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Colon Floyd Benson

Interviewee

Route 2 Box 190

Newshelton, ms. 39140

Address

Priscilla P. Ghanen

Director

Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin
Regional Library

July 20, 1978

Date of Agreement

Life in Lawrence County, MS.

Subject of Tape(s)

Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History
Data Sheet

FULL NAME Colon Floyd Benson

ADDRESS Rt. 2, Box 190, New Hebron, MS

PHONE _____

BIRTHPLACE Jeff Davis County, MS

DATE OF BIRTH July 15, 1879

EDUCATION Chestnut - Rock School, Grange, MS

OCCUPATION Carpenter; farmer

TRAVELS _____

SPOUSE'S FULL NAME Lola Martha Shows

BIRTHPLACE Unknown

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown

OCCUPATION _____

NUMBER OF CHILDREN Five (5)

NAMES OF CHILDREN

J. C. Benson

Jonnie Irma Benson

Damalu Benson

Erna Floyd Benson

Martha Jane Benson

FATHER'S FULL NAME Wiley Pharoah Benson

BIRTHPLACE Unknown

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown

OCCUPATION Farmer; carpenter

MOTHER'S FULL NAME Martha Matt Ross (Hargrove)

BIRTHPLACE Unknown

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown

OCCUPATION Housewife

MAJOR NATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL EVENTS OF IMPORTANCE DISCUSSED _____

INTERVIEWEE'S AREA OF INTEREST AND/OR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY _____

Depression; Civil War story; Prominent people in Lawrence County;

An Interview with
Colon Floyd Benson
June 6, 1977

Interviewed by
Evelyn Benham

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

BENHAM: This is an interview with Colon Floyd Benson, New Hebron, Mississippi, June 6, 1977. Interviewed by Evelyn Benham. Mr. Benson, what is your full name?

BENSON: Colon Floyd Benson.

BENHAM: When were you born? When were you born?

BENSON: In Jeff Davis County. East of Grange, southeast of Grange.

BENHAM: Do you remember when you were born? Do you remember when, the date that you were born?

BENSON: The fifteenth of July.

BENHAM: What?

BENSON: In 1978.¹

BENHAM: No, when were you born?

BENSON: When?

BENHAM: Yes, what year were you born?

BENSON: Seventy-eight ('78).

BENHAM: All right, I'll tell you what. How old are you now?

BENSON: Ninety-seven (97).²

BENHAM: All right, we'll find out from that. All right, what is your father's full name?

BENSON: Wiley Pharoah Benson.

BENHAM: Mr. Benson, what kind of work did your father do?

BENSON: Farmed and carpentered.

BENHAM: All right. What was your mother's maiden name?

BENSON: Hargrove.

BENHAM: What was her first name, her maiden name?

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BENSON: Oh, her first name? Martha.

BENHAM: Martha Hargrove?

BENSON: Martha Matt Hargrove.³

BENHAM: Do you remember when your mother was born? How old was she when she died? Do you remember?

BENSON: Ninety, ninety-eight (98).

BENHAM: Do you remember where she was born?

BENSON: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: Did your mother work outside of the house, outside of the home? Did she have a job?

BENSON: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: Where was the Chestnut-Rock School?

BENSON: How was that?

BENHAM: Where was the Chestnut-Rock School?

BENSON: It was south of Grange.

BENHAM: Can you tell me about Grange? Can you tell me a little bit about Grange? What it looked like a long time ago?

BENSON: One little old store sitting off aside of the road and another old house out in front of it that they used for a junk house and that was the town buildings. Just two (2) buildings there.

BENHAM: Do you remember what year that was? Do you remember how long ago that was?

BENSON: That was in...

BENHAM: About how old were you when that was?

BENSON: I was about eight (8) years old. Eight (8) or nine (9) years old when I remember that.

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BENHAM: All right. How old were you when you started school?

BENSON: How old?

BENHAM: How old were you when you started?

BENSON: Five and a half years old.

BENHAM: Were there other schools around where you were?

BENSON: No.

BENHAM: Can you tell me where this school was? Where was this school located that you went to?

BENSON: Down at Grange.

BENHAM: I see. Can you describe the school to me a little bit? Can you tell me something about the school?

BENSON: Well, one (1) teacher and a big log schoolhouse. It was built out of logs and you could stick your fingers through the cracks of the logs, you know. And the seats the children had to sit on was an old slab sawed off the log. One end of it stuck in the crack of the schoolhouse and the other one on a block. Had a block laid out across up and down that away and the end of it laying down there. That was what the children had to sit on in the school.

BENHAM: That's interesting.

