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Louis camera

Interviewee

McCall's Creek, Mississippi

39647
Address

Prusalla P. Jhansen

Director

Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin
Regional Library

4-15-1977

Date of Agreement

Sawmills; cotton gins; White Caps, and mail delivery

Subject of Tape(s)

Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History
Data Sheet

Austin D. Rowlin
INTERVIEWER

April 22, 1977
DATE

McCall Creek, MS
PLACE OF INTERVIEW

Louis Benjamin McCurley Wesley Cameron
INTERVIEWEE'S NAME

FULL NAME (Louis) Benjamin McCurley Wesley Cameron
ADDRESS McCall Creek, MS 39647 PHONE 833-5140
BIRTHPLACE McCall Creek, MS DATE OF BIRTH July 4, 1880
EDUCATION Third grade

OCCUPATION Farmer; Sawmill hand

TRAVELS Mississippi and Louisiana

SPOUSE'S FULL NAME 1st - Viola Cotton Cameron
BIRTHPLACE Beat Five, Franklin County, MS DATE OF BIRTH June 10, 1881
OCCUPATION Housewife

NUMBER OF CHILDREN Five (5)

NAMES OF CHILDREN
Rivers Cameron
Josephine Cameron
Almeda Cameron
O. C. Lewis Cameron, Jr.
Harriet Ellamira Cameron

FATHER'S FULL NAME Anthony Cameron
BIRTHPLACE Monroe, MS DATE OF BIRTH Unknown
OCCUPATION Farmer

MOTHER'S FULL NAME Harriet Jones
BIRTHPLACE Little Springs, MS DATE OF BIRTH Unknown
OCCUPATION Farmer; Cook

MAJOR NATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL EVENTS OF IMPORTANCE DISCUSSED

INTERVIEWEE'S AREA OF INTEREST AND/OR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY
Types of sawmills; Means of getting logs to sawmills; Cotton gins;
Mail delivery; Houseboy; White Caps (Ku Klux Klan); Churches;

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SPOUSE'S FULL NAME 2nd - Georgia Jenkins Cameron
BIRTHPLACE Lucien, MS DATE OF BIRTH September 13, 1894
OCCUPATION Housewife

NUMBER OF CHILDREN One (1)

NAMES OF CHILDREN

Jessie Mae Cameron

FATHER'S FULL NAME Anthony Cameron

BIRTHPLACE Monroe, MS

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown

OCCUPATION Farmer

MOTHER'S FULL NAME Harriet Jones

BIRTHPLACE Little Springs, MS

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown

OCCUPATION Farmer; cook

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gins; Mail delivery; Houseboy; White Caps (Ku Klux Klan); Churches;

Austin D. Bowlin
INTERVIEWER

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INTERVIEWEE'S NAME

An Interview with
(Louis) Benjamin McCurley Wesley Cameron
April 22, 1977

Interviewed by
Austin D. Bowlin

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History Project
Meadville and Vicinity

BOWLIN: What is your name?

CAMERON: Louis Cameron, that is what they give me. My name is Benjamin McCurley Wesley, but they put that name down, Cameron, so I could go to school.

BOWLIN: What is your address?

CAMERON: McCall Creek, Mississippi.

BOWLIN: Your phone number?

CAMERON: 833-5140.

BOWLIN: Where were you born?

CAMERON: 1880, the fourth day of July.

BOWLIN: Whereabouts?

CAMERON: Beat Four, one-half mile north of Magee's Creek on what was called the Miller place.

BOWLIN: What education did you get? How far did you get in school?

CAMERON: Third grade.

BOWLIN: And what was your first occupation, Louis?

CAMERON: Farming, I say. I was born and in three (3) years I went in the field and never did come out until I got through.

BOWLIN: In other words, you farmed all your life.

CAMERON: All my life pretty well, except I sawmilled all together around seven (7) years. That was when the boll weevil got here and they couldn't make cotton. I went to the sawmill and as soon as they began to make cotton

Page Two: Cameron

I quit the sawmill and went back to farming and never quit.

BOWLIN: Who did you farm for, Louis?

CAMERON: First farming was, I farmed at home with my mother and father. I farmed with them about fourteen (14) years and then I married and farmed one (1) year there. Then I went off on another man's place, Mr. Bertram Montgomery. I moved from there to C. C. Jones' on the old Matt Jones place. From there back to old man Jim Hester's and farmed. And from there to the Dan Buie place. I farmed there until 1911 when I quit farming and moved here to McCall and went to work at the mill.

BOWLIN: Who owned the mill?

CAMERON: Moreton and them, I reckon. It was called the Central Lumber Company.

BOWLIN: Was it here at McCall? Or where was it?

CAMERON: At McCall. A mill called Selco, just below here where old man John Allen - it was on part of his land - was called a mile down the railroad.

BOWLIN: Do you remember when the sawmill was put in here?

CAMERON: It was put here in 1909.

BOWLIN: How long did you work at the mill?

CAMERON: I worked down there at that mill six (6) years and then I went to farming.

BOWLIN: How did they get logs in to the mill?

CAMERON: Log train. I fired a log train three (3) years and I came off the log train and went to old man Tom Wright's and went to farming in 1918. The first farming I had done after 1910. I moved from old man

Page Three: Cameron

Tom Wright's here in that house on the corner. I lived out there seventeen (17) years and been here in this one going on twenty-five (25) years.

BOWLIN: Now, let's get back to the sawmill. How long did that sawmill stay here?

CAMERON: Well, they stayed here from 1909 to 1919. They had a mill at Lucien and they had more timber there and they shut this one down and everything went to Lucien and finished there.

BOWLIN: What year was that?

CAMERON: That was in 1920 they went to Lucien. And from there to Bogue Chitto to Brister's mill. They bought Brister out and cut out what timber they had and then came back and built a mill at Quentin.

BOWLIN: What year did the mill go up at Quentin?

CAMERON: It was up, it started the last of '19.

BOWLIN: That was 1919?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. They completed it and started to running in '20. I quit it in '20 and moved here to go to farming. It was closer and old man Bob got killed and I didn't want anymore of that mill and I didn't go back.

