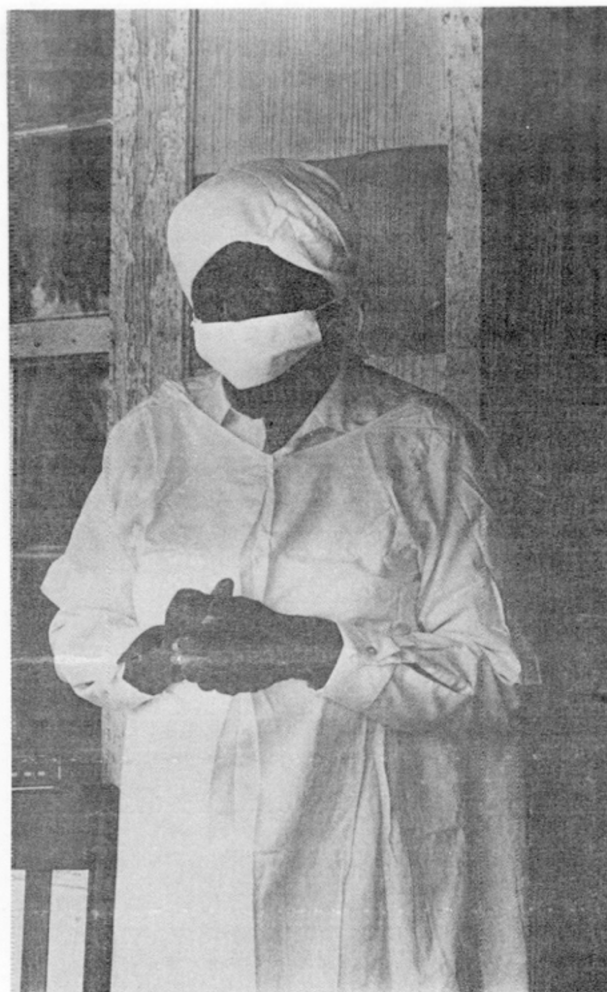
Mrs. Breckinridge is better known as Mama Janie by the people of this area. Mama Janie has been a midwife in Port Gibson and surrounding areas for 47 years. She delivered 1500 babies in her 47 years of midwifery. Most of her work was charity, because people were poor and she usually knew the people very well. With the exception of her charity work her fee was $7.00 per baby.

Mama Janie was a very unusual midwife, and sometimes called crazy, because when she went to deliver a baby, she went prepared to clean, wash, cook, sew, iron, and do whatever was necessary.

Mama Janie was the seventh child and considered to be wise, because it was said that the seventh child is always wise. Not only was she wise, but she practiced cleanliness as well as encouraged people to be clean. She was one of the first to help begin a health clinic in Port Gibson.

--Octavis Davis

My name is Janie Clara Breckinridge. I'm 83 years old and I'm proud of it. That's what makes me so proud--just to know how many babies I have delivered. All these old and young women, just like that! I wish it could be something like a something where all of 'em could meet one day.



I'm the youngest girl. Now the brother is younger, but the sisters, they older. I went [to school] till the seventh grade. I went to the Archer School [at] Mercy Seat [Church]; you know, the Archer School. Back in that time it was kind of hard, you see. It was about eight of us in the same grade till we could get a transfer to the seventh grade. Well, I did finish seventh grade--that was as high as we went back in them days. See, I always was number one.

I lived down below the road down there--up the road 'side Mercy Seat Church. Second, I came here [Russum Road] in '50. It's been 30 years.

I worked in the fields. I ain't never have no pleasure. Went to church--that was my pleasure. The

only thing I wanted. Yeah, yes, God kept me. Sure, sure, 83 years old and I got me a nice little garden back out here, and I go out there and work in that garden. I got a garden! See, I know God keeps me. Ain't nothing to it. God keeps me. That's right. Anything I ask him, he'd do it. He'd give me what I need.

Well, I'm a Baptist--born Baptist. My mother and daddy was a Baptist. I been a mother of the church --that was 50 years. See, I'd take care of the sacrament. I do that now every fourth Sunday. Now, I'm active; I've stiffened, but I'm active.

See, when I joined the church, people believed in God. People believe in self now. They don't believe in God. They ain't thinking about God now. I went to school everyday, and I didn't miss a day going to Sunday school.

[My husband and I] we went to school together. The thing about it, my daddy told him don't ever put his hand on me. Cause if he hit me, I'm going home to daddy. That was my motto, going home to daddy or I'd knock the devil out of him.

[My children are] Rosetta Harris Devaul and Georgia Harris, and John Charles. Got 18 grandkids and 32 great-grandkids; some call me Granny and all like that. That's my granddaughter in there.

[What was life like when you were young?]

Farming--I worked on the farm. Then I just wanted to be a midwife. My mother-in-law, she was a midwife, and as I worked with her, I just wanted to be a midwife. I started back in May 28, 1925. I midwifed 47 years and I delivered 1500 babies.

Well, I tell you darling, I never was scared. We had a Mrs. Mary Oliver that was our instructor, and Mrs. Jackson. She would come 'bout every two months. And then we had books to read on delivering and everything like that. Back in them days then, I had taken a great step.

I tell you about working. I didn't get nothing for my work when I started working. They barely paid $7.00, and as the years passed on it went up to $15.00, and from $15.00 to $25.00. That right, when I stopped that's what they were paying me, $25.00. That was up-to-date rates.

Well now, see [$7.00] was the

price after my mother-in law give up. She'd give me training and all like a that. I was under school like. [Sometimes for pay] I'd take nothing, and I'd walk right out. I could walk up to a house--no porch, no steps, no yard around it--and I knew it was charity work. I knew there wasn't no pay. You see, they give me hogs, cows, cow peas, sorghum molasses, all that for just pay. Stuff like that.

Sometimes I needed [rest]. I never had it. Sometimes my husband said I was gonna fall dead one of these days. If he'd come up here [home], I'd rest for three hours at home. I'd stay for three days after they'd call me [to help with the housework].

[Can you remember the first baby you delivered?]

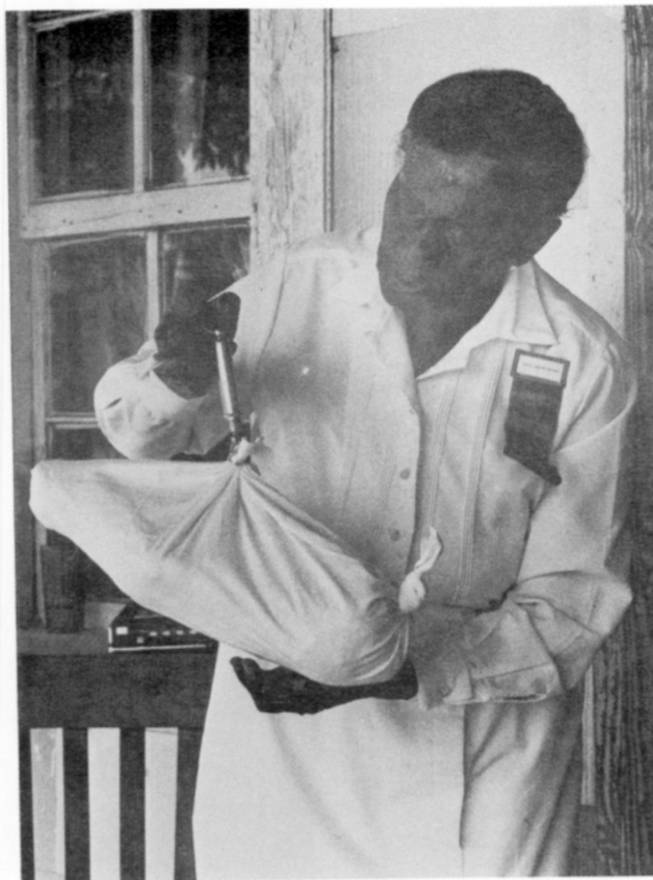
Eula Hedrick's boy. It was right after I made license. I had to go to Hermanville. And I delivered that baby like on Monday. That must a been two weeks after I started work and got my license. So the man that gave me my license told me, anywhere somebody called, I'd get my buggy and horse and gone. So I delivered three babies the first week. I've got a list in there on about 48 of 'em. I wouldn't know 'em now if I see 'em. [The last baby I delivered was] Lillie Mae Watkin's boy.

Whenever they'd call for me, I'd never work without my bag. They'd have to bring me home [to get it]. Well now, my son sent the bag to me. It's old. He said, "Mama, I'm a send you that." See the "J. C. B." wrote on it? My name is Janie Clara Breckinridge. Boy, that put a spring in my step. I could naturally step in that thing! They'd get so mad at me; they'd say I was bragging about myself. But Lord knows I knew what I was doing.

If a woman got pregnant like in November--no, let's take March--say that baby was born in November. That was a nine month period. And see, if they could tell the exact date--you see, so many people didn't even plan the babies, and they didn't even know when they got pregnant--but if they could tell me the right date when they got pregnant, then I could tell her. You count back three months and seven days, and that would give you the exact date when you gonna have your baby.

[Could you deliver a baby anywhere?]

Yeah, I could have, but that's something I never did. It wasn't



Mama Janie demonstrates how to wrap a baby and weigh it with a hand scale.

5568 Draughn Drive
Jackson, Mississippi
October 25, 1972

To the Citizens of Claiborne County
and others to whom this May Concern

This is to certify that I have known Mrs. Janice Breckinridge for more than forty years and have been closely associated with her in the performance of her work. She was the attending nurse in our home during the birth of eight of our children and did a professional job without the help of a doctor. This afforded me the opportunity to know the fine qualities of her personality and to recognize that the skill she used in the performance of her work coupled with the effective manner in which she administered to the comforts of mothers is plainly evidenced in the health of her patients and the children she attended.

Mrs. Breckinridge is a lovely, likable, kind-hearted, dedicated person who sometimes worked under conditions far less than ideal but because she was extremely good on improvising she did a good job for a small charge and on too many occassions she was unable to collect even that. She was always willing to go when called regardless of circumstances and wherever she went among people she carried sunshine and made even despending and ill tempered people feel warm and more relaxed.

God, himself, made Janie Breckinridge a humorist, gave her a taste for comedy and enriched her with the grace of creating an atmosphere of amusement. Everyone who knows her fixes his attention upon some incident or act which represents the quality of this great lady.

In the stress and strain of life, probably much of what she gave in service is forgotten but her influence as a high bred, generous hearted, humanity loving, sympathetic worker has yielded an abundant harvest in the lives of those whom she had the priviledge to serve. For this she will not be soon forgotten.

I know that Mrs. Breckinridge is a worthy person and deserves the attention and honor you are bestowing upon her. I am glad to share the happiness of the occassion.

Yours truly,
E. W. Reeves
E. W. Reeves

CERTIFICATE OF LIVE BIRTH
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Mama Jamie has books that contain birth records for all of the approximately 1500 babies she delivered. These are copies of two of them.

could get ready and go back. Be clean with it.

Some of the homes I went in they didn't even own pine oil or lysol. I took that stuff out of my bag and washed them things. Hang 'em out and let 'em dry. Other midwives thought I was crazy--say they oughta had their own stuff. But see, I couldn't work like that. See, I'd have to put my mother to bed clean. I washed my things. All the midwives wondered how I keep my things so clean. Cause when I washed white clothes, I washed white, and when I washed colored clothes, I washed colored. And that's how I kept my clothes clean. And my uniforms stayed like this the whole time I was working. Always wear white for cleanness.

Mattie Parker, I delivered a bunch of her children. Just all around. Carlene Watson, I delivered a bunch of hers. If they needed medicine, I'd take 'em to Dr. Segrest. That's my old stand-by.

See, if the [labor] pain got so slow (see, the stage of labor is 18 hours, and if they go through and know the pain is not gone), then I'd call Dr. Segrest. I had children of my own, and that made me know what it was like. The doctor would say, "If Janie

MIDWIFE'S RECORD

PLACE OF BIRTH COUNTY Claiborne CITY or Town Port Gibson or Outside City or Town Inside

If in City, name Street and Number

How long Mother lived in this Community? All her Life

MOTHER'S HOME: State Mississippi County Claiborne Town or Outside Town

FULL NAME of CHILD Willie Vernard Moore DATE OF BIRTH June 19, 1947 9:45 A.M. P.M.

Boy or Girl? Boy | Twin or Triplet? | If so, born 1st., 2d., or 3d.? | Months of Pregnancy 9 | Is Mother Married? yes

FATHER
Full Name Catherine Davis Color Colored Age 20
Birthplace Mississippi Occupation Housework Industry

MOTHER
Full Maiden Name Johnie Vernard Moore Color Colored Age 21
Birthplace Mississippi Occupation Public Work Industry
How many OTHER children of this Mother are now living? | Mother's Mailing Address: Port Gibson, Miss. Box 303
How many OTHER children born alive but now dead? 0 | Information by Johnie V. Moore
How many were born dead? 0 | Relation to child Father

WAS THIS A LIVE BIRTH OR BORN DEAD?

USE SPECIAL BLUE BLANK FOR RECORDING A BABY BORN DEAD.

call, I know she needed me."

[Did you ever lose any mothers?]

Lost one woman. She had a heart attack. [Did you feel bad about that?] No, no. Ain't felt bad if nothing happened to the woman with the heart attack. See, the doctor had told her not to let a midwife wait on her and so. And she comes out here and didn't tell me that, and she died. I delivered the baby, but she died with a heart attack. And I tried my best to help her, and Dr. Segrest and another doctor out here to Hermanville, Dr. Lehman. But she died. No, I told 'em. I'd deliver them every hour and they die. I'd go to 'em.

See, it ain't my fault. You should know about your body when you're pregnant. Sure, I'd tell 'em. I'd tell 'em to go to the clinic or I'd tell 'em all to see their doctor.

After I retired now in '75, I had a sick sister staying with me, and I retired. We had seven other midwives, but after I retired, nobody else--Rosetta Claiborne, all of them, wouldn't none of them--just made 'em give up because I stopped. And I'd tell 'em all I wouldn't let one monkey stop a show. It'll take a whole lot of monkeys to stop a show.

No, after I retired I knowed I couldn't work. I always worked for what I got. And I'd work right now. People would call me and they'd come for me to send 'em on to the hospital, and I'd do it.

No, no. I wouldn't try to deliver a baby here now. No, I wouldn't do nothing like that. But I could give them instructions to go on to the hospital. See; I'd do that, that's right. I had everything it took. You ask your mama. I had paper pads. I had my things. They a little dusty now, but I had it.

What the young people do now, see, I have never experienced. I could tell 'em what they do is wrong. See, taking this dope and drinking that whiskey and all that kind of mess. I never drank a drop of whiskey in my life. Old woman 83 years old. I never smoked a cigarette. I never drank coffee in all my life, and see I'm 83 and I can do anything I want to. Ain't got no teeth, but I bet I can eat much as you can.

See, I tell y'all 'bout the young people today. They don't even stop to think. Back in my days, the only thing you got, you had to work for it. See, my kids didn't suffer too much through [the] depression. We had plenty to give them. People want to go to the store and get everything today. We growed everything we had.

Willie Alfred Wilson

Interview by Charles Ham
Transcribed/edited by Stacy Brooks

There are not many times in a person's life that he will meet a man as fine as this one.

I'm speaking of Willie Alfred Wilson. He's a man with a lot of experience. He's willing to share his experience, if only young people would stop to listen.

This man, sometimes called "Waff" or "Cousin" Willie Alfred by many people in Claiborne County, was one of the first town barbers. He started barbering by making a pair of clippers and watching his father barber. While at play Cousin Willie Alfred would sneak around and practice clipping on the little boys' hair in the neighborhood.

Mr. Wilson is an all around nice person. He received his license to barber in 1942. Cousin Willie Alfred is 71 years of age, and has clipped a many head of hair over the years.

Cousin Willie Alfred feels that with the experience and advice he could give a young person today, a young person could succeed in becoming a great barber and clip a many more head of hair.

--Octavis Davis

I finished school out here at Romola. It was consolidated in with the Port Gibson, Claiborne County Training School. I went on out the tenth grade there. It was as high as they went then.

We had books in Training when we was out here to Romola, too, and had books when we went over to town. We studied some books in the 10th grade that I don't reckon the 12th graders study now. That was Latin. Did y'all study any Latin when you got in the 12th grade?

[Do you have any of those books around here?]

No, they got burned up. My home got burned. I got one book supposed to be over to Mama's, and I don't know whether it's over there or not. American History.