BENSON: And the fireplace was a big long stick and dirt chimney. Dirt fireplace. Hearth built up, on, about a foot and a half high. Children lit it with lighter knots, fire.

BENHAM: I see. Is this school still standing? Is this school still here? Is this school still over there at Grange?

BENSON: No, it's been done away with long ago.

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BENHAM: How did you celebrate your holidays at school? How did you celebrate your holidays?

BENSON: We didn't have no holidays.

BENHAM: You didn't have any Christmas holidays?

BENSON: What little Christmas we had, we had it at home.

BENHAM: I see.

BENSON: Our daddy would buy us a few firecrackers and he'd shoot a big gun and they'd holler and hoot about daylight, you know, and wake us all up and then we'd get out and shoot our firecrackers. We had celebrated our Christmas at home. We thought we had something though. We'd hang up our socks around the fireplace. Had a big old stick and dirt chimney, hang up your stockings up there and the next morning they'd be filled up with apples and oranges and bananas, not bananas, but almonds and pecans, English walnuts. We thought we had a Christmas right.

BENHAM: That's right, that's right.

BENSON: Maybe once in a while there'd be a stick of candy sticking up there, you know. That was what we all enjoyed the most of any of all of it. Big old lemon stick of candy. Take you half a day to eat it.

BENHAM: What are some of your most enjoyable childhood memories? What are the things that you think about every now and then that happened a long time ago when you were a child?

BENSON: Well, us boys getting together and playing together. Having town balls. We'd meet together on Sunday evenings and bunch of us get together and have a town ball.

BENHAM: A town ball?

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BENSON: We called it town ball then; now, they call it baseball.

BENHAM: Oh, oh, yes, I see. Okay. Well, what else? Can you think of anything? Did you go fishing?

BENSON: We'd set out hooks Saturday nights and go take up the fish the next day. Come in home with a string of fish sometimes dragging the ground nearly.

BENHAM: My goodness.

BENSON: Catch more fish than we could tote home hardly.

BENHAM: Where did you go fishing?

BENSON: In Silver Creek. Set out sometimes twenty (20) hooks, you know, and every hook some mornings would have a fish on it. We'd go to them at night. If we wanted to get a lot of fish we'd go back to our hooks about midnight. Take them up and then reset them and then rebait them and get more fish. And the funniest thing was we'd camp on the creek at night, you know. Build a big brush-heap fire and clean them fish and wrap them up in wet paper and put them in there and roast them. Then when they'd get done, we'd take them out and shake them on paper and put a little salt and pepper on them. And that was what we all ate till we got filled.

BENHAM: That was fun, wasn't it?

BENSON: We had more fun than we have now all together.

BENHAM: That's what everybody says. Can you think of anything else that you would like to say at this time?

BENSON: No, I don't know as I do. I might think of it if you ask questions about it.

BENHAM: All right, did you all go on picnics? Do you remember going

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on a picnic?

BENSON: Oh, yes. Go on a picnic and have these big square dances.

BENHAM: Yes, that's right.

BENSON: That's where they enjoyed it. They had one at what they called the old Midway School down there once when I was about sixteen (16) years old, I reckon - fifteen (15) or sixteen (16). And they had nine (9) couples on the platform there dancing one day. And had two (2) men a fiddling and that was when they all enjoyed the evening.

BENHAM: Where was this Midway School located? Where was it?

BENSON: It was west of Grange.

BENHAM: Going towards Prentiss?

BENSON: No, going towards Rockport.

BENHAM: Oh, Rockport, I see. All right.

BENSON: They changed it from Grange to Midway. It was sort of in the center from what they called Robbins School. Seemed like there was a school they called Robbins, back out on Crooked Creek and they put it all together and they called it Midway. It was just about half way between the two (2) schools, you know, and they brought them together, and that was the second school I went to. And after the railroad came through, they moved it down there to Grange and made a big high school - they called it there at Grange then.

BENHAM: What was the name of this school?

BENSON: Grange.

BENHAM: Oh, the Grange High School?

BENSON: Yes

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BENHAM: When did this railroad go through? You said the railroad came through. What railroad was that?

BENSON: Gulf and Ship, a branch of Gulf and Ship Island Railroad came through Grange there and came through here at New Hebron, too.

BENHAM: Does this railroad come through here anymore? Does this railway, or the train, does this train come through New Hebron anymore?

BENSON: Yes, it passes through once in a while.

BENHAM: What did the young people do to entertain themselves a long time ago? What did the young people do to entertain themselves a long time ago? Do you remember?

BENSON: Well, they didn't do much, only they'd go visiting. Way we'd go visiting, we'd go Saturday evening and stay till Sunday evening.