BOWLIN: What is your wife's name, Louis?

CAMERON: Georgia Jenkins.

BOWLIN: Where was she born?

CAMERON: At Lucien.

BOWLIN: What was the date of her birth?

CAMERON: September 13, 1894.

Page Four: Cameron

BOWLIN: How many children do you all have?

CAMERON: One (1).

BOWLIN: What was the name of the child you all have?

CAMERON: Jessie Mae. She married a Carter, Jessie Mae Carter.

BOWLIN: All right, what was your father's full name?

CAMERON: Mine? Anthony Cameron. Anthony Cameron.

BOWLIN: Where was he born?

CAMERON: He was born down here at Bude. No, Monroe because his parents belonged to old man John Lee who owned that land all in there. He was born there in the latter part of slavery time.

BOWLIN: What was the date of his birth?

CAMERON: I don't know, sir. You see he died when I was nine (9) years old. I was not old enough to know nothing, but to miss him. That is all.

BOWLIN: What kind of work did he do?

CAMERON: Farmed - that's how we lived. That's all that was going on here then.

BOWLIN: You said he was born there in the latter part of slavery time.

CAMERON: Yes, sir.

BOWLIN: Was he or had he ever been a slave?

CAMERON: He was a young slave. His daddy was a slave, you know, and he was a young slave.

BOWLIN: You don't remember what year he got out of slavery? About what time?

Page Five: Cameron

CAMERON: Well, what I heard them say, they got out in May.

BOWLIN: Of what year?

CAMERON: '65. I think it was May of '65 (1865).

BOWLIN: Who was his owner, Louis? Do you remember?

CAMERON: Old man John Lee. He owned his daddy and his mother (meaning Anthony Cameron's daddy and mother) and old man Alfred Lee, her brother; William Lee; and their daddy and his brother, Louis Lee.

BOWLIN: What was your mother's full name, Louis?

CAMERON: Harriet Jones.

BOWLIN: Where was she born?

CAMERON: She was born back down there on what they called the Matt Jones place in Beat Five. He owned her daddy and my grandmother (my daddy's mother) after, well, that was after surrender, you know.

BOWLIN: About what community would you call it where she was born down there?

CAMERON: Well, it was not called Little Springs Settlement then. I know when it was given that name. It was just in Beat Five, that's all.

BOWLIN: Beat Five. But it was in what we called Little Springs?

CAMERON: Little Springs Settlement.

BOWLIN: And what did she do, Louis?

CAMERON: Nothing but farm until my daddy died and then she went to cooking for old man Dan Buie. Cooked for old man Dan Buie for three (3) years and I was a houseboy. She married again and we moved further down in Beat Five, out in what you call the Whittington Settlement, but the McGehee's had

Page Six: Cameron

bought it up. We moved to James Madison McGehee's.

BOWLIN: Was she ever a slave?

CAMERON: She did not know nothing about it. She was too young to know anything about it.

BOWLIN: That sawmill down at Quentin - how long did that sawmill stay there?

CAMERON: Well, they said - I didn't keep up with it after I left there, but they said it ran thirty-two (32) years.

BOWLIN: Thirty-two (32) years. In other words it ran until it burned. Is that sawmill that burned down there?

CAMERON: Yes, sir.

BOWLIN: Which was the first sawmill to set up here in Franklin County, Louis?

CAMERON: Well, the one down at Monroe was the first one I can remember them setting up there. But these little ground-hog mills, you know, but they weren't no sawmills.

BOWLIN: How did they get their logs to their mill?

CAMERON: What? At Monroe? Log train.

BOWLIN: To use a log train, it had to be a pretty good mill, didn't it?

CAMERON: Was a good mill. Big mill.

BOWLIN: Do you remember when the log trains played out here in these mills?

CAMERON: No, sir, not exactly. But they took the log trains off and went to using trucks down here. That was because they cut out one side.

Page Seven; Cameron

They cut out the short side. They had two (2) sizes with the long side and the short side. The short side was the band saw and they cut it out after so long a time and then just used trucks to haul logs in there.¹

BOWLIN: Were the trucks able to keep the sawmills in logs with the roads as bad as they were?

CAMERON: Well, they put up with it, you know. They logged pretty good. You know the thing about the pond. The piling logs would get bugs in them, you see. That was why they used ponds. They wouldn't bother them in the water.

BOWLIN: They kept their logs in ponds and took them out of the pond and put them on the ramps?

CAMERON: That's right. They had a chain, a carrier go down in the pond here and a big saw and big lugs on the chain. You take a pike pole - had spike in the end of it and a long handle - and you stick it in a log and pull it up and when the lug caught it, it would go on up in the mill. They had a lever there for that chain, so that chain didn't give and it would pull them up there. When it got up there they would stop that lever, scale the log, roll it out, pull another one on up. They were on that chain, you know, like beads on a string.

BOWLIN: Every time they would get one up there, they would scale it and roll it off on the carriage and it would be gone and they would scale another one.

CAMERON: Yes, sir. They scaled it before they threw it off. And there was a ramp right there where the carriage loads them, you see, and they would turn that log off, scale it, turn it off, scale another, turn it off,

Page Eight: Cameron

until they got the ramp full. It wouldn't stay full long, because they had a steam trip that would kick them off and the steam mill would do the turning and placing. They didn't have any trouble doing that.

BOWLIN: When did the oxen come into being in hauling logs?

CAMERON: When I was a child they were hauling logs with oxen on a two-wheel thing they called a carry-log. Right where this bluff is, that is the first sawmill I saw.

BOWLIN: You mean the bluff back here behind McCall's Creek?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. Right over there where that bluff is. Old man Judge Magee had a sawmill and they sawed lumber for years. You could see more houses that was built with that lumber from that mill. The circle-saw leaves a sign on the lumber, but this here was a saw called a sash saw, just lika a hand-saw that worked up and down.

BOWLIN: It worked up and down?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. And they hauled logs from away up in there close to where Mr. Posey lives.