See, I went over there to Port Gibson Training School, and Addison was the principal then, and Thomas Johnson was the principal when I finished over there. And Mrs. Watson [A. W. Watson's mother] was my teacher. I finished school in 1928.

[Were the classrooms crowded at that time ?]

No, because when we finished 10th

grade, it was 10 of us graduated. The whole 10th grade class. Six of them was boys and four girls.

[Romola was] near Welcome Baptist. [Claiborne Training School was] where Richardson is now. When school was burned down, we had to have school in different churches: First Baptist, Methodist, Christian. I graduated from First Baptist.

[Do you remember anything about your parents?]

Yeah, my great grandmother was sold as a slave, and she was about so small. She was washing for the Disharoons. She was so small she had to get up on a box to wash. Her name was Lillie Jennings. She used to tell us all about this old slavery--that she was sold, and she was small, and the man she married. People owned him was joining them together, and they started going on a Sunday to see one another, and she married him.

She said, way back there in the Civil War, was that the people would hide their gold and stuff, and the Gradicks [her husband's owners] put theirs in a cistern. And they had to get all that water out of that cistern and get that gold out and bury it in a stable. I don't know where the stable was.

Mama them used to tell him why didn't he go back and get that money? And he told [them] he didn't need it because he had enough of his own. And didn't nobody find that because he taken down sick. He used to get up every morning, leave out and go down in the bottom by himself, riding that horse. Couldn't say that's where he had that money buried, cause ain't none of us ever found it.

[When did you start barbering?]

I've been a licensed barber ever sence 1942. I taken it upon myself. My daddy used to cut hair, and little boys would come in and I would take the clippers and start to cutting hair, and that's how I started.

I had one man to go to town and get his hair cut, and the next weekend he'll come to me, and the places that wouldn't be cut, I would trace along there. I started with hand clippers. They had side springs in them, [and] the side springs was broken. Now you don't know anything about this, but ladies used to wear corsets. They would be 'bout that long [six inches]. I put it in between [the] handles of [the] clippers, and tied it so it sprang back. That's how I first started to use my clippers. I always took time. I would always take my time. I don't care how fast all of them cut hair, I took my time and cut a person's hair right.

[How did you get your license to become a barber?]

I went to Natchez and took an examination. How you supposed to use and how to sterilize your tools and things.

[Did you ever have anybody else working along with you?]

No, not since I've been down here. See, I used to work over there [in town], and it was five of us. I was over town, and Mr. T. J. said that he would build a barbershop out here, and so I left town and come on out here and started to cutting hair, and I done forgot what year that was.

[Did you enjoy barbering?]

Yeah, yeah, I liked it, but I'm tired of it now.

[When you were running that barbershop down there, did you hear tell of any jokes, tales, and ghost stories or anything?]

I heard a lot of them. Me and Smith used to tell some so bad until I can't tell none of them.

[You don't know one that you probably can tell us?]

Yeah, I know one. They say this one is true. This fellow named Scott Carpenter had two dogs named Old Salem and Old Drummer. They went out to Pine Grove to hunting one morning. They went for hunting.

No, they went one night, and Old Drummer seen a cat and he couldn't get him away. [Then he] got him away from there, and he called, and he broke and run. He shot him and thought he had killed him. He went back home.

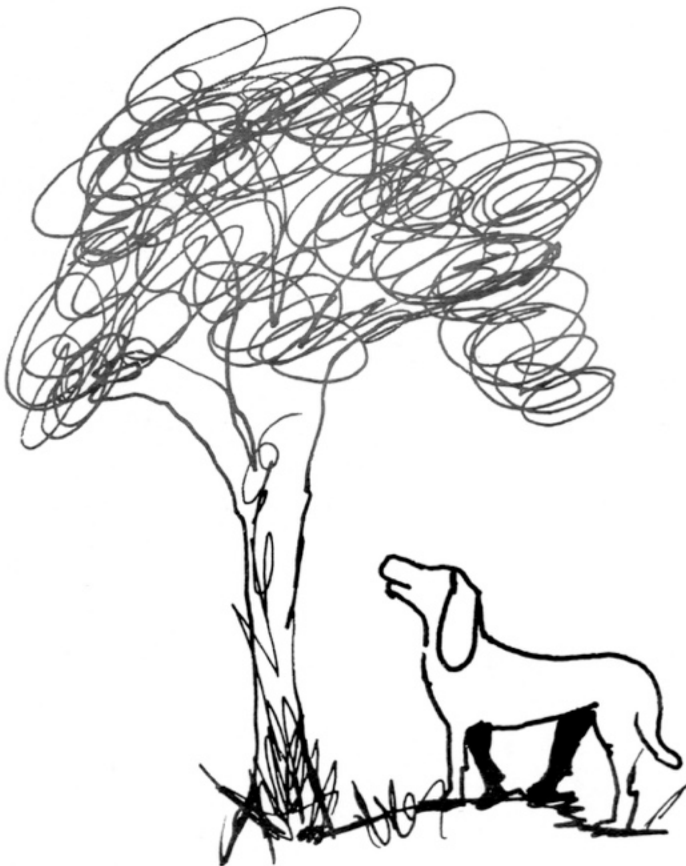
The next night his wife asked the other man, "Why y'all ain't going hunting tonight?" He said, "That fool ain't got nothing to hunt with. He done killed Old Drummer." So they went on out with Old Salem, a gooder

The entrance to Cousin Willie Alfred's barbershop.

tree dog than Old Drummer. They went on out to hunting, right up from Tillman Fork.

They went in down there on the creek on Magruder's side and they heard Old Drummer tree. Then he said, "I hear Old Drummer." And he said, "How in the world do you hear Old Drummer and you done killed him?"

Now that's the tale Scott told. He said Old Drummer said, "One coon two, two coons three," and he hit the creek. He got on 'cross to the tree, and he picked Old Drummer up and he kissed him, and counted the coons in the tree. [Cousin Willey laughs.]



[In what way are people different from what they used to be?]

People used to visit one another and now they don't do it. On Sundays and Saturday and at night too. People would walk miles and miles if we hear somebody being sick, just to do for them. When we were farming and you got behind on your crop and I got through with mine, we all come in and help you get through with yours.

When my children got up in age we plant about 17 or 18 acres of cotton and about that much corn. I had boys big enough, and four mules. After they left, I got a gang plow, and, see, that carry a row everytime you go down and come back. I had a riding disc and three mules, and I would ride my riding planter when I got ready to plant.

[Were the mules easy or hard to work?]

I used to break them all, horses and mules too. I don't care how wild he was, if I got him the first day, I would work him the next. The wilder he is, the easier he is to break. The one you think is more gather [tame], he's the one will give you more trouble.

[Was farming an easy job?]

No, it weren't easy--weren't nothing back in those days easy. We had it all to do by foot, by hand, and by steel. That's all we had to do it by.

[Do you think it's an advantage to have tractors today rather than horses and mules?]

Yes. It helps that man that's making it. But it cut a lot of people out of work.

Malissa Banks

Interview by Patricia Morris
Transcribed/edited by Darryl Warner

There is a little house that sits off of the main highway outside a little town in Claiborne County, Missisippi, called Hermanville. In that two-room, dimly-lit home lives an elderly woman named Mrs. Malissa Banks, who is perhaps one of the world's greatest artists. No, she's not another Picasso, but she really knows how to make a quilt!

A quiltmaker for most of her seventy-six years, Mrs. Banks learned the art of quiltmaking from her mother. One of three girls, she, as many girls of her day, learned to sew and quilt and did so in her spare time when she couldn't go to school due to crop season. At any given time, Mrs. Banks is swamped with orders for her beautiful, decorative quilts.

All of her skill and efforts have won Mrs. Banks statewide recognition. One of her many quilts was chosen as part of an exhibit, "Made by Hand: Mississippi Folk Art," displayed at the Old Capitol Museum in Jackson, Mississippi. The exhibit was a tribute to Mississippi's great craftsmen and women.

--Patricia Morris

[Did your mother or your grandmother ever quilt?]

Yes'm, they sure used to quilt, sure did.

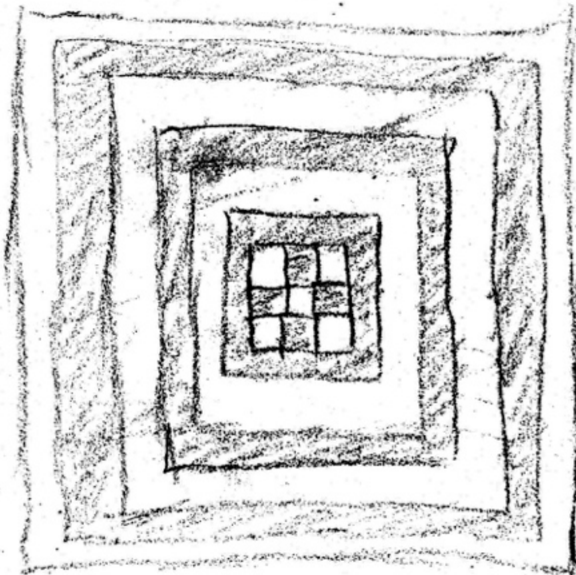
[Did they have any of the same designs or did you create some of your own?]

I created them on my own. Course I took them out--we was getting a catalogue from Sears Roebuck and different things, and I seen some patterns in there like them, and I drawed from that, from my catalogue.

Just looked at the pictures and if I see one out there and I want to piece, I take and look and sight over it right smart, and then, and I ask the Lord to visit it into me to do that, and so I drawed it from that and pieced that. That's the way I done that.

[Well, about how many different designs of quilts do you make?]

I have a star, and a cow catcher, and a pig pen, and then one what you turn all the way, you know, piece it up all the way round the bed till it get large enough. I pieced some strings all the way around, and a railroad pieces, four corner pieces, and a cup and saucer, and like that.



An example of the pig pen pattern.

[I know when you are making a quilt you have a top and a bottom part. What do you use for the lining (bottom)?]

I buy some cloth for the lining. I sew when I got strings like them, and if I want to piece up a quilt without strings, I buy the material to make quilts out of.

[Do you sew anything else besides quilts?]

No, ma'am. I ain't no seamstress on nothing but quilts.

[Can one person really do a quilt?]

One person can do pretty well, but when they want to help, I just let them help me, and they fix it just like I would do it.

[Do the young people around here seem to be interested in quilting?]

No, ma'am.

[Do you have any particular colors that you like better than you like others?]

Yes, ma'am. I like bright colors some and dark colors in some of them, and I likes different color so you can--so when you put them together they can show up.

[Is there any particular way you put the color? I mean, do you put two reds or ...?]

No, ma'am.

[I see you have a red and a green here.]

Yes! That's the way we do to make them show up. Get different colors and put them together to make them show up.

[Do you get scraps from any of your neighbors?]

No, ma'am. And when I used to get scraps, I used to go where they cuts up things and make things and they throw lots of pieces away. And we'd go to that dump and get them.

[Which do you like better, when you quilt them or when you tack them?]

When I tack them, I like that best. I can get through with them quicker.

[Do they last as well when you tack them?]

Yes, ma'am. And see, if you want wash them, you can clip all of these a-loose, and then wash the materials and then tack them back.

[Are you telling me when you wash them you take all the inside material out?]

Yes'm. And see it be too heavy to go in a machine. You go to the wash house and wash them and then dry them and come back and spread it on the bed and put that back on there and get to tacking.

[What would you call this pattern?]

I call this--just, you know, just scraps of old clothes. I've got old clothes, and you don't want to burn them up or get rid of them, you wash them and piece them, put them together and fit them like that.

[How long does it take to do one quilt?]

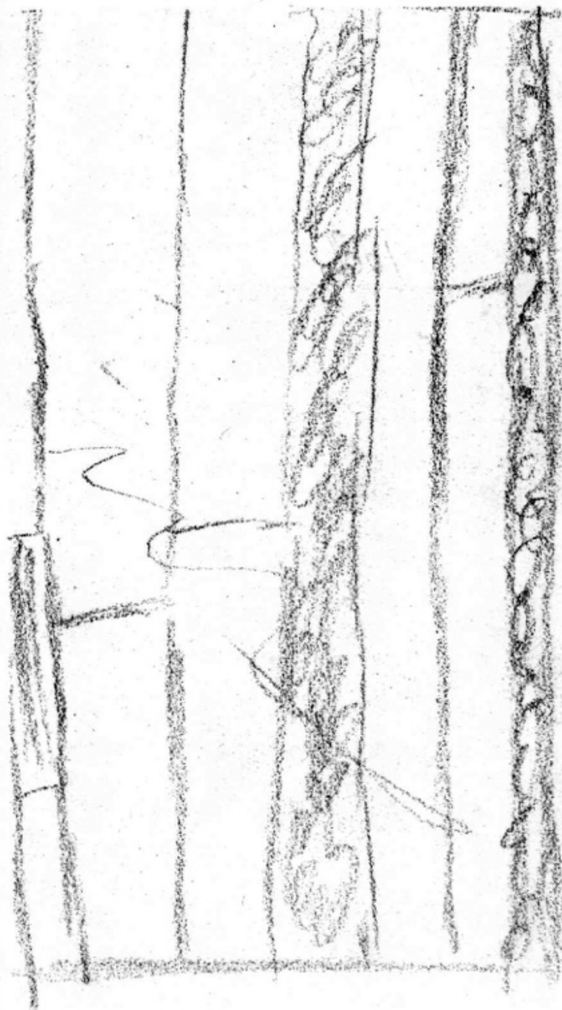
If I just get at it, it's a-take me a day and a half. A day and a half. Just spread it on the bed, and just go to tacking that.

[Do you sell many of the quilts that you make?]

Sure do. I sold all down to what I was going to use, down to about ten. What I was going to use, but the others I piece them up and sell them.

[How much do you charge for the quilts?]

Twelve dollars. Piece them up and then fix them like this, and sell them for twelve dollars.



An example of the railroad pattern.

[How old are you, Mrs. Banks?]

I am 76 if I live to see this September coming. I'll be 77. I was born 1904, the 24th of September.

[Did you all go to town, like most people do today?]

We never did go to town. Never did go to town till after I was grown and married. Then I took it up, going to town. Never did pick up going to church till after I was grown.

[Why did you start going to church when you were grown?]

Just to quit from being at home, being at home.

[I see you have a car outside. When did you learn to drive?]

I learned to drive in '60, the second day of January. I never did know how to drive a car then till I got one. I used to ride on trucks with people and it be cold, and I decided to stop riding in the cold on the back. And I said, after I went to drawing for my son [receiving survivor's benefits after my son's death], I said, "I ain't gonna ride on the back of nobody else's pickup." And I was talking about a week before I got one, I said, "I'm gonna get me a car." And they say, "Malissa, if I were you, I wouldn't get nar'." I say, "Why?" They say, "You ain't gonna learn how to drive no car." Say, "You can pay your way along."

I say, "Yes, that's true, too, but when I get ready, when you all get ready to come back, you all ain't gonna give me a chance to do what I want to do." And I say, "I'm gonna get me a car."

And here that Saturday come, they say, "If I were you, I wouldn't get nar'." And I just say, "Well, you all don't want me to get nar', I ain't gonna get nar'." And I say to myself, "Just soon as I get where to finance at, I'm gonna get one."

See, that morning when I got up, I asked Mr. Lucas, I said, "Buddy, is you going to town?" He said, "What town?" I say, "Port Gibson." He say, "No, I ain't going no farther than Hermanville. Why, what you want to go over there?" I say, "Well, I go that far with you, and I'll catch me a way over to town."

And I went in the post office, and sent off a money order. And a man stay up here, Eddie Burrell, him and his wife came along, and I say, "Buddy, is you going to town?" He say yes. "Let me go with you." He say all right. So when they got over there, I say, "Stay here till I go to the bank and come back."

So I went up there and I come back. I say, "Come go over to the Ford place with me." And I went over there, and I got one.

He say, "How you gonna carry it back?" I say, "You can get your wife to drive your car back, and you can carry mine back." And that's what he done.

And so that morning I say, "Buddy, learn me how to drive a car." And I never did get under nobody's steering wheel. Never. So he got in there and he showed me to the road and back. He told me how to do. He say, "When I go in the house, eat my breakfast, I'll come back, and catch up again." And I say all right.

I act like I was coming on in the house. And I say, "Shoo, I know how to do it now." So I got in there, and here where to crank it, and here where to back it up. I got there, I got in there, and I backed out yonder to the road, but it was slow. But I got in there and I went to the road, going there slow. And I went to the highway, and I turned around and I came back.