BENHAM: Yes, I remember hearing somebody else talk about that. What about watermelon parties? Did you ever have a watermelon party or something?

BENSON: Sometimes we'd all get together and have watermelons. See who could bring the finest watermelon, you know. That's when they'd have a big time.

BENHAM: Did you ever take some watermelon and have a watermelon fight?

BENSON: No, we never did get into that. Never did get that far along. We'd shoot watermelon seed at one another, you know, boys and girls, you know; they'd pick the watermelon seed and get them in the fingers and shoot them.

BENHAM: I don't know which is worse.

BENSON: See them jump.

BENHAM: Right. Yes, I think young boys have always, you know, they either pull a girl's pigtails or they tie them to the desk, you know, or they

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do something just like they do now. Do you think they have changed any?

BENSON: No.

BENHAM: They're just about the same, aren't they?

BENSON: Just the same, yes.

BENHAM: They just do something a little bit differently, that's all, isn't it?

BENSON: No, they just dress different.

BENHAM: Yes, they do dress. Do you remember what children wore or what people wore, say, when you went to school? How did they wear their dresses?

BENSON: They wore their dresses down nearly to their shoe-tops.

BENHAM: Really?

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: Do you like that way of dressing?

BENSON: Well, they look more nice than they do now.

BENHAM: Well, I don't know. I like it that way, too. But then, you know, we do have to change, don't we? It's awfully hot.

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: Do you think it was hotter years ago when you were a child than it is today?

BENSON: Hot.

BENHAM: Just as hot?

BENSON: About the same.

BENHAM: Same kind of weather, all right. How old were you when you met your future wife?

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BENSON: I don't recollect.

BENHAM: You don't remember? That's all right.

BENSON: I don't hardly remember where I did first meet her.

BENHAM: Well, all right.

BENSON: Went to Sunday School around and saw her for two (2) summers before I ever decided I wanted to see her.

BENHAM: Well, that's good. All right. What is your wife's full name? What is your wife's full name? What is your wife's name?

BENSON: Lola Martha Shows.

BENHAM: Can you tell me something about your wedding day?

BENSON: Well, that's been so long ago that I near about forgot all about it.

BENHAM: I know, but that is one day that you never should forget.

BENSON: What?

BENHAM: That is one time you should never forget, is your wedding day.

BENSON: Yes, but I forgot about it.

BENHAM: Was the sun shining?

BENSON: Sun was shining the prettiest you've ever seen and had pretty sunshiney evening. I know I passed a man's house, he was building in a pasture, and I was going on the the wedding that evening, and I reckon the buggy was hiding the other folks and the pasture man's house where he was building the house and he said, "Hey there, boy. Go ahead. You're fixing to get into trouble."

BENHAM: Well, did you feel that you were?

BENSON: Well, I didn't think then that I was getting into any trouble,

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but I found out later that I was, I got into it.

BENHAM: All right. (Pause) How many children did you and your wife have? How many children did you and your wife have?

BENSON: Five (5).

BENHAM: Could you give me their names? Do you remember them?

BENSON: Little boy died when he was a year and a half old; his name was J. C. Benson.

BENHAM: Just J. C.? It isn't important what it stood for. All right, what was the other names? What was the second child's name?

BENSON: Jonnie.

BENHAM: Jonnie. And the next one?

BENSON: Damalu.

BENHAM: And the next one?

BENSON: Erna Floyd.

BENHAM: All right, then the next one?

BENSON: June, Martha June.

BENHAM: All right. Did the grown people have any kind of social life when you were growing? What kind of social life was there around where you lived?

BENSON: Well, there was just get-togethers and have Sunday School every Sunday evening at old Midway. That's about the only difference. Sometimes the older people would go to church on Sunday morning, you know, but the Methodists and Baptists had their Sunday School there together at that Midway. They met there every Sunday evening just as regular as Sunday comes.

BENHAM: How did you celebrate the Fourth of July? Did everybody come

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together and listen to all these political speeches like they do now?

BENSON: Sometimes they'd have picnics, you know, around the different places. People would always gather in there and have a big dance or square dances or sometimes they'd have fights and fusses and kill one another.

BENHAM: Yes, I imagine so.

BENSON: I recollect they had a big picnic down here to what they call the Weathersby Gin once and - I'd have to get to think who it was, I think it was Cleve Shivers knocked old man Duckway and killed him off, you know, and they had to - were fixing to kill one another and they got up and got that squashed down, you know, and that broke up the picnic. They quit having picnics after they had fights.

BENHAM: Just like they are today. We haven't improved very much, have we?

BENSON: No.