BOWLIN: Mr. Neal Posey?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. One log had a lever here that had tongs on it. And you back that thing up, hook that thing, pull that lever down and drag one end of it on the ground.

BOWLIN: They would haul one log all the way from up there to the mill?

CAMERON: All the way. I was a chap, but my step-daddy showed me where the old road was. Went right down here. Turned out right down here.

Page Nine: Cameron

They had a ferry across the creek that must have been on a cable.

BOWLIN: Where was that ferry? At McCall? Here at McCall?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. Right down here at McCall Creek. And they would put that thing on the ferry and pull it across to the mill. That mill was in there. It wasn't as high, didn't seem to me like it was, when I first saw it. But when the fresh came and washed out in the female and was down there in the chalk with that big stern wheel; now I didn't know how long it was, but the man told me it was ten (10) foot and they didn't know how wide them wings were, but they said they were twelve (12) inches and when they opened that gate and that big wheel started turning, everything went to moving.

BOWLIN: Is that the way the sawmill was furnished its power?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. With water. I reckon that was the oldest sawmill, until later years, that ever was in here. When the first that I saw, they had a little twelve (12) horsepower engines sawing with them and the little old boilers upright, set up just like little heaters.

BOWLIN: Now, what about this mill that you said was here across McCall Creek? Do you remember when it was built?

CAMERON: No, sir. Because it was built in slavery time. It wasn't there long when I got big enough to know anything about it. I was small, a very small chap.

BOWLIN: But you did know about it?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. I did know about it and old man Judge quit running it.

BOWLIN: Who owned the mill?

Page Ten: Cameron

CAMERON: Old man Judge Magee. Yes, sir, he owned the mill. He owned nearly all this country. All the large place. It belonged to the Godbold's and he married into the Godbold family, you know. That is why Mrs. Mary Stewart got hold of all of this land.

BOWLIN: Was his wife related to Mr. Cam Godbold?

CAMERON: I don't know.

BOWLIN: Horace?

CAMERON: Well, I said that. It had to be. Because where Mr. Casey Cowart is, that is where old man Levi Godbold was. Where Mr. Hunt, Mr. Frank Hunt's place, that was his son's place old man Bright bought, and the Buie place across the creek.

BOWLIN: This is on the road from McCall to Burt Jordan's store?

CAMERON: That's right. And the Dan Buie place, that's nine hundred (900) acres. It was one of the old man Levi Godbold's sons, one named Jimmy. He moved down Wells, Creek - that's over there about, somewhere about Roxie - but there was no railroad there then, you know. And Dan Buie bought it (Jimmy Godbold place).

BOWLIN: Now, you said the oxen were here back when you were a kid. Now, when did they get to where they could use oxen and wagons instead of a two-wheel cart?

CAMERON: They used oxen a little bit. They had oxen - most all the farmers had oxen and they done all their hauling with them. Now I remember when Mr. Buie had a gin, but he didn't have no sawmill. And old man Jim Magee had a sawmill. They took them oxen and pulled a log up to under

Page Eleven: Cameron

the back axle of the wagon and drag one end of it. I said old man Magee operated it, but I think his daddy had it. Old man Mac Magee owned the gin and sawmill and he was like old man George Lewis - he just stuck to it and followed it until he died.

BOWLIN: Louis, when was the first post office established here? Did they have a post office? Remember?

CAMERON: No, sir. No more than what I heard. Now I can't think of the man, but McCall. Was a McCall and another man so I heard. It was like two (2) men running for office and McCall got it. But when I knew anything about it, I never heard anything about no mail and I reckon it was though, until I was nine (9) years old and they brought me up here to Judge Magee's post office. I never had been up here and didn't know nothing about it.

BOWLIN: Where was the post office?

CAMERON: Right at Judge Magee's house, right in front of that cemetery over there where the pecan trees are.

BOWLIN: Where is that?

CAMERON: Where the big house was.

BOWLIN: Where is that?

CAMERON: Over there where the Judge Magee's cemetery is. His house was right across the road from that.

BOWLIN: How far is that from McCall Creek?

CAMERON: Well, they said once it was two (2) miles and some said it was two mile and a quarter.

BOWLIN: That would be about two and a quarter miles. Let's see,

Page Twelve: Cameron

sort of east of McCall - sort of southeast.

CAMERON: Southeast of McCall. They had a mile board setting up there - 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ - where the roads fork there to go down to Minnie's (Nelson place).

BOWLIN: Who ran the post office?

CAMERON: Old man Judge Magee was the first man I heard talk of that anybody had one. He had it and ran it until he died. Then old man Tim Lam-bright built a place right back of Mr. Casey Cowart's that went around to the Cotton place, old man Acy Cotton's place. He built a store there and a post office.

BOWLIN: That is on the road between McCall Creek and the old Jordan store?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. Just off the road - wasn't far off the road - just right back of Mr. Casey Cowart, right back west. That road was settled. That road went all the way around there and came out down there by the foot of the hill before you go up to Mr. Jim Buie's.

BOWLIN: How did they get the mail out of the post office to the people?

CAMERON: They had to go and get it. There was no free delivery, you know. I rode, it was eight (8) miles up here to get it.

BOWLIN: In other words, when the mail got to Judge Magee's post office, then the people had to get to that post office from how far around?

CAMERON: I don't know, sir, because I was a chap and I was in Five and the post office was in Four. They did not have one in Five then, as I know of. And I know they must not have had one. They ought to have been

Page Thirteen: Cameron

over at Cains, but there must not have been because old man Dan Buie got his mail up here.

BOWLIN: Do you remember the year the post office was put in there at Judge Magee's?

CAMERON: When was it?

BOWLIN: Yes, when?

CAMERON: I don't know, sir - when I knew anything...

BOWLIN: You were nine (9) years old?

CAMERON: Yes, sir.

BOWLIN: Now what year was that?

CAMERON: Must have been in '89.

BOWLIN: 1989?

CAMERON: 1889.

BOWLIN: You came eight (8) miles, you say, from down in Beat Five?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. Come up here and ride a horse with a big sack to put it in so I wouldn't lose it. And when I would come by Mr. Raulins' he would give me a sack to put his in, and sometimes I wouldn't have to come up here. He would done be sent up here and got it and have it at his house. If he hadn't, I would get his hand and bring it back to his house and go on.