I told him, I said, "I got it now." And she say, "My baby's sick, and I want some lemons." And I say, "Well, I'll go to the store." Store was up the road yonder. She say, "I'm scared the highway man gonna get you." I say, "The highway man better not fool with me. I'll tell him I am

"[Quilts are] something to keep the cold back. See, when you get cold and you want to get warm, just go get another quilt and put it up on there, and that's keeping the cold back."

trying to learn how."

And I went on up there, and I got them lemons and I come on back, and the highway man never bothered me from that day until this day.

And so I drove it that week. I say, "Saturday I am going to get my driving license." So I went on down there and the man asked me what I wanted and I told him. He call himself giving me a book to learn. I say, "Shucks, ain't studying 'bout this book," and I walk in and throws that book down.

And I read in that week and I went back and he said, "Can I help you?" "Yes sir." He say, "What you want?" I say, "I want my driving license." I say, "You don't give it to me, I'm gonna drive it." So he give them to me and I been driving ever since. And I had no accidents since.

[You are very lucky. Didn't he take you in the car and let you drive?]

No'm. No, he didn't take me out. Some of them said, "He gonna take you out," and I say, "Well, if he do, I'm going." "Ain't you gonna be scared?" "What I'm gonna be scared for?" "You gonna wreck." I say, "I ain't got but one time to die. When I kill myself, I'll just be gone." And he ain't no more take me out than this bed did. And I been going ever since '60 up to now.

Patricia Morris interviewing Mrs. Malissa Banks

Frances Pearl Lucas

Interview by Elvin Jenkins
Transcribed/edited by Octavis Davis

Very few people have the ability to survive alone. Ms. Frances Pearl Lucas is a very strong lady who learned the meaning of survival at a very young age.

Her struggles began at the age of four when her father was killed during the winter. Without an adequate amount of food, her mother was not able to take care of her six head of kids alone. After her father's death, Mrs. Lucas was given away to an aunt, in Vicksburg, where she began to learn the meaning of survival.

Mrs. Lucas ran away from her aunt at the age of twelve. From there she went to the Delta and began picking cotton and corn. While in the field or in someone's kitchen, Mrs. Lucas learned how to sew, make quilts, preserve fruits and vegetables, plant a garden, and raise various kinds of animals. She married at 18. Because of her strong character and determination, Mrs. Lucas was able to raise nine healthy head of kids.

Mrs. Lucas, in her 60's, is a very strong lady who stands alone. When there is work around her house such as gardening, cropping, slaughtering hogs, and even house work, she does it all.

--Octavis Davis

I know we had a hard time working in the fields. Working in the fields in the winter time. We didn't have what we needed. The man would take all the crop from us, and Mama had six children. Had six children there to feed and take care of. Didn't have nothing, didn't have no hogs or nothing to kill. And they'd take all we'd make.

That was back there in 1925. I was the child at the house. And that part of winter my Daddy got killed. Then my mother gave us away to anybody. She couldn't take care of us. She give us away. At Little Romola, that's where they was living at back then. And my Mama give me to my auntie in Vicksburg. I lived with her till I got about twelve, and I been down here every since.

When I got grown, I went to the Delta and picked cotton and corn. Out

there was never nobody to hand us nothing. And we was, I may just say, throwed away. I had a hard time coming up and it was eight of us. Right now I know where one of my sisters is, in Clarksdale. One brother died up there, another sister died in Cairo. They didn't know me and I didn't know them, but they say they was Mama's children.

[What was your father's name?] Paul Ruffin. [Do you remember anything about him?] No more than he worked hard.

[Do you remember anything about your mother?]

She worked. They all worked hard and that's all I remember about them. We worked hard, all us worked hard. We lived on a man's place for years. His name was Eben Johnson. Back down on that creek back in there. I been long wanting to go back down in there, since I been grown, to see can I remember where I lived, back down in there. And we lived way back yonder. We never did get out from down there till now and then; and we just stayed down there and played, nowhere to go.

We'd play like hopscotch, jump the rope, swinging, and pull out a rope and swing on the tree vines.

[Do you have any kids?]

All these eight head of girls I got! And they all grown and gone. All of 'em grown. Eight head of girls and one boy.

[Do you have any grandchildren?]

I can't name 'em. I got about six great-grandchildren, some I ain't never seen. Most of my children wasn't born by a doctor, they was born by a midwife. That's all I had. Never did go to the doctor, and like these folk go to the clinic, I never went to a clinic in my life.

But when the midwife came in, if you was in labor, that child was not there, and you tell her how long you

been in labor. She'd give you a dose of quinine and make you some ginger tea. She said that would rush the pain.

[How do you make ginger tea?]

Just pour some hot water on it. You know, that powder, that ground up ginger, just pour some hot water on it and set a saucer or something on it and let it steam.

[What home remedies did you use?]

For fever, give them an alcohol bath. And that doesn't cool it down right fast, I'd go get me some baking soda and some vaseline or some lard out the bucket, and I'd mix it up right good and I'd grease him and it soon go away.

For wasp sting, put a little 'bacco on it. Most of the gentlemen chewed tobacco, and we'd put a little of tobacco on it.

For mumps, I'd get a hog jowl and get the marrow out of it, wrap it around they neck.

I never carried none of my children to the doctor, but one.

Things is different. Children is even different now from what they used to be when I was coming up. When I was coming up, I never was told to do nothing but work. But you have to tell these children something three or four times what to do and then they'll stand there and look. See, we didn't do that and Mama never did have to whip us much about nothing. Now if you don't keep you a switch, you ain't get nowhere. We never did do nothing like that. We never did.

I never did do no public work. I never did no nothing but housework. Cook for different people. They'd pay you. Things was cheap then--they thought when they pay you from five to six dollars for cooking, they done give you big money.

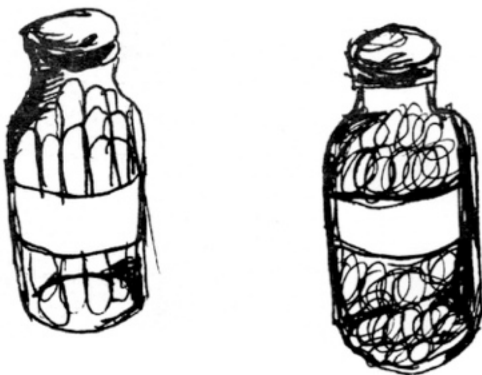
[I used to preserve] peaches, pears, apples, blackberries, meats, sweet potatoes, beans, peas, all that. Make tomato ketchup when I feel like it, and hot sauce. You know, you take it and boil it [tomatoes] all to pieces, and get you a strainer and you

strain all them seeds out. Then you put your spices and a little vinegar in it, and cook it down low, chip you some onion up in it. If you want it spicy hot, put you some ground pepper in it, and you cook it down low. You eats that over meat and it's good, but it's hot. I ain't got none here cause I ain't make none in two years now. But it make it mighty nice to eat over meat now.

And I made green tomato pickles. I'd soak 'em over night in salt and water, and before I get ready to put them in the jar, I'd sprinkle 'em in alum. That's to make 'em kind of tough where they wont cook to pieces. And then I'd take 'em and boil my vinegar real good with sugar. Then I'd put 'em in there and I'd let 'em cook about 30 minutes. They real good.

I used to can a jar of fruit for every day of the year. Nobody but me now--I don't have to do that. Nobody learned me how to do this. I'd go to your house, help you out, and I'd go back home and do it too.

Now here is something else. You



know what this is? That lye soap. I made it myself. I get me four pounds of grease and a quart of water. You adds a quart to each four pounds of grease. You got eight pounds of grease and that'll give you eight jars of water. Then you put your lye in.

You pour that lye in that cold water, it'll get so hot it'll burn you up. You can't stand over it to stir it and put your grease in. Add your grease to it and slowly stir it till it start to getting thick like molasses. Then you leave it alone and it makes it be like this [hard].

The whiter the grease is, the prettier the soap is. You make it out of, well, old fish grease and stuff--you know, where you cook and have old stale grease--you make it out of that. It's hard as any soap you buy.

I would come in your house and see you do something, and come back home and do just what you did. I seen other people. I used to sew long time ago, make overhauls, t-shirts, pants, and all of that. I done got old now. I can't see too good, but I piece quilts. Piece 'em at home, and we'd go round and have quiltings. I'd come and help you today, maybe we'd quilt out seven or eight, a bunch of us get there and quilt out seven or eight, where you go to my house or the other girl's house and do the same thing. That's the way we used to give quiltings. We'd get a bunch of us and quilt 'em out in the yard. But folk don't do that now. They won't help each other.

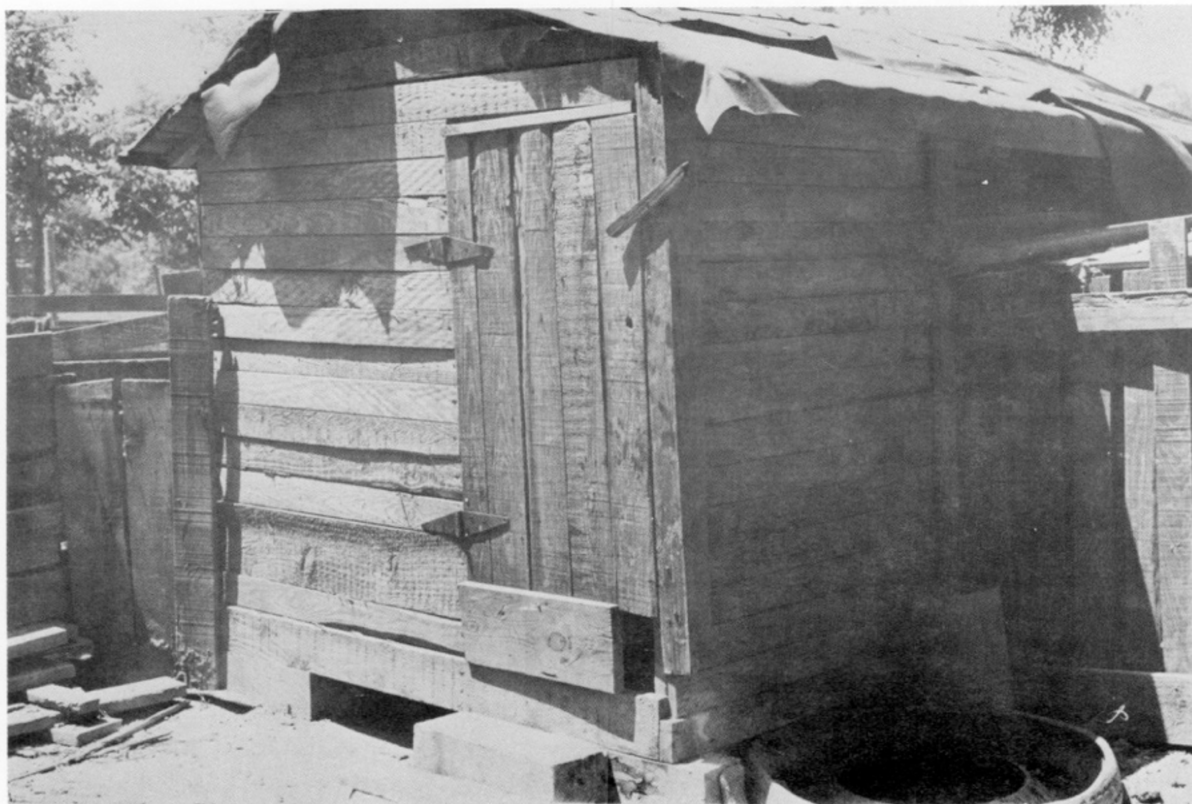
My Mama pieced quilts--she loved to piece quilts. That's how I learned how to do that. I used to sit up and thread the needle and she pieced quilts, so I loved it and I'd do it myself.

Yeah, I pieced quilts! I got one in there I been had it 24 years. My baby's 24 years old now, and I haven't never finished it. Now, I can't see how to put them little pieces together. But I'm gone quilt if I ever get the thread. I tack some of 'em, but I got 'bout eight I want quilted. I got a trunk full of 'em. I wants 'em quilted, but I'm gonna quilt 'em.

I quilt on my hand. I quilted when I could see good. I loved to quilt 'em. I [measure] on my hand and draws a shell. You quilt it square like a block if you want to, just quilt it round and then you join them all together and they'll be very pretty.

I got some pillow slips embroidery, bed spreads like chenille work. I loved it. Can't see it now.

I used to get those big white sheets and they would say fertilizer sacks. I used to bleach them white. I'd put a strip in between them, then scallop them all the way round and work me some kind of basket of flowers on each side of it. That would make a mighty pretty spread. But you don't find it anymore.



Mrs. Lucas builds by hand all of the chicken coops, shacks, storage buildings, feed sheds, and pens that she needs.

Remedies

Compiled by Vincent Goods

It was early Friday morning and just as I got off the bus to get a ride home, my grandmother came to me and hugged my neck. As she turned loose she heard me sneeze and she said, "You have a cold." So as soon as I got home she left out the house and got some weeds and boiled them and gave them to me. She said that they were good for a cold.

I thought she was sick, me being from the city and her giving me weeds. I was used to doctors. But it worked. I was feeling good that next day. And I had thought that weeds were to be cut and thrown away.

Until very recently people neglected doctors because they used old remedies such as the one for a cold Mrs. Buck told us about. She said, "You take tallow and put turpentine and a little coal oil, and grease that child from head to toe, and next give him some castor oil."

Mrs. Gaines told us for a cold, "You give him some peppermint and whiskey or bathe your child down with some hog hoof tea."

Mrs. Buck said for hiccups, "You take nine swallows of water and that is supposed to cure them."

In case you get stung by a bee, you take some tabacco juice and put it on along with some tallow, according to Mrs. Buck.

"You take a watermelon rind when they eat the red out of it, rub the rind all around your neck and back and stuff, when you have the rash." Mrs. Gaines also said that rabbit ear was good for diarrhea. "Rabbit ear is a little fine root that grows flat down on the ground, and when it dries up it has a flower on it."

Mrs. Gaines said the leaf of the blackberry bush is good for when you are chapped. "Take that and put it in your pocket, and you will never be chapped again," that is, as long as you keep the leaf with you.

Measles and mumps, "those troublemakers," said Mrs. Gaines, "you take warm lemon tea for measles, and for the mumps you take some sardines and rub them on your jaws and get the oil out of the sardines and then tie a rag around your face."

On the other hand, Mrs. Woodard said her parents would give her some warm lemon tea for mumps. Mrs. Breckinridge said, "Just like we had hog jowls, we'd tie a rag around they head and that'd get rid of mumps."

Mrs. Bucks told us about an incident that happened to her daughter. "I had a girl. My oldest child fell off the porch and broke her arm and wasn't no doctor around--close around. So we got some clay dirt, put some vinegar on a rag, and take some little boards and put them around the arm and pack it with clay dirt."

If you break your arm or something, you put some mud with some liniment--old fashioned white liniment--on it and pack it on your arm like a cast.

These are some of the remedies that students have grown up with. I'm sure there are more, but we have not really gotten into a deep study of remedies. As time comes and goes, people are slowly moving away from old things that worked then. But even if most people shy away from things like that, others will still be there with old remedies and will still believe in them.

I believe that more people would be feeling better than they do if they were still using old remedies.

After school one day a group of students got together under a big oak tree and started talking about cures they had heard of from parents, grandparents, and just other people.

Octavis Davis said you could boil pine straw, add a little sugar for taste, and drink it for a cold. She also said you could sniff a lemon for a cold.

Vincent Goods said all you need to do for a headache is put a hat on your head.

Charles Ham said for an earache you put urine from a baby in your ear to stop the hurt, or put three baby maggots in the ear to eat the infection. He said also you dab vanilla flavor on your tooth for a toothache.

For red bugs [chiggers] and ticks you take an alcohol bath. If you step on a nail, put a patch of salt meat on it and put coal oil on it. If you get burned, put molasses on a serious burn. It cools the burn and reduces the swelling. You could also put baking soda on a burn.

Henry Earl Jennings

Interview by Octavis Davis
Transcribed/edited by Octavis Davis

One of my favorite aunts, better known as the lady with the white hair, is Mrs. Henry Earl Jennings. For years she worked at the Addison Junior High School cafeteria and was called Aunt Earl by most of the students there.

She has been an outstanding citizen of Claiborne County for many years. Presently she is an active member of the choir and mother's board of the Christian Church.

When we were children, Aunt Earl told my brothers and sisters and me that the signal lights on automobiles were invented by her brother-in-law, my Uncle Simpson.