BENHAM: Well, how far is New Hebron from Grange?

BENSON: Three and a half miles.

BENHAM: When did you move from Grange over here to New Hebron?

BENSON: When did I?

BENHAM: When did you move over here to New Hebron?

BENSON: Well, it was about 1905.

BENHAM: Why did you decide to come over here?

BENSON: Well, after I married, I bought a place back up here, you see, and I moved up there. And then I lived on the farm for about thirty (30) or forty (40) years and the children got big enough to go to school, so I acted the dunce and moved to town. And been suffering here ever since.

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BENHAM: I see. Well, it's not too bad to live in town though.

BENSON: Well, you don't have as good eating as you do in the country.

BENHAM: No, I know. There's a lot of advantages and disadvantages no matter where you live.

BENSON: You don't have that good milk and bread and good molasses.

BENHAM: I know, right. That's right. But you can always go out and buy your molasses, can't you?

BENSON: You can't buy none like you can make though.

BENHAM: Oh, I know that. But you know you couldn't go out there and do it now, could you?

BENSON: Well, I don't know.

BENHAM: You'd try I bet you.

BENSON: I'd try it.

BENHAM: I'm sure you would. It sounds like my husband. How did you get your mail a long time ago?

BENSON: Go to the post office.

BENHAM: I see.

BENSON: Maybe once a week.

BENHAM: Well, how did the mail come to the post office?

BENSON: When did the mail?

BENHAM: No, how did it come? Did they bring it on a horse or mail carrier?

BENSON: Yes, they carried it on a horse.

BENHAM: On a horse?

BENSON: They'd come from Columbia and go to Westville, Old Westville, you know. From Columbia to Old Westville riding a horse and come through by

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Grange and Old Hebron and on up to Old Westville, you see.

BENHAM: Well, just exactly where is Grange? Where is Grange?

BENSON: Well, it's down there, It's, well,...

BENHAM: You say it's three and a half miles from here?

BENSON: It's south of here about three and a half miles.

BENHAM: Well, can you see it right by the side of the road? Is it still there now?

BENSON: Well, yes. There was an old store there now. They moved it from where it used to be, the old school used to be, and moved it up to - when the railroad came through, you see, they moved it from about a half a mile up to on the side of the railroad.

BENHAM: Oh, I see. I see. All right.

BENSON: And they put up two (2) stores there, three (3) stores now, there were three, two, big stores there when the railroad ran through. And they had a sawmill and a grist mill and a gin and then after the Thompsons sold out, dissolved partnership. One of them moved to Texas and the other one sold. He died, you see, and the land then all just went back to his debtors.

BENHAM: I see. Do you remember who the sheriff was when you were a boy? Who was the sheriff when you were a boy? Do you remember him?

BENSON: Old man Dan Lee.

BENHAM: Did they ever find an old whiskey still someplace?

BENSON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Did they have any way back then?

BENSON: Yes. They found several of them. Willard Bourn was sheriff once and he found three (3) or four (4) whiskey stills. And they wound up, he

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was one of them operating some of them.

BENHAM: Yes, that's the way it is. I figured that.

BENSON: He caught the other fellows, you know, and he's still operating his.

BENHAM: I'll be darned,

BENSON: He claimed old man Dan Lee made the best sheriff we ever had, but old man Arch Fox was the sheriff and he had better control over the county than anybody else. People were scared of him.

BENHAM: Well, is that the same Fox called Arthur Fox? Is he related to the Fox family?

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: All right. Can you tell me where the Westville-Monticello Road is? Where is the Westville-Monticello Road?

BENSON: It used to go right along out there.

BENHAM: Outside of this house where you are living now?

BENSON: Yes. Right out there in front of here. The old marks of the old road is still up back there. Came by the old place down yonder where my daddy raised us children. Came in through and went on back up to Westville, you see.

BENHAM: Well, how far is Westville from New Hebron? Do you remember?

BENSON: About eighteen (18), sixteen (16) miles, I think.

BENHAM: I see. Going west?

BENSON: North.

BENHAM: Oh, going north.

BENSON: Yes.

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BENHAM: I see. Is this road still being used?

BENSON: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: How did World War I and World War II affect the people in this county? How did World War I - you remember World War I?

BENSON: It affected them awful bad,

BENHAM: It did? Can you tell me something about it?

BENSON: Well, the one thing they couldn't get any flour. And they couldn't get any sugar.

BENHAM: I remember that. I remember that. We had to use syrup instead of sugar.

BENSON: Yes and you had to use corn bread. I know I went to Monticello once and ate dinner down there at a place and they didn't have a thing cooked but cornbread, you know.