BOWLIN: Did the people down there - did you get their mail or how did they go about it? How did the rest of the people down there get their mail? Did they all come to get it?

CAMERON: There wasn't everybody getting mail; see, there wasn't everybody getting mail. There was lots of people, they did not fool with

Page Fourteen: Cameron

reading papers, you see, and nothing. And they wrote a letter. Just like when my daddy died - we didn't know it. He worked in Donaldsonville, Louisiana. He was a sugar-grader and he didn't get off but once a year. He would have so many days off. I don't know if it was eight (8) or ten (10), in May. He took sick. He had been here and took sick. He came here like tonight and he was going driving and he went and killed a deer. He had to hurry back. This Y. & M. V. road wasn't here then. He had to go to Summit or Brookhaven to catch a train and go to New Orleans, then come up. He got sick after he left here and in October, he tried to come home and he made it up to Summit and there wasn't anybody in there and his mother was in Brookhaven, living in Brookhaven. My oldest sister was staying with her and he got that far. Well, they got word and my uncle, Elbert Jones, taken me and my brother, both, and my mother and Aunt Calina, that was my daddy's sister, to Brookhaven on the wagon. And I got to sit on his knee, and he told me, he said, "Son, if I get over this, I will be with you all from now on. I am quitting with that sugar business." The last word he said, "If I feel better I will be out one day next week." That was Sunday morning when we was leaving there and he died Monday night. We couldn't get the word. There was no phone, wasn't a letter before a week, you know, and we didn't know anything about it. He was dead and buried there in Brookhaven when we knew anything about it. Was on Friday, so you see everybody didn't...

BOWLIN: Didn't get mail?

CAMERON: No, sir. Just like the Buies, they take three (3) or four (4) different papers and that was why they got the mail.

Page Fifteen: Cameron

BOWLIN: How did the mail get to Judge Magee's post office?

CAMERON: By buggy or horse-back. They would go to Brookhaven from that post office this morning, come back this evening. In the morning they would go to Meadville and come back this evening, next morning on to Brookhaven. That is the way they transferred it. Had these little old two-wheel jumpers they called it. That is the way they carried it.

BOWLIN: Louis, who carried the mail? Did the same one take it all the time?

CAMERON: There were two (2) fellows, two. Frankie Belton and Jim O'Neal.

BOWLIN: They were white men?

CAMERON: They were colored.

BOWLIN: Colored men.

CAMERON: Yes, sir. But you see they had, just like you have a job and have me to tend certain parts, you know. Old man Judge Magee would get them to go, you know. Transfer it back and forward.

BOWLIN: In other words, Judge Magee had the authority to send who he wanted to?

CAMERON: That is right.

BOWLIN: Consequently, the colored men of that day went and got the mail pretty often, didn't they?

CAMERON: How is that?

BOWLIN; The colored men that was on there got the mail. How often did they change hands very much?

Page Sixteen: Cameron

CAMERON: No, sir. There wasn't but two (2) of them. First one and then the other one. It was just like you had a job and a certain part you put me on and if there was anything the matter, you decide who else would take my place, you see. And that's the way it was carried out.

BOWLIN: Yes.

CAMERON: It was all under one man's suggestion.

BOWLIN: You said you lived down there on Judge Magee's place one time.

CAMERON: Sir?

BOWLIN: You said you lived on Judge Magee's place?

CAMERON: No, sir. Mac McGehee.

BOWLIN: McGehee?

CAMERON: Yes.

BOWLIN: Is that the one you lived with some?

CAMERON: Mac McGehee? My mother married and we moved there when I was eleven (11) yeas old. And that is where I growed up, you know. That was the only McGehee, well, I worked for old man Cal some when I got grown.

BOWLIN: Was your mother working for Mr. McGehee?

CAMERON: No, sir. We was farming.

BOWLIN: Who was she cooking for at one time?

CAMERON: We was farming. She married. That's how come us out there. And the man she married was farming and we farmed on then until we were all grown and got away.

BOWLIN: Did you and your mother ever stay in at Mr. Dan Buie's?

Page Seventeen: Cameron

CAMERON: Say did we ever stay there?

BOWLIN: Stay at Mr. Dan Buie's?

CAMERON: We lived there for three (3) years.

BOWLIN: You lived there for three (3) years?

CAMERON: Yes, sir.

BOWLIN: And what did your mother do?

CAMERON: She was the cook. She cooked for them three (3) years.

They had about six (6) wage-hands and he had a cook. He kept a cook; didn't do nothing but cook, washing, and such as that. These men all worked in the field. Most all of his hands he had was day-labor. Cause there was three (3) or four (4) different ones - kind of old people living on the place in his houses - and they would hoe and pick cotton. They had five (5) or six (6) men. Them was the farm-hands.

BOWLIN: How old were you at that time?

CAMERON: Well, I went there coming nine (9) years old, and I left there after I was eleven (11) years old. My mother married and we went five (5) miles south.

BOWLIN: While you were there at Mr. Buie's place, did you ever stay in the house with them? What was the occasion mostly?

CAMERON: Stay in the house?

BOLWIN: Yes, with Mr. Buie and them.

CAMERON: I stayed there. I stayed when I did not want to be whipp-ed. I wouldn't go to our house, you see. I was the houseboy. I waited on the tables. I carried all the something to eat in and I carried the dishes

Page Eighteen: Cameron

in and I carried the dishes back. I set the table. There wasn't no screens and I'd stand there and keep the flies off while they were eating, you see. And when they would get through eating, you know, they would want to talk some and I would get close to Mrs. Buie, and I would do this way. (Indicated he would nudge her with his elbow.) And she would go to stacking up the dishes.