Aunt Earl's advice to young people today is "beware of the company you keep." She also feels that people should love one another as if we were sisters and brothers.

--Octavis Davis

I'm 71 years old, born 1909. When I was young, I lived in the country. I lived about five miles from Hermanville, and we went to school. We had to go across the pasture, and we couldn't go to Sunday school cause it was too far to walk every Sunday. And a white lady came out there in that community and she started a Sunday school in a house, an empty house. And every Sunday morning we'd go down and go to Sunday school in this house until we got quite big children. Then Papa went and got a wagon and started carrying us to Sunday school.

Lick Hill was the school where I went to school at. The Sunday school didn't have no name. But this school was Lick Hill; it hadn't started talking about integration then. It was just colored people then. Then when I left there I went to SCI in Edwards, Mississippi--Southern Christian Institute. I went there in 1925. Yes, indeed, go to school in the day time, come in the afternoon and knock stalks. That's the cotton stalks and corn stalks, and we'd have to knock 'em so we wouldn't have to stop after school.

Back there they used to comb our hair on Sunday evening and then wrap it, and then they wouldn't take the strings off it till Friday morning. Friday morning they would take it down and freshen it up. I'd be crying cause it'd be hurting, and then Mama would hit me 'side the head with the comb. Sometimes she'd break it, but, all right, we made it.

[My parents] were just nice. They didn't let me go everywhere because some of the children would want to go dancing, and they wouldn't let us go there. At commencement time they had this building that hadn't been long tore down, and people would go there and have a big dance. But they didn't let us go to special dances, cause they always had fighting.

I guess [religion played] a big role [in my life]. I met Elb [my husband] at church. I had seen him different times at church, but I think I started talking with him at First Baptist in Hermanville. And one time I talked with him on Sunday, and then the next Sunday I was walking, going up the road going home, and my mama and I looked back and saw this car coming, and Elb was coming, and he picked me up and took me home, and I didn't think a thing about it. And my mama say, "Look like we fixing to have some trouble." And I say no, he was just coming up the road. And I wasn't paying no attention to it.

And the next time it was out to Mount Vernon, and he was there, and he came where I was. I had a boy's ring on, and he came and got his ring. And Everette [Elb] said, "That's all right, let him have his ring." And

Everette pulled his ring off his finger and put on my finger. Then I come right home and I know he was liking me.

[Did your parents try to stop you from marrying?]

No, no. They say I was a baby, but I was planning on marrying him, and they was satisfied. I always tried to mind my folk, tried to respect them. My daddy always said, "Tell your close friend they know better than to put they arms around the chair around you." So if Elb heard my folk or somebody coming, he'd always put his hand down. And Elb always said that he admired that, because I respected my folks. And then he say that he felt like I would make him the right kind of wife.

There's a lot of things that they look to when you picking a girl, like how you treat your folk. How quick you get mad. And what kind of company you want to keep. And how you treat your boyfriend, whether you want to be fussing with him about somebody all the time. And all these things are to be looked at.

Elb worked with the young people all the way, and young people was crazy about Elb until the end. And the mothers always said they could trust their daughters with him. When they get ready to go to conferences and places, they would say, "We'll put 'em in Mr. Jenning's hand." Didn't worry cause he was going to see that they be taken care of. And when they got to these places, he'd give 'em a lecture when he leave 'em, and they'd better stay there where he told them.

[Could you tell us about your relatives?]

One of my grandmothers was a slave. I don't know none of her folks, but I knew her. She was a midwife, but she was at the age of slavery, and she used to tell us about what they did at the age of slavery. She told us how they'd whip 'em and how they'd make 'em do things. And that if they didn't hurry up and do it, they'd get a good whipping. But she wasn't in very much of that. And my other grandmother was on the white side, cause she was a kin to us. She had this long, long hair. My grandmother was in that Heath family.

Simpson Jennings and Samuel Jennings were my brother-in-laws. Simp and Sam were twins. You see that signal light on the car now? You see, that belongs to colored folk. But the white folk took it away from 'em. Simp did that. He was riding down in Greenville and it was raining and stuff, and he said he was going to stop that thing putting his hand out there in that rain. And he said he was going to think up something, and he was a very good thinker, and a carpenter. He thought this up, and he had some of them arrows made up.

I came down in '29, and they was making 'em then. He was having to go to Chicago, and one of the men that came to the house--you ever heard talk of lawyer Anderson in Port Gibson--Anderson was his secretary, and, see, that's how they had a chance to get it away from him. Because they always seem to have known how to do something. So they helped check this thing into the Patent Office when we had to pay so much, and so much money. You have to pay so much to keep it going. And this thing passed, then they had to be passed in Mississippi, and, in Jackson, it passed up there. And it used to was a man who accepted it to be put on all the trucks and things.

They had to find a place to make 'em. And that was the next big job: finding a company that could make these lights. If he had been able to find a company to make these lights, then we all could have been rich. He went to Jackson, then they made 'em and they put 'em on a few cars. At that time they had one left and one right, but they had them in the front, and they'd turn.

These were the shares. You were supposed to sell so many and so many shares. And those shares cost ten dollars. And they sold some shares, but he didn't sell enough shares to help put this thing on quick enough. And then all at once it kind of started to dying down, cause this happened. That's when it happened, someone started easing it away from him. Took their name and changed it to somebody else's name or something. And we don't know who. But it was Simp's. Next time you see it you'll know it.

They also had a music thing. They had a band. But this was before I got married. They'd play all night and they would play for white folks' dances, and colored folk, too, I guess. But I knew 'bout 'em then, and they was some of the first ones to

INCORPORATED UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

85

LEFT TURN SIGNAL COMPANY

PORT GIBSON, MISSISSIPPI

CAPITAL STOCK $10,000.00

THIS CERTIFIES THAT Willie Phillips is the owner of two Shares of the Capital Stock of

LEFT TURN SIGNAL CO. FULL PAID AND NON-ASSESSABLE

transferable only on the books of the Corporation by the holder hereof in person or by Attorney upon surrender of this Certificate properly endorsed.

In Witness Whereof, the duly authorized officers of this Corporation have hereunto subscribed their names and caused the corporate Seal to be hereto affixed this 15 day of July

Simpson Jennings
SECRETARY

PRESIDENT

SHARES

$10

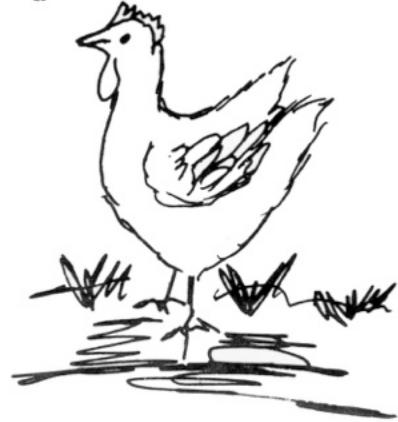
have a car 'round here. They 'bout bought [their instruments], cause they had big old drums and things. And somebody had to play the base violin. But I didn't never go, but I heard 'em talking about it.

They used to play all night for dances, mostly for white folk, cause they was able to pay for 'em. And they went around in the buggy, horse and buggy, and they had to take the girlfriends in the buggy.

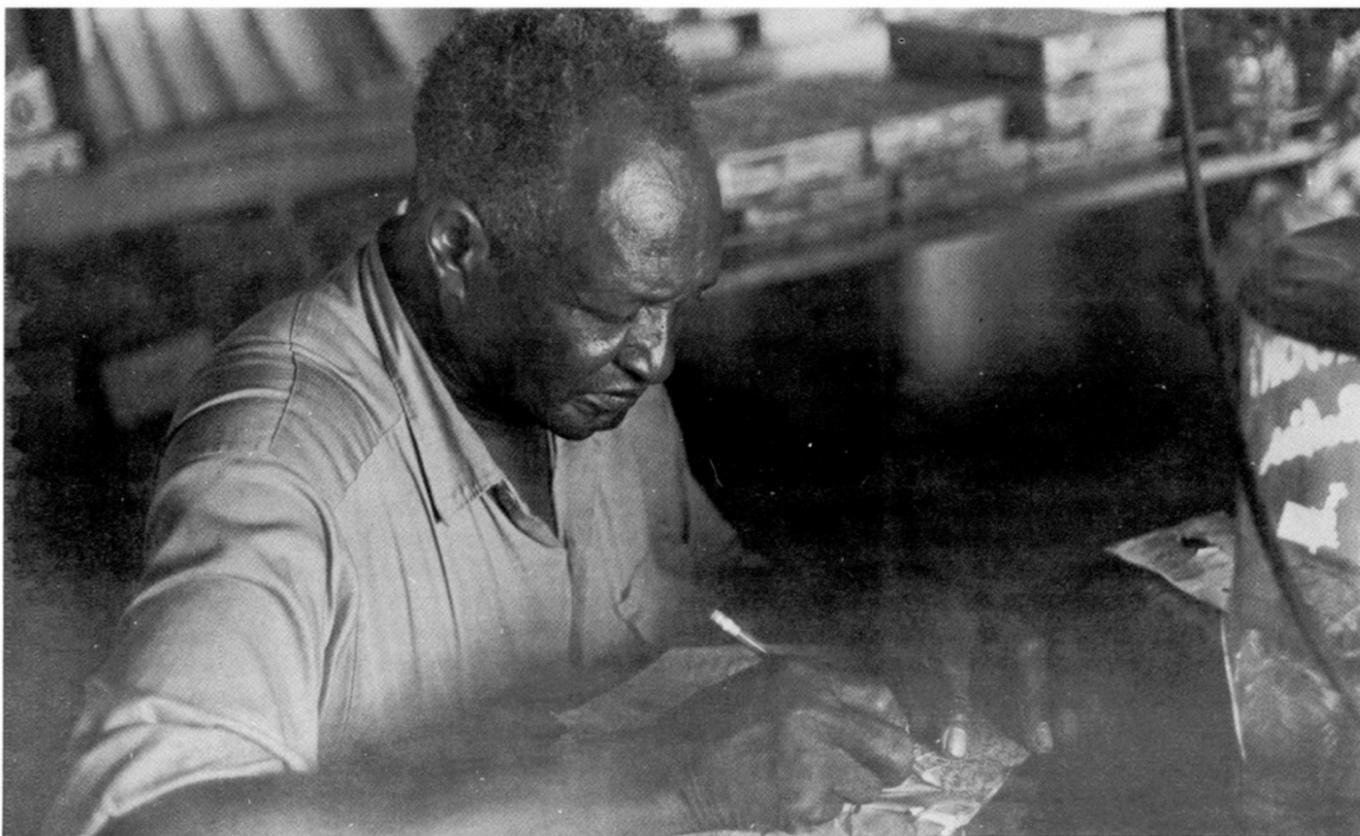
One night they went to concert somewhere and then this one decided that he'd walk home with his girlfriend. And this one decided to walk, too. And when they all got home, they asked where was the buggy. They just left the buggy where it was and every[one] had walked. They daddy made 'em go back and get the buggy. Nobody brought the buggy home. Everybody walked home with their girlfriend.

[Do you know any old tales?]

Yeah, one day me and my mama was going up the road to my auntie's house, and when we got up the road by this big tree where this man had been hung, I saw something look like a chicken run across the road. And he ran in a hole, and I stopped and bent over and looked at it. And when I looked at it in the hole, it had done turn into a possum. And I called my mama. I said, "Mama, this chicken done turn into a possum." So my mama just told me to come on, and when we got to the lady's house where we was going, I say, "Your chicken back down the road there." And that woman said, "I ain't got no chicken."



I heard one where this woman owned a talking parrot and a cat. And one day the lumber man came next door and started throwing off a load of lumber in the other lady's yard. So the parrot said, "When you get through, throw me a load in my yard." So the lumber man put a load of lumber in the yard and when the lumber man came to the door for his money, the lady told him that she hadn't ordered no lumber, and she gave the parrot a good whipping. And the woman went back in the house, and then she ran the cat out the house. And the cat ran pass the parrot, and the parrot said to the cat, "You must've ordered a load of wood, too."



John Dunigan's Store

Interview by Layefette Thomas
Transcribed/edited by Octavis Davis
and Stacy Brooks

On a very hot summer day, while interviewing, we stopped in this little convenience store to buy cold pops. I remembered going to this store often when I was young. As we entered the store I began to talk to the owner, Mr. Dunigan.

Mr. Dunigan is a man who spent most of his boyhood working in the fields and working various other jobs, such as logging and cropping. Mr. Dunigan struggled all his life working for other people until 1953, the 27th of July, when he opened a little convenience store.

When I was young, there weren't too many grocery stores to provide for the community. But right up the road from me there was a little store called Dunigan's Groceries.

Mr. Dunigan would open the store every day to provide the little kids with plenty cookies and candies. He would also provide the mommies and daddies with enough supplies, especially cold cuts, bread and pops, to tide them over until they could get to one of the larger stores.

Mr. Dunigan has been running the store 27 years. He not only runs the store to provide for his family, but also to provide for the community. Though he was his own boss the majority of his life, nothing comes easy.

--Octavis Davis

All I ever got, I got the hard way. I can tell you that I come the hard way. In the frost. In the ice. Part of the time the saw mill in the rain. All I ever got was hard work. I never got nothing easy.

[The first job I had was] in the field. It was the first work I done, was in the field, milking cows, running dairy, and all like that. That's right, building roads with mule slip, loading gravel with a spade shovel, and all that kind of work. I ain't never had no easy work. All the work I had was hard.

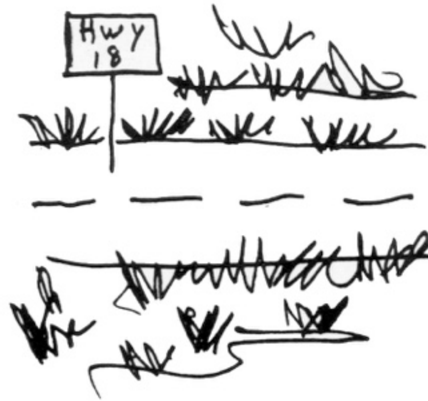
[I've been running this store] soon to be 27 years. Since '53 and this is '80, and it be 27 years about the 27th of July. That's when I opened this place up and started selling this stuff.

That old [gas] pump there is the first one I had; that old invisible pump, that was the first one I had. We didn't have no electric pump. [You work that pump] with the handle down there, up to ten gallons. See, you can't get no half gallons. Go from one to ten. When I first opened up, I think [gas was selling for] about 30 or 31 cent. Wasn't much more than that.

[Do you have many customers now?

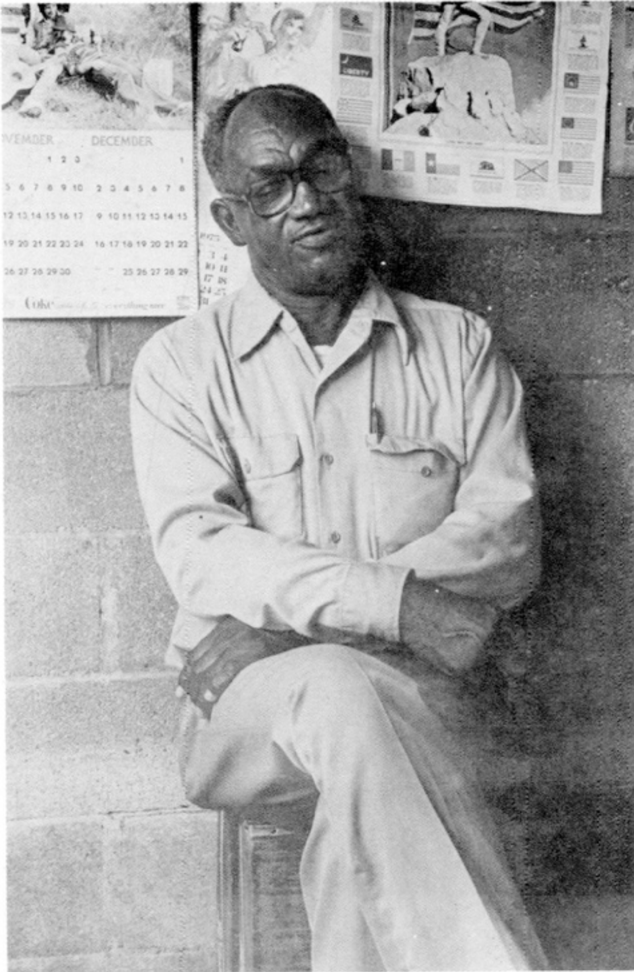
Not too many. Scarcely, scarcely. People ain't doing nothing to earn no money. People ain't got no job to make an hour.