BENHAM: Well, that was mighty good though if you were hungry, wasn't it?

BENSON: Yes. That killed the hunger.

BENHAM: That's right. It's just like biscuits. Biscuits can really fill you up, can't they?

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: And they are good. Well, do you remember the Depression of the Thirties? How did it affect you or the people that you knew?

BENSON: Well, if the people lived at home it didn't hurt so much, but them that were buying and living off - as the old saying is - a paper sack, it hurt them mighty bad. But the fellow used to living at home, it didn't hurt. It didn't affect them very much. Only they just couldn't get the flour and the sugar that they would like to have.

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BENHAM: What did they use, in the Second World War, what did they have to have in order to get the sugar and the flour? What did they have to have besides money? What did they have to have?

BENSON: Well, they had to have a writ or some kind of showing...

BENHAM: Did they have to have a stamp book in order to get the sugar and the flour?

BENSON: Yes, yes.

BENHAM: I still have one of those stamp books that I had to have when I went to get my sugar. Say, like if I was going to can something, I could have maybe twenty-five (25) pounds of sugar, but that was all I could have. Do you remember that? Do you remember when you all had to do that?

BENSON: We didn't have to get that for long.

BENHAM: You didn't have to have a stamp to get things?

BENSON: I don't recollect that.

BENHAM: Well, you know, we lived on a farm, too. We live way out in the country too and I do remember that much about it. Do you know any funny stories? Can you tell me any funny stories that happened to you? Do you know a funny story?

BENSON: Who?

BENHAM: Do you know a very funny story?

BENSON: No.

BENHAM: You don't know any funny stories?

BENSON: No, I don't reckon.

BENHAM: I can look at his face and tell he does know some but he can't recall them. That's all right. That's all right. Do you think the ideas about

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Christianity, have they changed from when you were growing up to what they are today?

BENSON: They have changed quite a bit.

BENHAM: All right, how have they changed?

BENSON: Well, back then they'd go to church; they just worshipped in the house. They'd have their meeting on Saturday and just tend to their business on Saturday and they didn't tend to the church business on Sunday. That was all passed. They didn't tend to their business at all on Sunday. But now that is when they tend to their business.

BENHAM: Yes, yes, yes, that's right.

BENSON: If a man would go to church on Saturday just as regular as they did now, more so than they do now on Sunday. I recollect when I was a boy seeing the old men come by home and getting Pa. Would say, "Wiley, are you ready to go? We're going to church today." And I was a little fellow, you see. I recollect old man Jim Sills came by there one morning, Pa said he wasn't ready. He didn't know he'd be so early, you know; the Sills were always early. He said to him, said, "Let's go, Wiley." Said, "I'm going to church." So he laid down everything and went and got ready; he hadn't even started to get ready to go.

BENHAM: Do you know where Indian Hill is? Have you ever heard the Indian Hill? Indian Hill?

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: Where is Indian Hill?

BENSON: Where is Indian Hill?

BENHAM: Indian, you know, an Indian Hill? Like a mountain, but it's not

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as big as a mountain.

BENSON: I have heard of it, but I can't recall where it is now.

BENHAM: All right. Did you ever know any Indians? Did you ever know any Indians when you were a boy?

BENSON: Yes. They used to come through here camping. I went to their camp many a time where they made baskets, you know.

BENHAM: Well, where did they camp?

BENSON: What?

BENHAM: Where did they camp?

BENSON: They'd just camp on the side of the road. There's one camp up above back up north of here.

BENHAM: Well, where is that? North of here is...

BENSON: They just stayed there for about three (3) or four (4) weeks, you see.

BENHAM: Oh, I see.

BENSON: They had a little tent. They stayed in a tent, you know. They had a fire there and they'd cook their meals, vittles on that fire.

BENHAM: Yes. Do you know what kind of Indians? Who were these Indians?

BENSON: Huh?

BENHAM: What was the name of this tribe of Indians, do you remember?

BENSON: I don't remember.

BENHAM: Was it the Choctaw Indians, maybe?

BENSON: Yes, it was the Choctaw Indians.

BENHAM: The Choctaw Indians. Did any of the Chickasaw stay, too?

BENSON: I know they came that way every fall and wanted to dig his

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potatoes. Pa would let them go in there after he'd get his potatoes dug and they'd go over the field and get them. He'd give them half and then they'd give Pa half what they got after Pa done dug his potatoes. He told them, he said, "No, you can have them all." They told him, "Half of them are yours." Said, "We are satisfied with this." They'd take a hoe and dig that ground all over, all over, you know. I can just see them old Indians in there scratching them potatoes. They dug them potatoes.