Then she would go in the kitchen, and she would say, "I know Louis got tired and he's pestering me. I knowed what it meant." I knowed they would get out of there. When they got through eating she would fix my plate. She would fix my something to eat in her plate, all the time. That is where I eat. And I would carry them plates and things. We set the table then and didn't wait until they got ready to put something on it. I would carry a dishpan full of dishes and I would get here (indicate one end of the table) and turn that plate over and shove it and it would go right there. One right there and one right there. Well, I didn't know they was watching me. So, one day Mrs. Buie come down the hall. She'd been watching it and she had company, the preacher - I cannot call his name - him and his wife were there and she was telling her about how they ought to see me set the table and says, "I look for him to break something," but says, "he don't break nothing." So I glimpsed a shadow here. A table here, coming out of the kitchen, right here in the dining room. I glimpsed a shadow. I looked and didn't see them there. I was placing them plates and the preacher's wife, she laughed and I looked and they went on back, you see. After they were gone, I said, "Mama, Miss Jo and them - I don't know what they was doing - they was watching me,"

Page Nineteen: Cameron

and she burst out laughing and say, "I told her she ought to see that boy set the table." Well, I done like they told me. I turned them plates down and put them knives and forks by them, all the way around. Then put a table-cloth placed it over them, you know, until they got ready to put the dinner on there. I was the houseboy then.

BOWLIN: Now on occasion, you wouldn't go home for certain reasons. Why wouldn't you go home?

CAMERON: Well, if I had done something and I thought Mama was going to whip me, I didn't have no business down there. I had two (2) homes and I stayed up there. That was the best place for me until the old lady got kind of over it. Because if she told us, "Don't you do so-and-so; if you do, I am going to whip you," then you better not do it because she sure going to whip you. She wouldn't whip you on Sunday, didn't care what you had done, but just as sure as you ate your breakfast Monday morning, she tore you up. Mrs. Buie and old man Dan, them was my protection and I stayed under their wing.

BOWLIN: In other words, she wouldn't whip you as long as you were at that house?

CAMERON: No. They wasn't going to let her. That was the reason I stayed up there. If I would have went down home, she would have whipped me. She wasn't going to whip me up there in the yard. No. Well, it wasn't just about as far as your car.

BOWLIN: In other words, about seventy-five (75) feet.

CAMERON: Yes, sir. Of course, I never did run from her. But

Page Twenty: Cameron

if I had been outside, she wouldn't of whipped me out there at that house, because I done made to the big house.

BOWLIN: Louis, what was the price of cotton back then?

CAMERON: Oh, was four (4) to five (5) cents. That was the best.

BOWLIN: What was the cheapest a bale of cotton you remember being sold for?

CAMERON: Well, the cheapest one, they said it weighed three hundred and thirty (330) pounds and it brought three dollars and a quarter (\$3.25).

BOWLIN: Three and a quarter (\$3.25).

CAMERON: Three and a quarter (\$3.25).

BOWLIN: How much flour would that have bought?

CAMERON: Well, it would nearly about bought a barrel, because the flour was three and a quarter (\$3.25) on up to four (4) dollars then.

BOWLIN: What about lumber? Now what was the lumber selling for?

CAMERON: Well, I reckon the lumber was about eight (8) or nine (9) dollars a thousand.

BOWLIN: Was that just any kind of lumber? Or what kind of lumber was that?

CAMERON: Heart. Heart-pine lumber. They wasn't making no other kind. There wasn't no sap. They didn't use no sap. They would get boards out of this heart stuff and they would slab it.

(Begin side two of tape)

Well, they slabbed them and made stovewood out of them and ginwood of the long slabs and made stovewood out of the slab that came off the boards

Page Twenty-one: Cameron

when they sapped. They made enginewood they called it out of the sap slabs and we burned them. They didn't have coal, you see, or nothing. There was heart-wood, cut out of sap pine in the summer to dry to gin with. Where the sawmills was, they would get slabs from there and cut it in four (4) foot lengths for machines to gin the cotton. (Pause.)

BOWLIN: What was your first wife's name?

CAMERON: Viola Cotton.

BOWLIN: And when was she born?

CAMERON: Well, I'd say in '81. June 10, 1881.

BOWLIN: Where was she born?

CAMERON: She was born in Five, because she was born out of there at old man George Cain's. That's where she was born and that is in Five. I don't know what you would call that place, because it wasn't nothing but George Cain's community. Off from there a piece, where there was a whole lot of colored people, it was called the Colony. He didn't live in the Colony; he lived on the edge of it. Just old man George Cain.

BOWLIN: Now, what kind of land did you call it?

CAMERON: Called the Colony.

BOWLIN: Colony?

CAMERON: Yes, sir.

BOWLIN: Now, how many children did you all have?

CAMERON: Five (5). Two (2) boys and three (3) girls. No. Three (3) boys and two (2) girls.

BOWLIN: And what was the boys' names?

Page Twenty-two: Cameron

CAMERON: The oldest was name Rivers and the oldest girl was named Josephine. The next girl was Almeda. The next oldest boy was O.C. Lewis, Jr., and the baby girl was name Harriet Ellamira after my mother and after my wife's mother.

BOWLIN: When was the first cotton gin you can remember coming in here?

CAMERON: That was at the Hardy Cain place. First gin. I didn't see it, but I could hear it. It wasn't no piece from my house. I could see the gin top, but I didn't go up there.

BOWLIN: Who owned the gin?

CAMERON: Old man George Godbold was operating it, but they said it was old man Hardy Cain's gin. It wasn't steam. It was a horse gin. It had a lever and a big wheel set in a box. They had a box up there and it was a circle and had iron cogs on it all the way around. Then another big wheel with little cogs on it, but it was smaller and it worked in this big one that the horses pulled. Then there was a belt on it that went to the gin-stand. That was the first I ever knew of. And the next one...

BOWLIN: When was the cotton gin put up there?

CAMERON: I don't know, sir, because it was put up some time in slavery time, you know.

BOWLIN: What year was it that you remembered it?