I been practically my boss all my days. I ain't had to work for nobody after I got straightened out a little bit.



Layefette Thomas resting in the store.

Mr. Dunigan hangs advertisements and calendars against his wall.



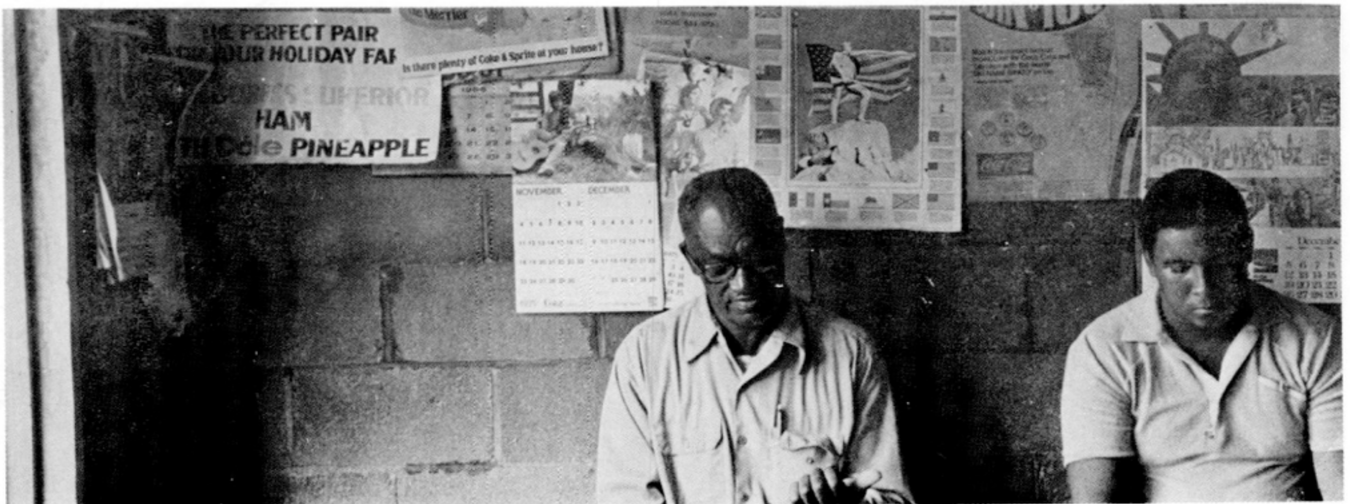
The temperature outside was 100 degrees, and Mr. Tom Curry and Charles Ham came into the store to get out of the sun and rest.

Editors' note: Mr. Tom Curry was sitting in the store with Mr. Dunigan and joined the conversation after awhile.

I learnt all of that when I was little; I didn't have much time to play, not too much. When I was eight years old, my play day had done stop. I never know nothing but work. I was in the field, working when I was eight years old.

Yeah, we had two fairs. I didn't care too much for that. I don't know why. I just didn't care nothing for it. Didn't make myself like it. Card games, none of that. When I was little, I didn't care nothing much about shooting no marbles, but I'd watch the others play. Didn't care nothing about them. Wasn't no pleasure for me, no fun.

Church was good! Some people had to walk to church, go by wagons, had to do that. Now they can drive up to the doorway and go in.



Minnie Lou Buck

Interview by Tarassa Clark
Transcribed by Tarassa Clark
Edited by Sarah Crosby

One day while we were trying to think of somebody that quilts, Octavis thought of a woman named Minnielou Buck in Hermanville, Mississippi. We got in touch with Mrs. Buck, and on June 18, 1980, went to interview her.

While there we learned from Mrs. Buck things from the past we had never heard of before. She also told us about different quilts she had made, like one called the fence row. There were others, too, like the pig pen, the bare foot, and the flower basket.

Mrs. Buck is 66 years old, and her husband is 72. She said that she and her husband met at church when she was sixteen, and they got married when she was 19. She is a member of the Welcome Baptist Church. She is also secretary, deacon's wife, and mother of the church. She works with the Claiborne County Women's Association.

Mrs. Buck is the mother of ten children, five girls and five boys. Mrs. Buck said back in that time they didn't go to hospitals to have babies; they had midwives who delivered the babies. Mrs. Buck says that her grandmother on her father's side delivered four of her children, and Mrs. Janie Breckinridge delivered the other six. Mrs. Buck spoke highly of Mrs. Breckinridge, and this is what she said, "She was the best in the state."

Mrs. Buck also sewed clothes for people, and she did this on her hand. She said she didn't get a machine till she was a grown woman. She mentioned the clothing that was worn by the children and some ladies in that time. They wore long dresses with long sleeves. She said it would take five yards at that time to make a dress. Material was a nickel and a dime a yard.

Mrs. Buck also told us about how they combed hair back then. They would wrap hair on Sunday evening after coming from church. When the next Friday came, they would take it down and make two plaits. Then when Sunday evening came they'd wrap it back up for school the next week.

We enjoyed talking with Mrs. Buck, because she told us many interesting things. We hope you enjoy reading this article.

--Tarassa Clark

[Did you go to school when you were a child?]

Oh, yeah, had to. And had no way to go but walk, and walked a long ways. I was a little bitty girl, and my brother would catch me by the hand. Mornings when it was raining I'd get wet and go on to school. My mama couldn't read, and my daddy couldn't read. My daddy could read just a little. All they learned they learned themselves.

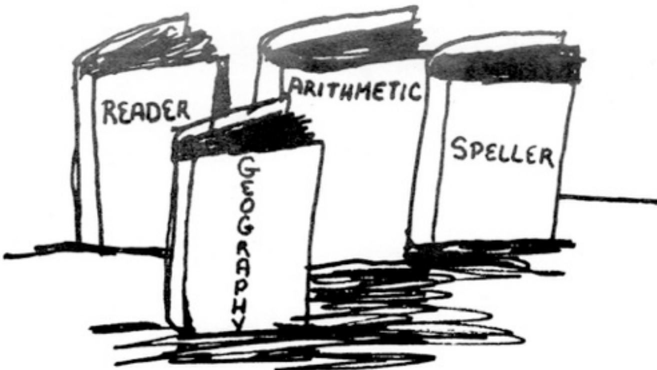
When I started going to school I was six years old, and at that time you could finish school when you get in sixth grade. And when you got in eighth grade you was a down right good teacher. Wasn't no college at that time. You go on teach school next year. A lady did me like that. She finished school then, sixth grade; and I just starting in, six years old, and she taught me. When they finished, they knowed something.

Philadelphia was the first school I ever went to in my life, back down in Jefferson County. I finished school going toward Grand Gulf, Spring Hill. My teachers were Neli Gaines and Florene Bazand.

It was a large school. At that time they hadn't built nar' a one of these schools down there. It was county schools. It was three teachers at that school, and they had a little old room about the size of this room [9' x 7']. Each one had a little old room. Had about 25-30 children sitting on benches. She had a chair.

We had a wooden heater. When it look like it gonna rain--didn't care how cold it was--she'd send the boys down in the woods to get an arm of wood and bring it up. Last the next day. The boys had to go get wood.

We had primer. That's the little first grade primer. They would have just one book--that just one little reader: the primer. But second grade would have two books: a reader and arithmetic. Third grade would have three books: a reader, arithmetic, and an English. And the fourth grade would have four books: a reader, arithmetic, English, and geography. The higher the grade you would get, the higher the geography went. But you still would have your reader, arithmetic, and speller. Keep the geography, but put the others down and went to another grade. I liked the geography better than any class I was in.



Like school going on now and they have commencement and prom and things like that--there wasn't anything like that. When you finished that eighth grade, that was it. And now if you didn't go out and get you a job, or try to get to teaching or something like, or married or something like that, you were just at home when school turn out.

They had something like a concert. Wasn't nothing but different parents would fix a little ice cream or get some candy and sell it or have some punch. Well, it wasn't no punch. They would just get candy, apples, ice cream, and they would sell that. A big old something of ice cream--wasn't no cones--just a big old bowl of ice cream. For a nickel. Big old bowl. They used to have a band. The school would have a little band that the peoples would come over and play their guitars for the children when they finished school. Then there would be three or four or five grown people would get up and dance, dance a little for the children.

They didn't have no bought ice cream at that time. We didn't have ice cream but once a year, and once a year was 4th of July and at school closing. We had four months school. November, December, January, February. We couldn't get to go to school those four months because we picked cotton till December, and then after December, January, February, we'd go to school. But we made a grade--we made a grade.

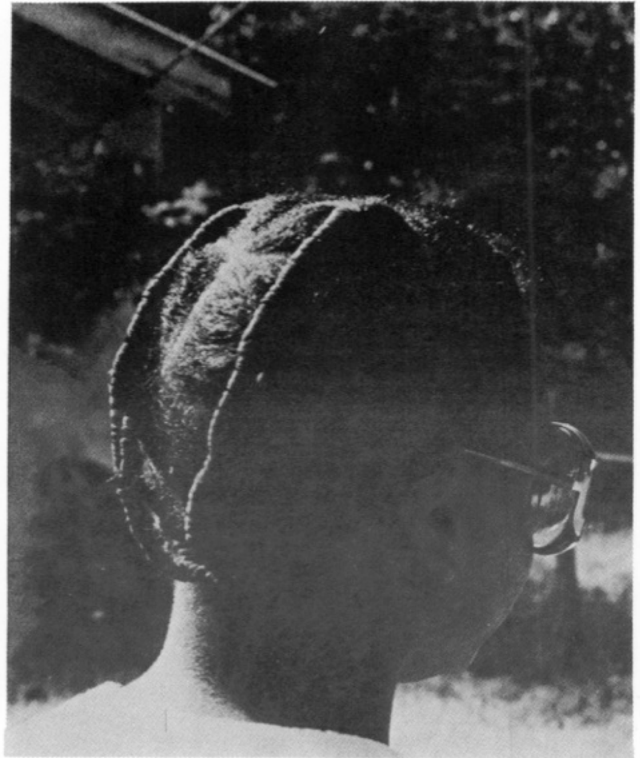
After it left four months--I remember this just as good--it went to six months. School started then in September. Then it go on to March. After that it went nine months. But, see, that's this generation now. Back in them time it was just four months school. I never did get to go to school but two months. My daddy never got a chance to buy my full set of books, cause he wasn't able to. You see, like if me and another girl and another boy, another girl, was in that same class, but they daddy wasn't able to buy they books, then, if they would get a reader, my daddy would get me a geography. Next one would get a speller, next one would get arithmetic. Like that. When we get in our class, we passed them books around. Everyone would study 'em. You see. Like it was hard, but we learned, we learned.

When I was little and going to school, my mama would wrap my hair. You have never seen wrapped hair, is you? Well, you comb your hair just like it's combed, but you'll part [it]into little plaits. And back in them times they wasn't selling nothing but black stockings and old brown stockings. Cotton black and brown

stockings. You take those stockings and tear them up in little bitty strings, little old strings. Just tear that stocking up. Catch this little ball of hair and twist it all way round. And when you through, you keep parting your hair all way round. And when you get through, just tie them strings back in.

Go to school a whole week with them strings in your head. They stay a month if you don't take 'em off. My grandmother would keep hers a whole month. Church time on a Sunday Mama would take my hair down and we would take our hair down. And she would put me a plait here and a plait here. When I'm going to church, see?

In the evening when she come back, my hair had to be combed again for to wrap my hair for to go to school. They would stay on there until Friday morning. Friday morning she take them off and put up two plaits on to go to school. That's old times. That's hair wrapping.



[What do you remember about your grandparents?]

I remember my grandmother, my mother's mother. Yeah, I remember her well. She was a little old woman about that tall, and about that big, and hair was about that long, and hair was just snow white, but it look silk. That was my mother's mother and she use to come live with us. We would call her grandmother. She couldn't talk good. We didn't hardly hear what she said, and she was black as tar. Yeah, I remember her good.

She would wear those long dresses that sweeping the floor. You know. It would take about five yards to make a skirt. And at that time, you see,

cloth was just 36 inches wide. I don't care what kind of cloth it was, you bought it. It just 36 inches wide. You could take 50 cents and just buy a whole something and she would make. They would never make dresses like we make now. They make those long dresses and put a lot of gathers in them where they just sit out, and those little long sleeves, you know, everytime you see them. Winter or summer they have those long sleeves. They never showed their arms.

Yeah, we played little games like merry-go-round. We'd be at school and catch the little children by the hand and go all around and they'll jump up and they had their little long dresses on. See, they weren't dresses like they wear now. And the little long dresses and what not on, and the boys would have their little pants on.

[These little long dresses] were made. They didn't buy. You know back in that time people coundn't buy what they wanted. You could take--see, cloth at that time was a nickel and a dime a yard, and, see, you would had to get five yards at that time to make a dress. At that time.

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

Oh, yeah. I was at home with my mother and father. They had religion back in them days. They had religion. The old people had more religion back in them days than they have now, because--just like this church right up here, up here in the fork. You could be down here and you could hear those people singing a mile. They was singing. And you go there to church and couldn't get seats. And them old people, you could hear them singing a mile. And the church then didn't have pianos and organs and what not in the churches like they have now. They didn't have anything but their own voice. They didn't have loud speakers or nothing.

And they had some church, I'm telling you. Like we pay the pastor now three to four dollars, maybe five dollars a month--they was paying 25 cents a month. Really. A head. Well, when they sumaged that up, sometimes the preacher would get sometimes six dollars or five dollars.

They didn't have no way to go to the church like we have to go to church now. They would walk. I don't care how far the church was, they would walk. And when they did have a way, they had to go on a wagon.

I remember I went to school in a buggy. My daddy had a horse and a buggy and I would stand right up behind my daddy in that buggy and go to school a many Sundays because I didn't have no other way to go. And if it rain, I would be standing back there in that buggy. And if it was snowing, I'll stand back there in that buggy. And if it be hot I would be standing back there in that buggy going to church. Wasn't yesterday.

[When did you learn how to quilt?]

I was a girl at my house. I couldn't tell you what year it was, but it was back yonder. But I was a girl at home, and my mother, she used to quilt, and I was home taught. And I learned how to quilt. It was quilting frames at that time. It was four long sticks, and you just put that quilt down and you put that stick down, and you whip that quilt in that stick, and then you stretch that quilt and put it up. Then we sit down with

Mama. I was a girl. I would stand up and I put my hand under. Helping Mama quilt.

[Have you ever used patterns in your sewing?]

Now, since I have gotten up in age. I have to use patterns for sewing. But I haven't used patterns all my life. Ever since I've been sewing, I haven't used patterns. I could just look in a book and somebody will say, "Make my dress like this," I make it like that. It wasn't no problem for me. But ever since I got old I have to sew by patterns now. I could do it now, but I don't ever risk with people now like I used to.

[Do you know any other quilters?]

No, people not big on quilting now. They are lazy. They rather buy blankets and things like that. Sometime I quilt and people see them, and they want to buy them. I have a quilt just quilted a month ago, and when everybody see it, they wants it.

[If I wanted to know how to make a quilt, how would you teach me?]

You have to come to my house and I have to cut the pieces, and I have to show you how to sew those pieces together and get those pieces sewed together. And then we gonna put those

pieces together and make that top. And when we get through making that top, then we gonna get that lining for that quilt. We gonna spread that quilt out. We gonna put that batten in that quilt. Batten, that's the filling in that quilt. Then we gonna spread that top over that lining and whip that quilt in and roll that quilt on each side. And after we whip it in, we roll on each side, then we gonna lay it on the bed. I quilt on the bed now. And then I'm gonna show you how to put your hand under there and quilt that quilt 'round.

[Do you have any particular colors that you like?]

Well, a quilt mostly have just two colors, or maybe just three colors, according to the pattern of quilt you take out. But I mostly--see I sew, and I have so many pieces--I mostly just take any kind of pieces, and when I get them put together, it really is pretty.

[Do you think it's easier to do on the bed than on a frame?]

No, no, on a frame. After peoples quit using a frame, then I didn't have a frame. I just had to do it on a bed. It better on a frame, cause you'll have a better way to stretch 'em. They have to be stretched. You have a better way to stretch them on a frame. I rather any day quilt on a frame than to quilt on the bed. It's all right to quilt on the bed, but you don't have the opportunity to stretch 'em like they should.

[You said you're 66; how old is your husband?]

Seventy-two.

[When did you meet your husband, how old were you?]

I was sixteen. [I got married when] I was nineteen.

[Where did you meet?]

I believe it was at church one Sunday.

[How many kids did you have?]

Ten. One died. Ten living: five boys, five girls.