BENHAM: That was a nice thing for your father to do to give them something.

BENSON: Yes, he'd always give them his tater patch every fall. They had a camp close by there, you see, where they camped and made baskets. There used to be a lot of reed brakes back there then on the creek down there and they could go cut a little cane and strip it up while it's green, you see, and then they'd sit there and make the baskets. I've seen them old Indian women just a-weaving them old baskets there.

BENHAM: Yes, that was interesting.

BENSON: It'd be right interesting to watch them old Indian women make baskets.

BENHAM: Yes, yes.

BENSON: Then they'd make the baskets and give Ma a basket every once in a while.

BENHAM: Oh, that was nice, wasn't it?

BENSON: I reckon Ma had some of them old baskets when she died, I reckon.

BENHAM: Yes. Can you remember any Indian names? Can you remember any of these Indian names?

BENSON: One of them was named Jim, that's all of it, and there's one

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named Jack and another one - it seems like there's one named Charlie, if I am not mistaken.

BENHAM: All right. Have you ever heard any stories about the Civil War? Have you ever heard any stories about the Civil War?

BENSON: Yes, but I've forgotten all about it.

BENHAM: Can you remember maybe one story?

BENSON: No.

BENHAM: You don't know a thing you haven't heard a thing about the Civil War?

BENSON: Not that I know of. Old folks never did talk around us, talk much about it. They wouldn't talk about it.

BENHAM: Well, did you ever hear any stories from maybe your father? Did your father ever tell you a story about the Civil War and how people after the Civil War would hide everything because of the carpetbaggers that came through here?

BENSON: Yes. They used to take the horses off to the woods and hide them, you know. I know I've heard Grandpa Ross talk about his. He had a little islet on this place and he took his horses all in there. And he had a lot made there. He said the cavalries came through there checking one day before Pa married and he went to Grandpa's one day for something or other, and had a pony fixed out and they started to take it, you know. And Grandpa done had his hid out, you know. Pa said they looked at that pony all over, checked it and said, "Well, it wouldn't do to make the trip on. We'll pass on." Grandpa said he kept his horses, I forget how long in the woods. He'd have to go feed them every day, you know, off in there about a mile, about a half mile from his house so they

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wouldn't. He owned lots of land and he had a big farm to the north of his place and that's where he had his horses. And made them a lot there and put them in there. Kept them there, I reckon, over a month until the cavalry got all through the country.

BENHAM: How did it affect the people's lives? I mean, what did the people do? What did the women do? Did all the men go off to fight?

BENSON: Well, they went off before I was born.

BENHAM: I know, but maybe your grandfather told you a story. You know, grandfathers like to tell stories.

BENSON: He never did tell me. He always was so busy, he never had time to talk to me. He was a doctor and they kept him busy, you know.

BENHAM: Oh, I see.

BENSON: He wasn't much more than that high, you know, and he had a sister that could stand under his arm.

BENHAM: A sister who could stand under his arm?

BENSON: What?

BENHAM: How tall was your grandfather?

BENSON: He was about four (4) feet high.

BENHAM: Oh, he was a little person.

BENSON: And Aunt Billie was about three and a half.

BENHAM: And you, how tall are you?

BENSON: About five (5) foot and four (4) inches.

BENHAM: All right, you are the tallest one of the whole family. Well, that's all right; I'm just saying that. Well, I guess I can't get anything more out of you about the Civil War, can I? No stories?

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BENSON: No.

BENHAM: You can't tell me anything else about the Civil War? Did the people have a lot to eat?

BENSON: What?

BENHAM: What did the people do with their food? You know, when the carpetbaggers came through, what did the people do? What did the women do with their food and their belongings that they wanted to keep the carpetbaggers from stealing? What did they do with it?

BENSON: Where they kept it? They had a little old, you might say, a clothes shelf; they called it a safe, a wooden safe, you know, that kept what they had in there and part of it left over from this meal then it went into the slop bucket for the hogs.

BENHAM: I know it, but where did they keep it? You know, in my house there is a trap door upstairs. That's where they kept all their food when the carpetbaggers came through so they couldn't steal their food. Did your father have something like that in his house?

BENSON: No.

BENHAM: Well, did somebody else have something like that?

BENSON: Not that I know of.

BENHAM: Well, what did they do with their food because I know the soldiers came through here trying to steal it. Did they hide it?

BENSON: They tried to keep it locked up.

BENHAM: Locked up? Did they hide it somewhere? Maybe they hid it out in the woods or something?

BENSON: No, they put it in under the, mostly had it in under the house.