CAMERON: That Godbold or Hardy Cain. I'd say the Godbold, because that was all I know was operating it. And the next one that I saw was old man Dan Buie's. They were all horse gins. They were rigged up with the big

Page Twenty-three: Cameron

wheel down here. I reckon that thing was eight (8) foot. The horse would go around and that little cog up there was on a shaft with a pulley on it and that made the gin stand run fast enough to get the cotton out. I didn't see the press. I saw old man Buie's press. It had a wood-screw in it that went all way, nearly all the way down to the ground. It had a box and it would get the cotton out of the flume in the big chute. The cotton would blow in there and they would get wads of it and put it down in there. And would get in there. They would have a bucket and a wad of cotton and they would wet the walls all around. Tramp it down so that it wouldn't rise up. When they got up even with the floor, they had some big doors lying down. They would set them up and put the ends in them. They put what cotton they could in there, in that part of it, and hook to it, and run it up.

BOWLIN: What kind of power did they use to run the screw up to pack the bale?

CAMERON: What kind of power?

BOWLIN: Yes.

CAMERON: Horses and mules.

BOWLIN: Horses and mules.

CAMERON: Yes, sir. Didn't know nothing else. Horses and mules. They didn't have no steam outfit then I know of. Old man Buie had a little old six horsepower engine to run his gin-stand, a little stand for the saw. A little old boiler set up that away and on the hip of it, that little six (6) horsepower engine. When they would gin five (5) bales of cotton they had made a day. They called it a day.

Page Twenty-Four: Cameron

BOWLIN: Five (5) bales was all they could gin in a day?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. And they would start they didn't have lanterns to start with and they took lamps to the gin with globes on them. They would set them in places there where lint couldn't get to the fire and keep that gin running until daylight, then they would put them out.

BOWLIN: Would they gin all night?

CAMERON: They would start before day. They would have to. They couldn't gin the cotton.

BOWLIN: They would start before day and gin after dark?

CAMERON: Yes, sir.

BOWLIN: When was the first modern cotton gin of that day?

CAMERON: They had one over at old man Mac McGehee. And the next one I saw, old man Adam Cotton had it, a steam gin, and a sawmill, a little old sawmill, just to cut lumber for the community around. They had a little old engine and a little old carriage. Two (2) men on the carriage: I wouldn't know what they were doing.

BOWLIN: Louis what was the first church that you remember going to?

CAMERON: Well, it was this church up here on the Buckles place now. It was called Old Bethel. They set it up "Sand Hill" because it was sandy, but they changed it and called it Old Bethel. And that was the first colored church, I reckon, in Franklin County. All the colored people that wanted to belong to the church, belonged to the white people's church. I know one of my aunt's husband and another old man by the name of George Sanders and old man Jessie Rawl's wife, when they died, they died belonging

Page Twenty-five: Cameron

to Mt. Zion.

BOWLIN: Mt. Zion? That is down here in Sixtown Community?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. Down there in Beat Five. They never did get their letters from that church. A whole lot of them got them and went to Bethel. Some to Rose Hill down there on Ninety-eight (highway). The white people after they surrendered in '66 organized Bethel for the colored people. Old man Sam Scott - that's the way they gave it to me and I made a record of it - old man Sam Scott and old man Montgomery, they lived just across the bridge. There was Frank Montgomery and old man Sam Montgomery and old man Allen Runnells and old man Pink Herrington, them was the white men. The colored men were: my daddy's daddy; old man Sam Magee and his brother, Charlie Magee; and Elisha Lee and Isaac Brown.

BOWLIN: Do you remember what year this was?

CAMERON: It was in '66.

BOWLIN: 1866.

CAMERON: That was the way they gave it to me and I put it down and I have had to bring it up at different times. They would mess up on the anniversary. Nobody knew nothing about nothing. But I kept up with the thing from a chap coming up. The first time I went to church my grandma and sister toted me about two (2) miles. I had on a dress - a little red candy-stripe - and they toted me.

BOWLIN: How old were you then?

CAMERON: They said I was three (3) years old. I don't know how old I was. I kept that up and I tried to get them when I was... All my

Page Twenty-six: Cameron

people belonged to Bethel and I went in Bethel when I was twenty-five (25). I joined the church when I was twenty-five (25). I laid my ball, my baseball bat down; I laid my guitar down; and I came off the ballroom floor and I haven't been back in nary one of them places since. I was just ruining myself with the devil's tools, you see. I would hang that guitar up by the side of the bed and Viola would tell me, "You ought to quit." I would wake up in the night, put my feet out and get that thing and go to playing. Down here, T. J. Scott's mother, his daddy was a fiddler. He died and there was some little children and I would have to carry my quitar. I would pick until my fingers would get so sore, you know. They would just keep on after me. I just decided to get out of the world and get rid of the worldly things. And I have been in the church will soon be seventy-two (72) years, seventy-two (72) years.

BOWLIN: Did you ever go to any of the White churches?

CAMERON: Oh, I used to go to the white churches all the time - to Mt. Zion and Ebenezer a whole lot. Well, you see, I would drive the surrey over there. Old man Cal wouldn't go and Dan wouldn't go. Miss Nora and her daughter and Claude and Hollis was a little fellow, and somebody had to drive her. Then I would go to Mt. Zion. I was driving for them. Man, that place would be lined with colored people. And they had a place for them to go in. I went in there with Mr. Manon Cain about four (4) years ago. He wanted to go around through there by the old Dempsey Cain place where there was a place called the Hardy Cain Cemetery. There was a tomb there. It was a Gammill and he asked me did I know who it was. Was it old man Wilkes Gammill's folks? I told him he was related to them. I told him the way I

Page Twenty-seven: Cameron

know, I saw the man. They were building a gin down there on that place. Mrs. Geneva Byrd, old man George Byrd's wife, that was her first husband. And he died and they buried him there. He got me and went down there. I told him, "I say, that's it." I told him I didn't know his given name, but he came here from Texas and brought two (2) girls. That was in 1905 and one of the girls was nearly grown. They called him a Gammill. Well, after he went back, he died and they brought him back here and buried him. That was the tomb.

BOWLIN: What year was that when you were going to Ebenezer and Mt. Zion?

CAMERON: I started going to Mt. Zion along in '94, I think it was.

BOWLIN: 1894?