[Were your children born at home?]

Every one of them. Haven't ever been to the hospital in my life.

[Was there a midwife there when they were born?]

Yeah. My first three was my grandmother, my daddy's mother. Really. That was 45, 46 years ago. She was a midwife. Then after her it was some more around. We didn't go to the hospital like they go now, and it was a midwife. At that time, they only charge $25 to $10, like that. But now it's up in the thousand dollars. I never had any trouble. Never had a doctor. When my first babies were born I so far could get to a doctor no way. So the midwife was just there.

[Can you remember whether Janie Breckinridge delivered any of your children?]

Sure, sure. All I had but four.

[We talked to Miss Janie a couple of days ago.]

Well, if you had mentioned a Buck to her, she could have told you every Buck she delivered, and that's practically all of them. She was the best in the state.

[What kind of remedies did you use?]

You mean in the olden times? Somebody get stung by a bee or something? Girl, they didn't do nothing but take some tobacco juice and put it on it. For a cold? Take you some tallow. I never did carry my children to a doctor for a cold. You take tallow--I'm talking about back yonder, cause I'm not talking about now, cause you get to carry 'em now--take you some tallow and put turpentine in it and a little coal oil. Mix that all up, and grease that child from here [chest] to his toes, from here to his toes, and give him a dose of castor oil.

I don't care how hot that fever is, from here to his toes. I did this now--most people did this. Till you feel that child's body begin to get cool. When that child body begin to get cool, pull that cover up on that child and go on about your business. Next morning that child be up playing. That's true.

You want to know what tallow is? Tallow is when you kill a cow, the fat in a cow. You run that fat up like, like you do when you kill hogs. You know, you kill hogs and get the lard out. Well, you do cows the same way. The cow fat is tallow; the hog fat is lard. I have cooked with tallow when I didn't have no more to cook with. Tallow would get so hard till you couldn't hardly cut it with a knife. I didn't have no other choice, so I cooked with it. Back in that time.

Hiccups? Let 'em drink nine swallows of water. Cuts? When they get a cut in the olden times, just put a little coal oil on it and tie a white rag around it.

My oldest child fell off the porch and broke her arm. Lord knows it's the truth. And wasn't a doctor close around, and we didn't have nothing to go to a doctor with no way. And they didn't carry 'em to no doctor when they got their arm or leg or anything broke. They just go and get some clay dirt, and mix some vinegar up with it, and when they mixed that vinegar up with it, put that vinegar on a rag and take some little pieces of boards--they called 'em splinters--cut 'em up some little pieces of boards and put one on this side and one on that side. One here and one here, and pack that with that vinegar and clay, and wrap that arm up. Go on about your business. That's true.

I had a girl--my oldest girl--got her arm broke. She was about two years old. Fell off the porch and broke her arm, and that child suffered. And that arm just swole up. Looked like that. I didn't carry her to no doctor. Didn't have nar' to carry her to. I just got some clay dirt and mixed it up with vinegar--that vinegar would keep that fever down--and splintered her arm up with four splinters, and wrapped [it].

That night that child had pain. I just kept getting up that night and

pouring that white vinegar on that arm. Cooling it down. And the next morning she got up. She was feeling a little better, but not too much. And on up in that day she began to feel better.

About three nights after that, I said, "How's your arm?" She said, "Mama, it's hurting." I said, "Wait. I'm gonna take that thing off." I just greased it real good and I took that thing off, and her arm got all right. And I tied me a little white flour sack around her little neck. Greased it with vaseline. Honey, I'm telling you the truth.

[What other things did you use to bring a fever down besides vinegar?]

It some weed call bitter weed. I don't know whether you know it or not, but they grow about this tall [three feet], and they got little yellow balls, little yellow flowers on it. I would go out in the--Mama and them did, too--go out in the pasture and find these weeds and boil 'em, and, ooh, you talk about bitter, oooh. They were bitter. I boiled these weeds, I'd take that water and put it in a tub, stand 'em up in that tub and bathe 'em down. Bathe 'em down.

And then I'd have about a half a tea cup of this stuff, and I'd let 'em swallow it. And you talk about bringing [down] some fever. That's right.

And then they had something they called quinine--I don't know whether you ever hear tell of it. If you couldn't get this bitter weed--it won't be none up in the winter time; it come up in the summer--go to the drug store and get you some quinine. White. In a little old bottle. I don't think they sell it now. It's been so long. Mix that with vaseline and just rub that child from here on. And the fever look like it wasn't going away, get a little piece of paper and put a little pinch of that--it would be white paper--a little taste in this paper. Ball that paper up, like this. Let that child swallow that paper: there's a capsule with some quinine in it. Really.

I had one brother that got snake bit. My brother got snake bit in some water getting fishes out. And the snake bit him in the water. And he come up to the house. Somebody was at the house and cut that open. Just took a knife and cut that and let that blood run out of there. And got some cockleburr leaves--you know, cockleburr weeds--got some cockleburr weeds and wrapped it all up to his knees. Just kept that cockleburr leaves wrapped up.

And it was some stuff you call Primal Christian. It grow tall. It had big old leaves. They get them leaves and wrap all around there to keep from getting fever. And my brother never had to go to a doctor. Keep it open where he got snake bit. Never did let it close up, and that poison run out. They always said if he had a-kilt the snake when he come out the water, it wouldn't hurt. But they let the snake get away and couldn't find the snake.

[Did you ever have to work in the fields?]

Sometimes we had to go out and cut the weeds, and take our hands, pull that grass from around that cotton. Keep the snakes and things from coiling up around there when we was out there picking that cotton. And honey, we would get out there sometime, and the cotton would be this tall, and we would go out there and take our hands and clip off the top of that cotton, keep it from growing that bush.

And we went out there when the cotton got where we could pick it. We'd go out there and pick it. We get out in the field with sacks on our backs and pick that cotton. We get out there in the morning and we'll pick cotton till night. We'll pick cotton two days time, we done pick a bale of cotton. Girl, done fell a many a time with a big sack on my back trying to pick cotton.

Told you that's the reason I'm no

count, working myself to death in the fields. We get out there in the field, pick that cotton. Pull them great big old--see, cotton sacks were as long as from me to the door there, and you would pick that sack packed full of cotton. And we'd take that sack and pull it on our shoulder, on our back, into the scales to weigh that cotton up. Weigh that cotton sometime and have 60, 65 pounds in the sack. Pick cotton till sundown.

[When you were picking cotton, was it on your own land?]

Not my own land. I didn't have no land. We growing it at somebody's place, like we were renting, you know. Renting from the white folks back then. Picking that cotton.

[When you grew corn and potatoes, was that to sell or yours to eat?]

We didn't sell it. We grew it for us to eat. We storaged it. We called it a crib--that's a little house--and we would pump our potatoes. Did you ever see a potato pump? Haul the potatoes to the house and weigh them. Put them up. We would just throw them on the ground and mound those potatoes up till they get about that tall [five feet]. Big old round something. When they get up that tall, look like a sharp shoot* or something. We would take pine straw and put that pine straw all around those potatoes. Then go out in the field and cut corn stalks, and put those corn stalks all around, all around that bed of potatoes. Corn stalks all around. Then take dirt and rake it up on the corn stalks. Sometimes we have three or four of them pumps sitting in the garden. Pump the potatoes to live, to keep. That's the way we'd have potatoes till they come again. We go in there and get the potatoes out to eat. Sweet potatoes. Never did try to save Irish potatoes.

Peas, we would pick peas, and pick sacks of peas. Just put the peas in the crib, and when we get ready for peas through the winter--that's the biggest thing we'd have to eat through the winter: peas and potatoes. Milk. That's right. Peas and potatoes. We would go out in that crib and get those peas and shell them.

[Do you think life is easier now or harder?]

Easier. And then, in a way, harder. The reason I say it's easier now, you can get what you want. You can buy what you want, regardless of what it costs, if you want to. But back in that time, you wanted it and didn't have nothing to get it with. And if you had something to get it with, it didn't cost much, cause you could take $2.50 and go to the store and then you had to get someone to bring it home for you. But now you can take $2.50 and go to town and you can't get nothing. You can just take it. You can eat it right in the store if you wanted to. See, it's better now.

Sometimes people be saying, "Look like the time be going back." I say, "If it go back, it just gotta go back, but I don't want it to, cause I just don't really believe people would last long if time go back like it was, cause they wouldn't have sufficient food." Now I don't care what you want, you can eat it. Regardless of what it costs. You can eat anything you want.

Back there we only got cake, dressing, chicken, all like that--a decent something to eat--once, twice a year. And that's the 4th of July. Mama and them have a picnic or something like that, you know, and it wouldn't be a thing but ice cream and cake and goat or chicken or something like that. No, it wouldn't be chicken, it would be beef. A picnic dinner.

*sharp shoot--pointed at the top and rounded at the bottom, built up like a mound.

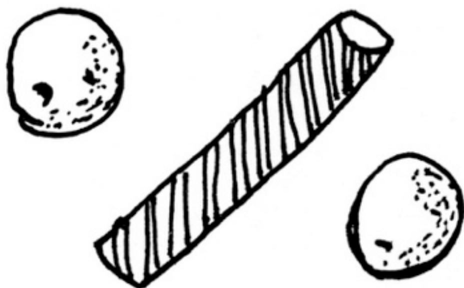
Well, now, in December--Christmas day--we'd get much cake as we wanted, much dressing as we wanted. That's all she was gonna make. Goose dressing. And after that you don't get nothing. If you got another piece of cake, it would be a half a piece once that week.

And when they kill hogs--the first day they killed the hogs--they cook up enough meat for us to eat a good stomach of meat. Well now, we weren't gonna get no more meat till Sunday, and she would fry about four slices of meat. And she cut them slices half. Every one of us would get a little half a slice of that meat. But now, a child, you give him half a slice of meat, he want three, four, or six slices of bacon now.

Now that's the way we did. We didn't have stuff like folks do now. Toys, like children got now. When Christmas come, we never knew anything about toys. I'm telling you the truth: we didn't know anything about toys. I never got my children a toy till they were grown. Wasn't no toys. If there was toys, I didn't know anything about 'em.

I never knew what a toy was till I was sixteen years old. My older brother stayed at home, he got me a doll. Paid three dollars for it. High, she was that high. We never got a Christmas card. It wasn't nothing like it is now.

Mama had eleven children; three had passed on. Papa would get six apples, six oranges, and--you all probably haven't seen it, but it was big old sticks of candy, great big old sticks, nothing but peppermint candy. Great big. Daddy get one of them and



a pound of this old cheese. They sell this old cheese now down here in Russum at that old store. It was the only kind of cheese they had at that time. Call it hoop cheese. My daddy get a pound of that.

Oohh, it be so glad when Christmas get here, for to get that little piece of cheese, and a half an apple, and a half of orange, and a piece of that old, hard peppermint candy. Now I don't like peppermint candy today. I don't like it today, no sir. I don't want nobody peppermint candy today. And every Christmas the Lord send that's what we had: a little block of cheese, a half of apple, a half a orange, and a block of cheese, and a piece of this old candy. We'd put our box out, and that's what Papa gonna put in it.

Yeah, a box. A shoe box. A big old shoe box. That's what we gonna get in it, and be so glad to get it. Be so glad. And then Papa would put that other candy up, and on and on 'cross that week Mama would give us a little piece of that candy to eat. Wouldn't get but one of the old stick, but it was so big and long. Thing didn't cost but 50 cents. But you talking about strong. Won't eat no peppermint candy now. Ate too much of that stuff.

When people go on to church [in the old days], they go on barefooted. When they get to the church house, they have a wet rag in their hand. And see, they didn't have nothing but old tennies or either some old time shoes. The heels were about that tall [2"] on the shoe, and the shoes were button up here, and cotton stockings. That's what the people would wear to church. They would have shoe buttons. Oohh, I wished I could find me a shoe button; button the shoes on the leg. Well, they wouldn't put them shoes on till they get in sight of the church and hear the people singing. And they would get down there, and take that rag and wipe they feet off and put they stockings on and put they shoes on, and they would go to church. And they come from church and get out sight of that church, they take them things off and walk.

I sit down a lot of times and tell my children about that, and they laugh. "Mama, I declare I don't see how you all did it." I say, "We here. We here." But it was something back in there. I wouldn't want to go back there for nothing in the world. I don't believe they could pay me to go back there. Go out in the field, and if we had to hoe for somebody, 50 cent a day, 40 cent a day. If [you] go out there and hoe, 50 cent. It was two and a half [a week], you had yourself some money. Some of 'em wasn't getting but 40 cent a day. Hoeing, 40 cent a day. Then when you get ready to pick cotton, 40 cent a hundred for picking cotton, 50 cent a hundred. All day long from sun to sundown. That's the reason I ain't no count today.

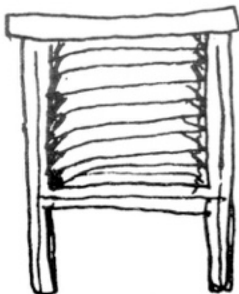
Look like in them times, back in them times, it was hard back in them times. But look like people was better than they is now. But when they sick, they couldn't go to no doctor then, because if you was sick, usually wasn't no doctor to go to. And what you eat didn't make you sick. If you sick, didn't nobody notice it. But now, you see, you can't eat nothing. Eat anything, it make you sick. And people back in them days were more healthy than they is now.

I got an auntie, 106 years old. And she can get about almost, I say, good as I can. Because I have rheumatism, but I gets about. And when I go to see her I say, "Auntie, you know, my leg been hurting me so bad." And she'll laugh till she cried. She say, "You ain't nothing but a baby, talking about your leg hurting." And she live in the house with her daughter, and she the one do all the work and everything, cause her daughter ain't able to do it. And she take her hoe--her grandchildren had gotten out there and wouldn't plow no garden, cause they didn't want to be out in the sun, working on the garden--and she took her hoe--she got a fig tree planted in her yard--she took her hoe and got all around that fig tree, and she planted butterbeans all around. And on down side of her yard fence, she dug up and put collards, cabbage, onions, okra, round her fence. They didn't give her no garden. And when those beans got up to stick, she went out herself and got some sticks. Got those beans' stick up side of there and made some nice butterbeans. Now she did that her-

self. Take her hoe, get out there and cut her wood. She cut her own wood. And she got a spring. Now she got running water in her house. She got running water. And when she feel like she want her some spring water, she'll go down that hill and get her water, and come on back to the house. Now if it growed up, where she can't get to her spring, she going in the storage house and get [a] bush axe and cut that road down for to go to her spring. God knows I'm telling the truth. And she go to that spring and get her water. This year she be 107.

She's just got a little hair around here. She plum bald-headed. Just a little around here. And you go there, and she be happy as a log. Just happy as a log. Say she don't have high blood pressure. She don't have rheumatism. She don't have indigestion. She don't have nothing. It ain't but one kind of bother--her hearing is kind of bad, and she can't hear the birds sing.

She cook. She wash. The last time I was down there she had--I'm talking now about how the people used to wash, scrub on the board, on the board--last time I went down there she had got her curtains down from her window, and had washed 'em just as pretty and white, and then she had a lot of clothes, just sitting on the chair, washed them that morning. We went down there that evening. She had gotten up and got all them clothes off that fence, and she had [them] in there sitting down by her. Sitting there folding those clothes up.



[What kind of advice would you give a young person to lead a better life?]

Good advice. Good. Don't think about marrying. That one thing I can tell you. Try to go to school and get all you can get as far as you can in school. And when you get out of there--college--you can be on your own. Your own job. Go to work and make your own money, and won't have to look at no man for no money. For god sakes, don't marry no man.

Gronetta Woodard

Interview by Layefette Thomas
Transcribed/edited by Layefette Thomas

In my studies of traditional culture, I believe that I haven't come across anyone at the age of 80 that can remember her childhood as well as Mrs. Gronetta Woodard. Mrs. Woodard is one of the most admired persons in my community, simply because she had faith in herself as a child to go and get what she wanted out of life.

Mrs. Woodard is a quilter and teacher. She had the opportunity to get her education, which she accepted with a smile. Mrs. Woodard was educated in the early 'teens. She entered and finished high school, but still this was not enough for her. So she enrolled at Alcorn A & M College, where she got enough credits to teach school. Mrs. Woodard passed her test and became a teacher. She taught school for many years.

--Layefette Thomas

What was it like when I was young? It was fun. And I had a nice home. And I could go out and had many friends, girls and boys of my age, and I thought walking was real fun to me. And it was a bunch of us. We all grew up together. I really liked those days a whole lot better than I do these days.