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BENHAM: Under the house. Okay. All right. Can you tell me anything else? Would you like to tell me anything else about the Civil War that you can remember your grandfather or your father talking about?

BENSON: That's been so long ago that I've forgotten and let it all slip my mind.

BENHAM: I know.

BENSON: If I could think it over a while and study about it.

BENHAM: Well, I'll tell you what, you be thinking about it and we're going to take a rest right now, all right? (Pause) Mr. Benson, can you tell me some of the prominent people that lived way back a long time ago? Can you tell me something about the prominent people, citizens of this county that you can remember?

BENSON: Well, old man Dan Longino and Bobby Longino and Jim Thompson and Taylor Thompson, Wiley Benson, John Benson, Charlie Benson, Jim Sills, Gene Sills and Rance Thompson were among the main people around Grange and around New Hebron. Old Hebron, old man Frank Riley, Newt Bush, Frances (Frank?) Hartzog, Anton (?) Hutchins, John Hutchins, Jeff Sutton were the prominent men around Old Hebron. And old man Simp Berry and Dr. Berry, Jim Dampeer, Jessie Chatman were around Old Hebron.

BENHAM: Well, I think you've remembered very well the people.

BENSON: Yes, ma'am. I've seen them at Old Hebron Church nearly every two (2) or three (3) times a year, you know. When I was a boy, I'd go there nearly every fourth Saturday and about half of them that I named over would be there. Them from Old Hebron would be there, but the Grange and around, them folks never would go up to Old Hebron. They'd go to Bethel Church.

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BENHAM: All right.

BENSON: And part of them would go to Crooked Creek Church back down on Crooked Creek.

BENHAM: All right. Can you tell me some of the changes that you've seen in New Hebron? What new changes have happened here in New Hebron?

BENSON: Well, I can't hardly tell how it has changed.

BENHAM: Well, the people have changed just by the way they dress, haven't they?

BENSON: Well, there's one thing the way the men folks still dress like they most always did, but the women folks change up their dresses.

BENHAM: That's right, they've got to change.

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: I mean that's the thing that keeps going.

BENSON: They used to wear their dresses that sweep the ground and now they can't hardly sweep the floor.

BENHAM: All right, what other changes have you seen in New Hebron?

BENSON: What?

BENHAM: What other changes have you seen in New Hebron? What was New Hebron like when you moved here? Did they have any cars? How did people get around? With a buggy?

BENSON: Way they went then was on horseback and in a buggy.

BENHAM: Right. Okay, so what do they do now?

BENSON: They go in cars now.

BENHAM: All right, so that's a change, isn't it?

BENSON: They've changed it the way they go.

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BENHAM: That's right.

BENSON: They'd go down there Saturday, you couldn't hardly find a place to hitch your horse and now you can't find a place to park your car.

BENHAM: All right.

BENSON: You hardly go to town now on Saturday. You don't see anybody in town hardly. Used to you couldn't hardly go to town that the sidewalks would be lined with people sitting there, talking and passing off the time. Now, you never see anybody sitting on the sidewalk at all.

BENHAM: Yes, yes. I remember that. That's the way it used to be in Monticello. It was fun to go to...

BENSON: They used to have fights down there. Now, they don't have a fight.

BENHAM: Now, they do all their fighting somewhere else, don't they?

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: I used to like to go to town on Saturday, about thirty-five (35) years ago, because that was when everybody like you say, came to town.

BENSON: Yes. They go there and enjoy themselves on Saturday evening. End up going to town just like they would going to church on Sunday. Go Saturday evening, that's when they done most of their trading, you see.

BENHAM: Do you think that Lawrence County has changed a lot from years ago? Do you think that this county has changed a lot?

BENSON: Well, it looks like it's done something. It's changed quite a bit.

BENHAM: All right. Have you done much traveling in your lifetime, Mr. Benson?

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BENSON: Not much.

BENHAM: Well, where did you go? Did you go someplace?

BENSON: I went to New Orleans. I went to Mobile, went to Fairhope, went to Spanish Fort, went to Clinton. That's about as far as I got, you know. Went to Jackson a few times. I went to McComb City and worked with my brother on this carpenter trade around. We'd go to Columbia and Bogue Chitto and McComb and Rockport and different places right away building houses, whoever wanted FHA houses.

BENHAM: What were your hobbies years ago? What were your hobbies? Did you have any hobbies? Like, did you like to garden? Did you like to go and work in your garden?

BENSON: Yes, I always worked the garden. Had a good garden every year until this year. My wife said she wasn't able to fool with the canning of it. So, I didn't have any garden and I've just bought.

(Begin Side Two of Tape)

BENHAM: That's right. You were telling me something that happened to you. You were telling me something just now.