CAMERON: Yes, sir. I'd go over there when anybody died. My step-daddy helped dig graves and I would go over there then. Well then, Mr. Mac's oldest boy, he and I were nearly the same age. His name was Lee. When he died I thought I was going to die. I would go over there, as long as I stayed in Beat Five, and I went by Mt. Zion. I would ride over there and go to Lee's tomb. I told Mr. Manon I wanted to see that. I hadn't seen it in many a year. He said, "Would you know it?" I said, "I can go right to it." When we got over there, I looked around there at old man Cal's oldest daughter, Lena. She married Willie Whittington and I found hers. I found old man Lee Bowlin. I didn't know. I had been asking what became of him and I found his. I said, "Well, let me go see Lee." Mr. Manon watched me and I went just as straight to it. And then he came meeting me and he said, "You knew where it was." I told him I know it just like I know my hand. I told him then, I said, "They

Page Twenty-eight: Cameron

have changed this. Mt. Zion sits right up on the big hill and the road come in from the north end of it." But they have cut all that out now, just all the way around, and it looked natural to me as it ever did. I used to go over there to Ebenezer - me and Christian Hill's deacon, and one of the other members. We would go to Ebenezer regular. They fixed for them. They fixed for them (colored people) in slavery time. Before you came up the hill to Mt. Zion, you go in on the left side and after you got in the door was fixed for colored folks. They did not bother you at all. I got scared at Ebenezer one day though. Amos Bailey, he was a great religious man. Me and him - there wasn't but us two in there then. We were sitting back there and the preacher came down on something and you know colored people will holler "amen" in a minute. He said it before he knew it and the white folks looked back at us and he done this way (put his finger over his mouth).

The preacher stopped and he said, "Whoever you are, when the spirit hits you, let it be known," so old man Amos commenced raising up. Yes, Lord, I used to go to those churches. Now they weren't the only white churches I went to. I went to Siloam down there on (highway) 98 with one of the Byrd boys on Sunday. Big meeting time and there were lots of colored people there. Didn't have anywhere else to go. They didn't have any churches. When these men (interruption) organized Bethel church and they made my grandpa the clerk. He didn't know anything about writing or nothing, but he had the remembrance. And whatever they voted upon, these white men wrote it for him. He carried it out to where old man Stag Raulins lived. There was a fellow out there who had

Page Twenty-nine: Cameron

a bunch of boys; Ira Byrd they called him - he was a Byrd. And they would put it down on paper for my granddaddy. And some of them would go back on conference day and read the minutes; you see, he couldn't read. My daddy, well, he didn't go to school. My grandpa Wilkes kept them big boys hired out. Hired them out for so much a year a piece and he would get half of that money then. My daddy and some of the young ones that he kept at home then, they had a school, but I do not know where it was or anything, but my daddy sent word for the teacher to send him a copy and the teacher sent him a copy and the next day he wrote that teacher a note. Then they made him the clerk and then me. I stayed on the books fifty-six (56) years down to Bethel and when I left there and came over here, the same thing. I just gave the books up about five (5) years ago.

BOWLIN: Now, Louis, when, what year, if you can remember, did the colored people quit going to white churches?

CAMERON: Well, sir, I don't know, because they had done that before my time. A whole lot of them, well, some of them never did quit. They are the ones I know about, because their membership was there. Old man Jessie Rawls and his wife, Channie, my grandmother's sister, and an old man by the name of George Sanders, and there was another man (he has got out of my remembrance) he belonged to the Cain's, named Charlie Gordon. You see, I never did go there. Never did go until I was about fourteen (14) years old. Never did go to any white churches. When I started I saw there was plenty of people there and they were recognizing them as humans and I just kept going.

BOWLIN: Now the colored people at one time stopped going to the

Page Thirty: Cameron

white churches, for one reason or another or either they were stopped from going. Do you remember when that happened?

CAMERON: No, sir. Well, there was some of them kind of slowed up when the White Caps was. They didn't mean nothing. That was just to straighten somebody out and they need somebody straightened out now.

BOWLIN: Did the White Caps bother the, just the regular colored people?

CAMERON: No, that's what I am telling you. You see, I was in it. I know. They came right out by my door at night as close as from here out there to that little house there. My house was sitting right on the road. Now, I didn't know what they was, but I know that every Wednesday about sundown they would come by there. The creek was about as far as from my house to the highway.

BOWLIN: What creek was that?

CAMERON: Magee's Creek. I was living right down there, just across Magee's Creek. I walked down there to see, to meet them, you know, and speak. They would be two-deep horses, a string of them; I don't know how long. Every once in awhile I would speak and there wouldn't nobody say anything.

BOWLIN: Did they have gowns on?

CAMERON: They had on something or other. I don't know what it was.

BOWLIN: Sheets probably.

CAMERON: No, they had something on their heads.

BOWLIN: Hoods over their heads?

CAMERON: Yes, and you couldn't tell whose horses and mules they were,

Page Thirty-one: Cameron

you know, at black night. My mother said to me, "You quit going down there at the road; they not bothering you." I said, "I want to see who it is." All right, the third time there was about half of them got past me and every once in awhile I would speak, you know. I was going on and they were going on. And one said, I don't know who he was, he said, "That fellow must be working back here somewhere. We meet him right here every evening." One man said - I don't know which one it was, because both of them had a clearing (bald place showing through the hood). I don't know whether it was old man Charlie Jones or John Jones - but he said, "He stays right back there on our place." Well, I knew who it was then, but I never let on and they didn't bother us. My mother got all upset and she wanted to leave and carry us. Miss Hannah Miller came over there and told her, she said, "Harriet, they are not going to bother you and your children." And old man John Jordan came and told her and she was satisfied then. They didn't bother anybody that didn't need to be bother and that is the way I say it. Now they did bother one man over there, old man Wash Magee, but it wasn't on his account. It was on account he had a bunch of bad women there. White men running there throwing away all their money from their folks, leaving it there. They got them out. Yes, sir, they got them out.

BOWLIN: Did they make them leave?

CAMERON: Yes, sir.

BOWLIN: What kind of women did they have? White or colored?

CAMERON: Colored. Colored women.

BOWLIN: Well, was it colored men going there or white men?