We used to play poison spot and all around the mulberry bush.

But I had a wonderful mother and a wonderful father. They were church members and they saw to me going to Sunday school every Sunday. I remember so well. My mother would put a little dress on me and little underwear, and I'd walk three miles to Sunday school barefeeted, and didn't think anything about the shoes at all.

I heard my mother say that her mother was thirteen years old during the time of slavery. And she told my mama how the masters, or whatever you would call them, used to prop the servants eyes open at night with little straws to keep them 'wake to pick the seed out of the cotton. They didn't have any cotton gins then. That's the way each farm in slavery time had to do--take the children and prop their eyes open to keep them awake.

Oh, we had a big farm--my goodness alive--and two nice little mules. One was name Jack and the other was name Tom. And my daddy would plow those mules. We'd hoe the crops, and it was eleven of us in our family. Eleven children, and course I was the baby of the family, and my daddy didn't never want to see me go to the field and do much work.

[For making butter] we had what you would call a stone churn. We had a dasher, what they called a dasher, and a top to fit on the churn. And this dasher would be in the churn. We would churn it up and down just the way, and the butter will come on top of the milk, and you'd skim it off and wash the butter. And my mama had a pounder, a wooden pounder. You put that butter in that pounder, and it would come out. And she wash it in cold water and it will come out into a pound of butter. And she would empty that butter, you know, on a saucer or a dish.

We always had a lot of cows, and sometimes we would milk high as four and five cows. And we would skim the milk and put it in the churn and we'd churn that, and sometimes we'd make three pounds of butter, and sometime we'd churn two churns of milk at one time. Save the cream and eat the milk.

I remember so well when we all would have a cold, Mama would make up some shuck tea, pine top tea, and they'd gather a weed what they call "life everlasting." That helped us to get rid of the cold. We took castor

oil. They'd give us castor oil. For measles they'd give us a little warm lemon tea.

We had the itch. They called it the itch. It broke out on our fingers, between our fingers and between our toes. Some broke out on people's faces. I had a brother, his face got burned with it. The itch. The itch would cause you to do a lot of scratching. A little pus would come in those cancer and we'd scratch and scratch.

I loved to quilt. I also piece quilts. The first quilt I piece was a nine patch. Well, I cut out. I had scraps, you know--different colors. And I'd cut out little squares. They were little squares and big squares, and I would sew three together and then I would sew three more together; then sew those six together. And then I'd make another three and sew it together, and that was nine. Nine little squares and they call that a nine patch.

A lot of us [would quilt together]. We would give quiltings, you know, and one of my sister would cook the big dinner for us all. [That] quilt was left for my family. And maybe say the next week or so the other woman would give a quilting. Sometime we will quilt three or four a day--three or four quilts a day.

We had a frame, what they call quilting frames. We had four long [sticks], longer that the quilt. And they had little holes up and down the frame, and we'll tack that quilt up in the frame, tack the lining to the frame. And then we'll pad the cotton in and then spread the top on it. And we would hang those frames up and nail little nails all around the side of the house and put ropes on the frame and tie them to the nails. And we all would sit around that quilt and quilt.

My mother taught me to quilt. Oh, I learned how to quilt when I was about 13 or 14 years old. Just sit around and watch other women quilt.

Mrs. Woodard holding an antique lamp that her father used when she was a child.

Mama would take me to the quilting when she will go quilting, and I would watch the other ladies quilt, me and the other girls like myself.

We walked to school, but happen then I didn't live too far from school--just about a little over a hundred yards from school. I started school at five years old, and I went to a one teacher type shcool. One room. And I stayed in that school from five years old till I finished the eight grade, till I finished the eight grade at that school! And then I went to Fayette, Jefferson County Training School, after then, and I stayed in that school two years. I finished the tenth grade, and after that I went to Alcorn A & M College where I finished. Till I went four years, four summer schools, you know, four summers. And there I got credits to teach by attending Alcorn A & M College those four summers. We used to call it Normal, but now they call it summer school.

And so after I finished those four years, I got credits to teach first grade, first grade license. Then we had what you call a license. The first grade was the highest, and my first examination I made first grade license. That was in about 1919. I was about 19 years old when I was ready to teach.

And then I was called to teach in a one room school. The name of the school was Coleman School. It's located about ten miles from Union Church, between Fayette and Union Church. The second school I taught was Contentment School, this schoolhouse sitting way up on a hill. We had to walk way on the hill to get to the school. It was a one teacher type school.

I taught from the first year--we called it primer--to the eighth grade. I had primer, first reader, second reader, third reader, fourth reader, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. I taught three different schools in Mississippi. I taught nine years, I think, at Contentment, and eight years at Zion over here. That's below Lester Tanksley, going toward Fayette. You know were Zion Church is, below this graveyard going toward Fayette? Well, I taught there. And I taught eleven years at the Coleman School, which led up to twenty-five years and a half.

I never did do nothing but teach school until the [consolidation] come by, and they carried the schools.... All was [consolidated] you know. And I didn't have any way to get to these schools. That was in about 1960 or '61, and I quit teaching in about '60 or '61. My husband was raising cattle over here for Mr. Walter Allred, and I quit teaching school, and I went to live with him over there. I kept house for Mr. Walter Allred until [my husband] died, and that was about 19 years ago. Then I moved to Brookhaven, where I had some property owned by my older people, and would stay in one of those houses.

Sarah Carpenter

Interview by Layefette Thomas
Transcribed/edited by Layefette Thomas

In the summer of 1980 a group of high school students and one graduate traveled to Rabun Gap, Georgia, to meet the students who publish Foxfire. After visiting Foxfire and seeing how the students are studying their own culture and publishing four magazines a year, the students from Port Gibson decided to begin studying their own traditions in the small communities in Claiborne and Jefferson counties.

In these studies the students found that the people living in these counties had, and still have a rich cultural heritage. So the high school students and I began to interview people with such traditional skills as quilting, midwifery, blacksmithing, and barbering. Finding people to interview was easy, because there are so many people who use these skills to provide for their families.

Ms. Sarah Chambliss suggested that we talk to her grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Carpenter. Miss Sarah is now 86 years old. When Ms. Chambliss was younger, Mama Sarah used to tell her about her own grandmother, who was brought to America from Africa.

Acting on Ms. Chambliss' suggestion, we paid her grandmother a visit one afternoon. While we talked with Miss Sarah, she told us about games that she used to play and little songs that went with them. She told us some of the things her grandmother had told her. She also showed us her mother's and grandmother's hair that she had kept across the years. While Miss Sarah sat there talking to us, she remembered that she had pictures of her grandmother. So she showed them to us and we made copies of them.

--Layefette Thomas

Miss Sarah as a young woman.

[Did you ever jump rope?]

Oh, yeah. One, and then we get tired and jump another one. We jump, we have a vine. The boys would get good vines and have 'em stretched out. That's the way we done.

[You didn't use real rope?]

Well, yes, but we didn't have ropes all the time. [They got vines from the woods?] That's right. Surely did. [What kind of vines were they?] Well, they'll be grape vine. You know, grape vines what run. If we find any kind of long vine, well, you see, the boys do something to them, grease 'em, you know, and getting 'em to stretching and going on. And we'd play that jump rope. One foot. We jump on one foot till we got tired, and we stop and jump on the other foot. One foot jumping.

Little Sally Walker,
Sitting in the saucer,
Crying and a-crying, and
Dust in the wilderness,
What has she done?

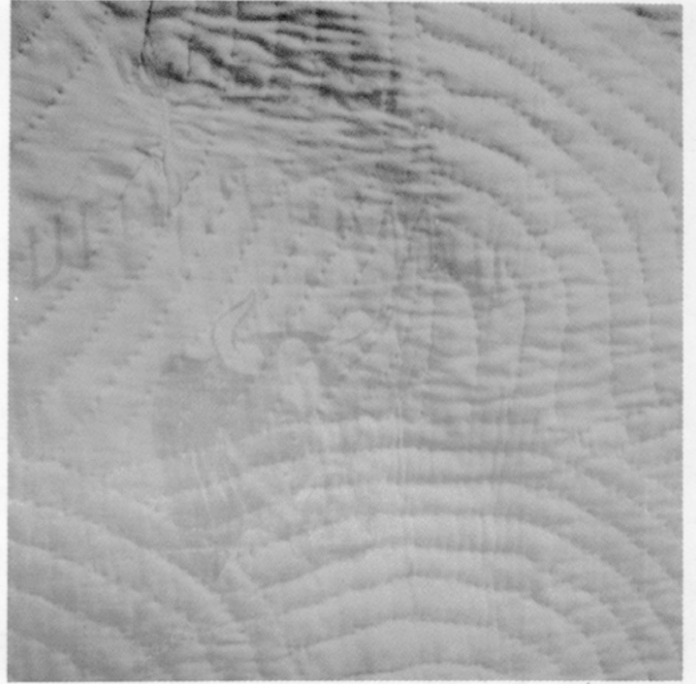
I lost my handkerchief yesterday
And I found it again today,
And I dash it in the mud puddle,
And I dashed it clean away.

And when you say you dashed it clean away, you done dashed it behind some of us. And we have to watch and see, because if we didn't jump and get it, we'll be out.

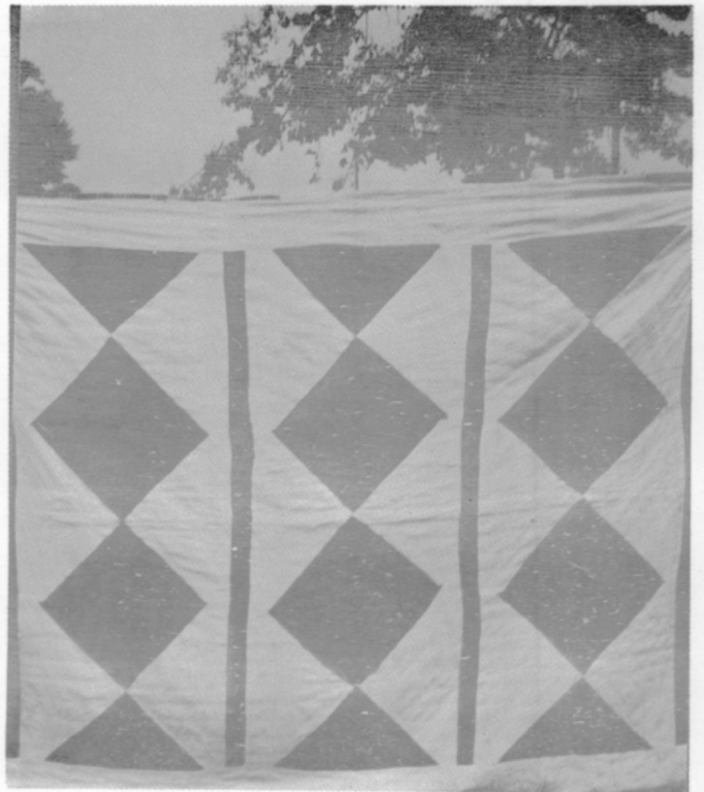
[Mama Sarah, you told me your great-grandmother came over on the ship. What did she tell you about the trip?]

Miss Sarah's mother's sister, Mrs. Cornelia Spiller Woods (left); Miss Sarah's grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Spiller Newsome (right).

Three generations of Miss Sarah's descendants: (from left) her daughter, Bennie Lee Jackson Gordon; her granddaughter, Sarah Gordon Chambliss; her great-granddaughter, Vanessa LaRose Chambliss.



Miss Sarah used feed sacks to line her quilts. She quilted all of her quilts using a shell pattern.



She ain't tell us about the trip. They say they just turned 'em loose like they was cows. Only said they done them like they did cows.

[How did she get to Mississippi?]

Well, they bought 'em. You see they was buying from way back. They was brought to Mississippi and sold.

[Did she tell you how much she was sold for?]

No, she didn't tell me how much. They didn't know themselves what they was getting. They was just doing like you do horses. It's the truth.

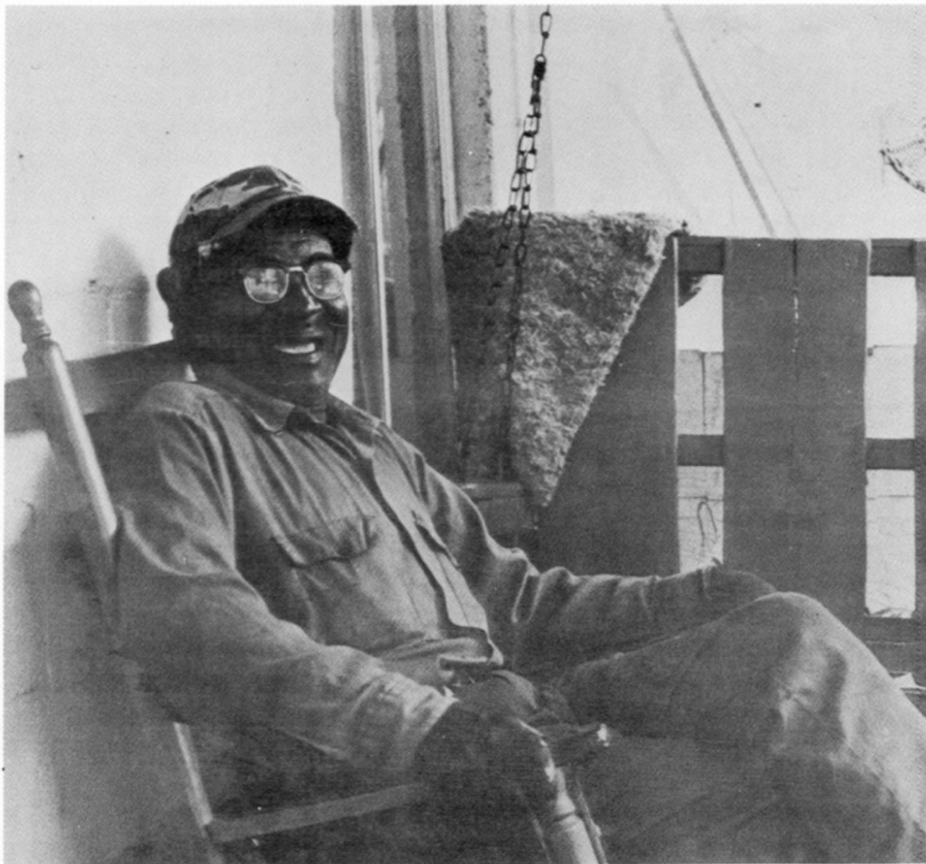
[What else did she tell you?]

She tell us many times she could step near the Mississippi River, that people could walk across it like a branch. It was that small.

Editor's note: Ms. Sarah Chambliss provided the following information about her grandmother.

Mama Sarah told me that the reason she kept that hair, it was hair that was her grandmother's and her mother's she cut off after they passed--to keep. It was a tradition that the relatives kept some hair. Then she said if she had put camphor gum on it, camphor gum and water, if she had put that on it across the years, it would stay fresh like it was at first. In fact it would even have continued to grow, she said, but she never put that on it. She just kept it put away, and would get it out from time to time just to look at it and remember them. [Now] it's dried out; it doesn't feel like the natural texture of hair would feel, real-life hair.

Miss Sarah holding hair that was cut from her mother's and grandmother's heads after they died.



Israel Buck

Interview by Vincent Goods
Transcribed/edited by Vincent Goods

Early this summer we went to Mrs. Minnie Lou Buck's home to interview her. While there we found out that her husband is a blacksmith, so we interviewed him. We found out that he is one of the few blacksmiths living in Claiborne County today. We also found out what he does as a blacksmith.

He told us that he works in the morning and late evening because it's cooler then. He also works as a carpenter and a painter. Early in his life he hauled pulpwood and farmed.

He also is a very religious person. He started going to church when he was very, very young. He is now a deacon in the Welcome Baptist Church.

Although he only went to school for three years, he is a very determined person. He had to work hard enough to support eleven kids. At the age of 72 he's still determined to go until he can't go anymore.

--Vincent Goods

Editor's note: After talking to Mr. Buck for an hour about blacksmithing, we realized that the tape had not been working, and so had recorded nothing. Mr. Buck agreed to let us come back again to get the blacksmithing story, but we wanted to print this little bit that we did get in this first issue.

I tell people right now they holler hard. It's this and it's that. I come the hard way. Wasn't no skidder* and it wasn't no power saw. It was cross cut and wasn't nothing but mules and ox. Go out there and cut a big tree down and make a load. When you put three loads on a wagon on a truck, you got a load, that's right. But now, they pile up a gang of wood and ain't got nothing. That's right. I drove mules and I drove ox.