BENSON: I just started to tell you about that man said he was camped out one night and the folks were camped out in the Army, you know, and they got so hungry, they decided they'd get something to eat. They didn't know how to do it. Some of them told about the old man and woman that had a big hog that they kept in a chimney corner. So they went that night and went there and put their hand and found the chimney and they found the hog, you know, and they put their hand on its back and rubbed their hand up his back and the old hog said, "Wo-o-o-o," and they found his head and they knocked him in the head

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and picked him up and toted him off. Said he weighed about three hundred (300) pounds and they had the old man and the old woman, you know, and they dressed that hog. They got out a search warrant the next day for them, you know. They had part of it in a wash pot and had three (3) or four (4) big heads of collards packed on top of it, you know, and the sheriff and the officers came and searched. And they searched all around and couldn't find anything, you know. They knew them soldiers had the meat under that, but they claimed they couldn't find anything. So they had that, he said he told about the men cutting the collards and hog but said that's the way we ate it.

BENHAM: I've never heard about collards and hog, but that's one time when they ate it, didn't they?

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: What soldiers were these?

BENSON: Huh?

BENHAM: What were the soldiers? Were they Confederate or Union soldiers?

BENSON: Confederate soldiers. The old man telling me about it was named Meyers.

BENHAM: From around here? Did he live around here, Mr. Meyers?

BENSON: His name was Lee Meyers.

BENHAM: Oh, Lee Meyers. Did he tell you any other stories?

BENSON: No. That was the night that they had a nigger killed a big family. We heard the hollering and screaming but we didn't do anything about it. We went on to Wesson and came back and found out they had a nigger hung up by the side of the road that had done the killing.

BENHAM: Go ahead. Is that all?

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BENSON: That's all.

BENHAM: Well, what other hobbies did you have? Did you like to collect stamps? That's a hobby. Did you have any other kind of hobby that you liked to do?

BENSON: No.

BENHAM: Did you like to carpenter?

BENSON: No.

BENHAM: Okay. All right. Did you like to read?

BENSON: Huh?

BENHAM: All right. Did you like to read?

BENSON: Well, I always read the Bible quite a bit when I was young. I read till my eyes gave out on me nearly about.

BENHAM: All right. Do you feel different now than you did when you were about, say twenty (20) years old?

BENSON: Feel any difference?

BENHAM: Yes, do you feel different? Do you feel different? Just because you're almost ninety-eight (98). How do you feel to be almost ninety-eight (98)?

BENSON: Yes. I feel now like I am an old man.

BENHAM: You do?

BENSON: Back then I didn't think I ever would get old.

BENHAM: I see.

BENSON: I wondered how old people felt, you know.

BENHAM: Yes, yes.

BENSON: I'd see old people getting around and be stiff, you know, and I said, "I wonder how anybody feels when they are that a way." I'd just think

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to myself.

BENHAM: Do you want to live to be a hundred (100)?

BENSON: Huh?

BENHAM: Do you want to live to be a hundred (100) years old?

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: I do, too. I want to see what the world looks like when I am a hundred (100) years old.

BENSON: Well, I reckon it will look about the same.

BENHAM: I imagine it will too.

BENSON: It will have to change quite a bit to change up much in two (2) more years.

BENHAM: That's right.

BENSON: It hasn't changed so much in the last ninety-eight (98) years.

BENHAM: How do you feel about this space program, about people going to the moon? How do you feel about that?

BENSON: I just feel like that is something that is uncalled for.

BENHAM: You do? You don't think that we ought to try to find out about it?

BENSON: I don't think that was intended.

BENHAM: Yes.

BENSON: Way I feel about it.

BENHAM: Yes, well, that's all right. Everybody can voice their own opinion about it. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about? Is there anything else you would like to say?

BENSON: Not as I can think of now.

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BENHAM: Well, can you think of a funny story? You said that you were going to think about it while I was going on with it. Did you come up with a funny story?

BENSON: No, I don't believe I can.

BENHAM: Well, can you sum up your life? What is your philosophy about life anyway? Have you got a philosophy? How do you feel about life in general?

BENSON: Well, it's pretty good. Anybody wanted to make out of it, better enjoy it.

BENHAM: Right, right, I feel that way about it, too. It really depends on you, doesn't it? It depends upon the individual, doesn't it?

BENSON: Yes.

BENHAM: All right, well, thank you, Mr. Benson, for giving us this interview. It's been very, very interesting. This is going to be the end of the tape.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Evelyn Benham)

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Transcriber's Notes

¹ 1879.

² Ninety-nine (99).

³ Ross.