Page Thirty-two: Cameron

CAMERON: White and colored.

BOWLIN: White and colored.

CAMERON: Yes, sir. You could go over there, they called it Kentwood.

BOWLIN: Where was that?

CAMERON: Just on the north side of Magee's Creek over here joining Webb Jones' place. They would come by there at twelve o'clock at night, a gang there all the time. Well, they (the White Caps) shot in the women's house. They were not trying to hit anybody because they shot way up, you know. Well, this old man's wife, she was down there and she came out from down there at Kirby Baldwins' and she did a whole lot of popping off and they went back. Now, they hadn't shot in his house. His house is here, one there and one yonder. There was three (3) houses on his place. They hadn't shot in but two (2) of them, but they went back. Well, they didn't know she was there. At the back there was a porch and a water shelf and a foot tub sitting on there. They saw it and thought it was her and they riddled that tub and they shot that tub all to pieces. Old man Wash was sitting on the bedside when they started shooting. Just him and his two (2) youngest girls was all that was at home. The old woman was off down and they shot her man down there at his house. That was the biggest log house you ever saw.

BOWLIN: Louis, when was the first time you heard anything about a law in Franklin County?

CAMERON: The first time I heard about logging?

BOWLIN: Law, law, having law in the county.

Page Thirty-three: Cameron

CAMERON: Law?

BOWLIM: Yes, law.

CAMERON: Well, I don't know, sir. I reckon I heard, oh, I reckon when I was about four (4) years old. I didn't know what it was or what it was about.

BOWLIN: That would be in 1884?

CAMERON: About '84. I was up here where the Laird's stay at old man Jack Butler's and I heard my uncle and another man talking about hauling logs at Judge's mill here. And I heard them talking about how the carriage, but I never seen one until years later and I heard them talking about the bar this carry-log different folks was going to haul logs, you see, and hook to it and haul. Had great high wheels; didn't have but two (2) wheels, great high wheels, and tongs hanging over the axle.

BOWLIN: Louis, I think you must have misunderstood what I was talking about. I am talking about a sheriff in the county or something like that, the law that was in the county.

CAMERON: Well, the first that I heard was Zachariah Butler, Zachariah Butler and his son, Hardy, knocked a colored fellow in the head with a pair of shop-tongs. I was a little fellow then. Wasn't far from my house.

BOWLIN: About what year was that?

CAMERON: That must have been, well, the same time I heard them talking about the law here. I reckon I was about four (4) years old, but I didn't know what it was. Mr. Leek Byrd was a young man. And it seems like old

Page Thirty-four: Cameron

man Hayes was the Justice of the Peace. He told him (Leek Byrd) to go and get him, "You be careful now." I heard him say that much. I know Mr. Leek Byrd got a pistol. I didn't know what it was. I hadn't ever seen anything like that. I didn't know what it was they were going to court for nor anything. I just didn't ask any questions, you know. You set around and whatever you heard, that was all we were allowed to do. Children didn't, wouldn't ask our folks questions. Our parents when they were talking, you didn't say anything to them. If they said anything and it was wrong, you let it be; don't try to correct them at all. They didn't allow that. Just when they would be talking, we would be sitting out yonder like kittens or puppies huddled together, hearing what we could, and keeping it because we knew better than to talk. They didn't do nothing about it (the killing). That was the first court I ever heard of. I didn't know what that was when they said they were going to have court; I hadn't heard about it. I am glad that I didn't know anything about it.

BOWLIN: How old were you when you first, when you were old enough to realize that things were not just like they ought to be as far as the law was concerned? Do you remember when a little more justice was meted out to all people?

CAMERON: Well, I had an uncle that shot a woman with some mustard shot, they called it. He was a long ways from her, but he shot her in the back. They said it was a long way - I didn't know about the distance, what would be a long ways. Just a few of them went in her shoulder and they sent him to the penitentiary for five (5) years.

BOWLIN: Was that a white man that shot her?

Page Thirty-five: Cameron

CAMERON: No, sir. It was a colored man that shot a colored woman and they sent him to the penitentiary for five (5) years. I heard them say they let him out six (6) months before the five (5) years was out. I wanted to know what that was for and they said if he stayed there the full time he would lose his citizenship. I did not know what that was. That was before I was grown. First time I was in court in my life was down there at Meadville. I stayed down here for two (2) weeks for a witness and I wasn't ever called. They was really sending people away from there then. Old man by the name of Jeff Truly from Fayette was judge. Now old man Cassidy was raised among them colored folks down there and they just killed one another when they wanted to and he was judge and didn't do anything. Old man Jeff Truly sent them away from there to the penitentiary like beads on a string.

BOWLIN: Did they send any white people to the penitentiary when he was judge?

CAMERON: Well, he sent three (3) white men from that court. They were people by the name of Wallace. The Wallaces back there. I don't know if you were big enough to remember when they killed Mr. Virgil Chisholm's brother, Bill Chisholm, up on Hominy Ridge. I'd say you wasn't big enough. He had a horse and the Wallace boy, he told him to let him trade him off for him and he traded the horse and I think they said he got twenty-two (22) dollars to boot and he kept the money and Chisholm wanted his money. The way they told it in court (the witness) they went there. He had already pulled his shoes off fixing to go to bed and called him out and shot him down there and another fellow - I forgot who he was, but he was not a Wallace - but he

Page Thirty-six: Cameron

was with them, you know. He was there and Judge Truly sent all of them up.

BOWLIN: Who was the first sheriff in Franklin County that you remember?

CAMERON: I don't remember. The first one I remember hearing them talk about was - wasn't Wentworth - was another one before him. I can't think of his name, but Ernest Wentworth came in behind the first sheriff that I can remember. I don't know what the sheriff was. I had never been that way - just heard them talking.

BOWLIN: What year was that? Do you remember?

CAMERON: That was along, I think, let me see, it has to be '88, about 1888.

BOWLIN: This interview was conducted by Austin D. Bowlin, Sr., on April 22, 1977.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Austin D. Bowlin)

(Transcriber's Notes)

¹The logs were shorter than the band saw cut.