People used to milk cows. We used to make butter back in them days. We didn't have no ice. You take your butter, put it in a bucket, and let it down in the cistern. It keep that butter cool. Keep it from melting.

See, we used to do all that. That's the hard way.

You forge welded. See, you had some borax, you know what that is. You had some borax. You get that [plow]point blood red and you get that other piece of iron blood red. Then you put that borax in there, get ready, put it back on that anvil and take that hammer and put it together. It stick just like I don't know what, and you can't pull it loose.

Look at that hand. Fires been all over that hand. Fire even have popped in my face. Burnt me in my face and that didn't stop me.

[A job paid] two bits and thirty-five cents, but now it's gone up.

That's the way I was brought up. Working and been hanging in there ever since, and I tell you something else, like my wife, [never] had to go out and work. That's one woman ain't never done a day's work.

*SKIDDER: a machine used to drag logs into open land. It pulls from the front and the back.

Children's Games

Compiled by Della Davenport

When I was nine years of age, my sister and I saw a group of children playing a game by the name of Punchinella. So my sister and I asked could we play.

We got in a big circle and held hands. One girl was in the center of the circle. The girl in the circle chose me to replace her in the center. So I got in and I danced. Everybody else danced, too. I turned around and chose someone else to get in the center. I had some fun that day. It has been so long.

I don't see many children playing those games at the age of nine. No way. I have seen children at the age of five or six playing hand games like ABC, and circle games like Punchinella. I think nowadays children get to be big girls and boys sooner.

--Della Davenport

Editor's note: these circle games and hand games are only a few of the ones played by children in our community. Already we have collected more than one version of some of them. In a later magazine we hope to do a more extensive article on children's games.

CIRCLE GAMES

Little Sally Walker

Weeping and a-crying
For a cool drink of water,
Rise, Sally, rise,
Wipe out your eyes.
Put your hands on your hip
And let your backbone slip.

Shake it to the East,
Shake it to the West,
Shake it to the pretty boy
You love the best.

Cause your Mama say so,
Cause your Papa say so,
That's the way you shake it
When you want to catch a beau.

Milk in the pitcher,
Butter in the bowl,
You can't catch a sweetheart
To save your soul.

I Lost My Handkerchief Yesterday

I lost my handkerchief yesterday;
I found it again today.
I filled it full of buttermilk
And then I throwed it away.
Away, away, away, away, away.

HAND GAMES

Mary Mack

Oh, Mary Mack, Mack, Mack,
All dressed in black, black, black,
With silver gold buttons, buttons, buttons
All down her back, back, back.

She asked her mother, mother, mother
For fifteen cents, cents, cents
To see the elephant, elephant, elephant
To jump the fence, fence, fence.

He jump so high, high, high,
Till he reach the sky, sky, sky;
He never came back, back, back
Till fourth of July, -ly, -ly.

Tweedle-leedle-lee

Tweedle-leedle-lee,
Tweedle-leedle-lee,
Tweet, tweet,
Bumble bee,
Gonna rock in the treetop
All day long,
Huffing and a-puffing, and
A-singing his song.

All the little girls
On Happy Days
Love to hear Fonz go
Hey, hey, hey.

Mama in the kitchen
Frying that rice;
Daddy 'round the corner
Shooting that dice.
Brother in jail
Raising hell;
Sister 'round the corner
Selling pizza for sale.

Grandpa, you ain't sick,
All you need
Is a peppermint stick.
Grandma, you ain't sick,
All you need
Is a peppermint stick.

Batman and Robin
Went to bed.
Batman he fought it,
Robin got scared.
Called the doctor;
Doctor said, "If
You do it again,
We'll all fall dead.

Rocking Robin,
Rock, rock, rock tonight.

Hambone, Hambone

Hambone, hambone, have you heard?
Papa gonna buy you a mockingbird.
If that mockingbird don't sing,
Papa gon' buy you a diamond ring.
If that diamond ring don't shine,
Papa gon' buy you a jug of wine.
If that jug of wine get broke,
Papa gonna buy you a billy goat.
If that billy goat kick me,
Papa gonna whip your B-U-T.
If that B-U-T get sore,
Papa gon' take me to the store.
If that store man don't say "Hi,"
Papa gonna sock him in the eye.
If that eye turn black and blue,
Papa gonna sock him
in the other one, too.

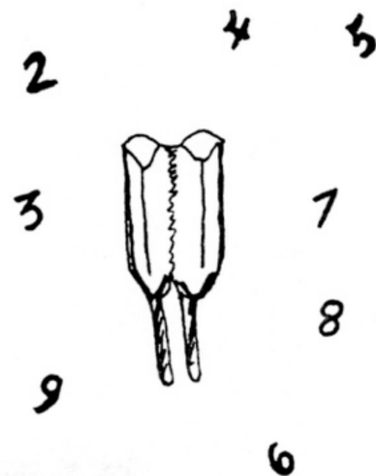
Pamela, Pamela, A Biscuit

Domino, domino, domino, biscuit,
Domino, domino, domino, biscuit,
Oo-shoo shoo-wah-wah, a biscuit.
I found another, a biscuit,
Went upstairs to see my wife,
Came back down with a butcher
knife
Cut a piece of meat,
Cut a piece of bread;
Come on baby, let's go to bed.

See that house
On top of that hill?
That's where me
And my baby gon' live.
Say a hot dog, baby,
Don't do it no more.
Say a hot dog, baby,
Don't do it no more.
Say a hot dog, baby,
Don't you do it no more.

Popsicle, Popsicle

Popsicle, popsicle,
Make me sick,
A woopie and a woppie
And two, four, six.
Whoever say "one"
Is out of the game,
So two, three, four, five,
Six, seven, eight, nine.



Lenora Wells

Interview by Elvin Jenkins
Transcribed/edited by Elvin Jenkins,
Octavis Davis, and Stacy Brooks

Ask anyone in the Tillman community who the leading citizen is. About 99% will say Mrs. Lenora Wells. Affectionately called "Dear," she has inspired many youth in the community with her charm and humor. People, young and old alike, will always have a kind word for this lady who is a mother to the motherless and a friend to the friendless. A strong believer in Christ, she treats everyone the same, offering a gift that is far more precious than jewels--love.

A strong lady, at the age of 73, she still participates in church activities as much as possible. She is an active choir member of Forest Grove Church.

If ever someone could perform magic it is "Dear," for she has the power somehow to hypnotize everyone she talks to with her charm and story telling, and by just simply showing that if no one else cares then she always will.

When I visited "Dear," she right away started to take control of me with her stories, riddles, and songs. She showed me antique utensils, her collection of sticks (for whipping anyone that was bad), and her pipe, or, as she called it, "her boyfriend." By the time the interview was over, I was another victim.

--Elvin Jenkins

I had a good life when I was young. My grandmother reared me. When I even knowed myself I was with my grandmother. Betsey Boyd. My grandmother was the finest black woman ever lived. My father's name was James Killingsworth. My mother's name was Birthine Boyd Killingsworth. I was born on Prospect Hill, on the Wade place.

What I can remember now--the first whipping I ever got. My Aunt Jessie sent me to Tillman to get some bloomers, down to my Aunt's house, and instead of me coming on back, I played. When I came back, she was through washing and she told me to get up the peach tree and get her a peach, and when I got up there, she caught me and tore my dress off the waist and she whipped me about that.

The next whipping I got, my grandmother sent at me from over to my brother's and instead of my going on home that same evening, I stopped at Carrie Simmon's house and stayed all night and Bea came by the next day and said, "Buck sent for you," and I went home and was sitting on the porch when she came from the field. And she whopped me and said, "Go when I send you and come when I call."

I worked like one dog and looked like another. Plowing. Ballgames would be down here, and all the children would be whooping and hollering, and I would have to stop about 4:30 and bring the horse or the mule home and feed him off. And that's why I married so soon. If it hadn't been for that I would have went on like other children, but I didn't. I jumped up and married Brother Wells. He was the first boy that ever went home with me, cause I didn't court.

[What advice would you have for young people today?]

First thing, get love in your heart. Think once before you leap and three time before you speak. Keep away from bad people, and try to go to church and Sunday school. Religion was never designed to make life pleasureless.

When I was a little girl I loved to play baseball and to Charleston. You want me to get up and Charleston for you? [She does.]

I used to love to play baseball. I was the catcher. And Lil Sally Walker Sitting in the Saucer. I used to love to ask tnose riddles. [Mrs. Wells begins to sing, ask riddles, and

Lenora Wells smokes her pipe while telling Layefette Thomas how she makes her nephews smoke a pipe till they're ill when they are naughty.

tell jokes.]

Lil Sally Walker,
Sitting in the saucer,
Weeping and a-crying
For a cool drink of water.
Rise, Sally, rise,
Wipe out your eyes,
Put your hands on your hips
And let your backbone slip.
Slip it to the East,
Slip it to the West,
Slip it to the pretty one
You love the best--
Slip it to the boys.

Did you ever eat a chicken whole? Feathers and all? Now you answer that question. You ever hear of an egg? If you have eaten an egg, you have eaten a whole chicken, feathers and all.

It was an old lady. She was making gingerbread. And it was an old man came to her house, and he was an old tramp, we used to call them, and he asked her for some. And every piece, she'd roll it out and put it in the stove, and it would rise up big. She rolled out the first, she rolled out the second, and she rolled out the third, and that (the third) was too big and she wouldn't give him more. And he told her, "For your disobedience, your fingernails will come as bird claws." The shawl she had on was gonna be feathers, her arms were gonna turn to wings, and her legs were gonna get like bird legs, and mouth was gonna grow long. The old man went on, and in three days, the old woman had turned into the woodpecker.

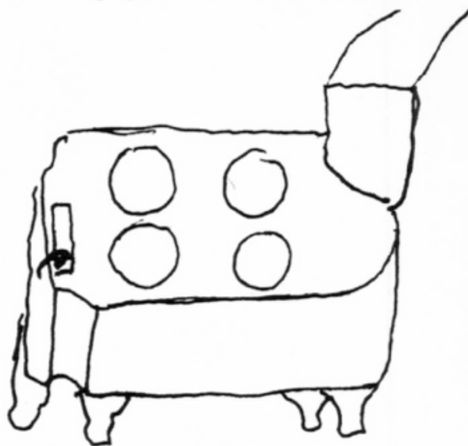
And that's why you got a woodpecker. He got a red head, she had a red handkerchief on her head, and had

the shawl around her shoulders, a black shawl, and see how she's doing now?

Let me see what else.

There was once this old haunted house, and couldn't no one live there. And it was way back in the time when the people use to drive ox with the log wagon. And this old man, he was tired and he came to this old house and he taken his oxen a-loose and fed them and then he went in to cook. And he carried his cooking on the old fire place, and when he went to cooking, one little cat jumped out of the chimney and said, "Must I start now or wait till the steam comes?" And he said, "I'll wait till the steam come." Well, the second little cat fell down and he said, "Shall I start now or wait till steam comes?" And he said, "I'll wait till steam come." And then the third little cat fell down and shook hisself out of the chimney and said, "Start now or wait till steam come?" And the old man got his ox whip and said, "Hell, no! I'm gonna start before steam come." Then he commence to whipping 'em and he whipped all them cats away. That was the greatest, onliest body to live there in that old haunted house.

What's got four legs, four eyes, and smokes a pipe? A wood stove.



What's got eyes and is brown on the outside, but white on the inside? A potato.

What's got one eye and a long tail hanging behind? A needle.

It was once some children and the mother left them at home and told them to be good. One of the girls was ironing and the other girl.... This old man was coming up the road, walking crippled. And they was laughing. And so when he got there he told them, say, "You all laughing at me?" And say, "You, ironing, you didn't do nothing but smile. What you laughing

for?" He told them, "Give me a piece of tobacco." Well, they told him they didn't have no tobacco, and one of them brothers had just a little piece of tobacco. He told them, say, "If you all had gave me that tobacco, you'd a-been dead before sundown." Said, "But the lightning is going to strike you and bust you." And that's the truth I'm telling now. My grandmother told me that. That was up there on the Wade place.

Are you gonna answer the riddle? [Yes, ma'am.] If you got a peck of corn and you got a goose and you got a fox and you got to cross the branch, and you got to walk a log, now when you get there you can't carry them all

across at once, how you gonna do?

[Jenkins: Now what you say you had?] You got a fox, a goose, and a peck of corn. Now you can't carry the fox and goose over there and leave them and leave the corn back, and you can't carry the goose over there and leave her back there with the corn. Now what you gonna do? You can't carry them all at once. You don't know?

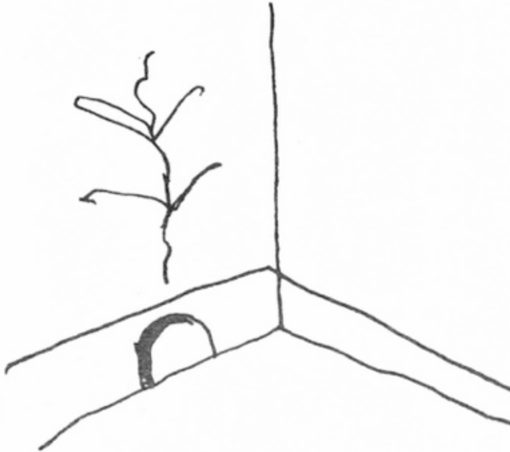
[Jenkins: I don't know. How you gonna do?] All right. You gonna take the fox over there and the corn, and then you going to leave the fox over there and bring the corn back. Then you going to come back to get the goose and the corn. See, you can't carry them all three across there at once.

What else do I know?

Once there was a young girl and and she was a rowdy girl. And death got on her trail. And she began to get tired. Her health began to fail her. I'll use it like that. But they say tired and so. And when she'd sit down to rest, she'd look around. And he'll tell her. She'd say, "What you doing?" I'm on your trail and I'm gonna follow you to the end." So she ran for a long time , and when she got to the end of the trail, she sit down to rest, and he didn't sit down. He stepped around her and told her to come on. "You gonna follow me." And that was the end of her. All right. So don't be bad now, cause the devil be on your trail. That's what that represents.

When I was a little girl,
I lived by myself.
All the bread and peas I had,
I laid it on the shelf.
Long came a mouse.
He took it in his crack.
And that was the end
Of my peas and my bread.

And it's another pleasure:



Grandma Gray, may we go to play?
No, my child,
It's too late today.

And we say: "I can't hear you." Then she'll come after us with a switch and whop us with it.

[When Mrs. Wells finished telling us the riddles and tales, she gave us the following advice to live by , and sang these two Doc Watts hymns.]

You mustn't live selfish and overbearing, cause you will die and go to hell if the Lord catch you with your work undone.

Be ready, be ready when he come,
Be ready, be ready when he come,
Be ready when he come, because
He coming again so soon.
Don't let him catch
You with your work undone,
Be ready when he come.

When you marry, when say for better for worse, rich or poor, through sickness and in health, in death do we part. If you all get together and stay together, and teeth and tongue fall out, walk out the back door, or walk out the front door, and come back through the next door. Stay there. Don't leave. Through thick and thin, you fight to stay there. If you don't have nothing but bread and water in the house, stay there and eat that. Do like me and my husband doing.

And you, girl, if you ever marry, you're twins now, but when you've married, you're one. And you can do something to hurt your husband, but you're really hurting yourself. And boys, you can do things to hurt your wife, but really you're hurting your own self. Cause in the Bible it says, "Wife, how do you know you ain't got to save your husband's soul? Husband, how do you know you ain't got to save your wife's soul? My grandmother told me that when Bay [her husband] asked for me, that if he make a bed of thorns and thistles, you've got to lay on them.

If you want to go to ballgames, parties, and things, that's okay, but love. If you love, you ain't going to hurt nobody. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend. But it's some devils out there.

Time, time, time is winding up,
Time, time, oh,
time is winding up,
Oooh, 'struction in the land,
God gonna move his hand.

Time is winding up,
Go and tell everybody,
Time is winding up,
Go and tell everybody.

Time is winding up,
Oooh, 'struction in the land,
God gonna move his hand,
Time is winding up.

You all got to stop. Time is winding up. Come back again all of you all children. You all call me "Dear," and if I don't know you all, you pull my coat tail on the street, cause I might need you to assist me across the street.

Preview of Next Issue: Mrs. Hystercine Rankin

Our thanks to the Field Foundation for their grant to Mississippi Cultural Crossroads to help with the printing of I AIN'T LYING. Our apology for omiting them from the list of contributors inside the back cover.

The Staff

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