

Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History
Data Sheet

FULL NAME Mamie Rebecca Johnston (Deceased - 1978)
ADDRESS Rt. 3, Monticello, MS 39654 PHONE
BIRTHPLACE Hooker (Silver Creek) MS DATE OF BIRTH 1885
EDUCATION Hooker School, Hooker, MS

OCCUPATION Housewife; storekeeper

TRAVELS

SPOUSE'S FULL NAME George Washington Johnston
BIRTHPLACE Hooker, MS DATE OF BIRTH Unknown
OCCUPATION Chiropractor; farmer

NUMBER OF CHILDREN Four (4)
NAMES OF CHILDREN

Eva Ernestine Johnston
Kathleen Suett Johnston
Maxine Johnston
George Garson Johnston

FATHER'S FULL NAME Obe Jolly
BIRTHPLACE North Mississippi DATE OF BIRTH Unknown
OCCUPATION Farmer

MOTHER'S FULL NAME Mary Catherine Williams
BIRTHPLACE Silver Creek, MS DATE OF BIRTH Unknown
OCCUPATION Homemaker

MAJOR NATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL EVENTS OF IMPORTANCE DISCUSSED

INTERVIEWEE'S AREA OF INTEREST AND/OR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY
Vanilla; Spinning thread; Making cloth on a loom; Playing "straws" on a
violin;

June 29, 1977 Evelyn Benham
INTERVIEWER
DATE

Lawrence County Medic Center
PLACE OF INTERVIEW

Mamie Rebecca Johnston
INTERVIEWEE'S NAME

An Interview with
Mamie Rebecca Johnston
June 29, 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 Mamie Rebecca Johnston, Route 3, Monticello, Mississippi, June 29, 1977. Interviewed by Evelyn Benham.

Mrs. Johnston, what is your full name?

JOHNSTON: Mamie Rebecca Johnston.

BENHAM: When were you born?

JOHNSTON: Oh, I'd have to get you a little bit more record, I don't remember.

BENHAM: Well, how old are you right now? How old are you? Are you ninety-two (92)?

JOHNSTON: I was ninety-two (92) - yes, ma'am - the eighth of June.

BENHAM: All right. Do you remember where you were born? Where were you born?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. I was born at Silver Creek, I reckon you would call the post office. No, Hooker. It was Hooker then.

BENHAM: All right. Do you remember what your father's full name is? What is your father's name?

JOHNSTON: Obe Jolly.

BENHAM: Do you remember when your father was born?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am. I don't.

BENHAM: All right. Where was he born? Where was your father born?

JOHNSTON: You'll have to let me study a little bit.

BENHAM: All right.

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JOHNSTON: I don't believe I can tell you right now. He was born up in the northern part of the state though. State of Mississippi.

BENHAM: All right, that's good.

JOHNSTON: That's all I would know.

BENHAM: All right. Well, do you remember how old was your father when he died? Can you remember how old he was?

JOHNSTON: That's slipped my mind too.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: But then he was way on up. I think he was in the age of ninety (90).

BENHAM: All right, that's fine.

JOHNSTON: Near as I remember it.

BENHAM: All right. Do you remember what kind of work he did?

JOHNSTON: He farmed.

BENHAM: What is your mother's name, her maiden name?

JOHNSTON: She was a Williams.

BENHAM: Her first name?

JOHNSTON: Her first name? Mary Catherine.

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

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am. She was seventy-six (76) when she died.

BENHAM: All right, then I can find out how old by that.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: All right, do you remember where she was born? Where was your mother born?

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JOHNSTON: I believe she was born at Silver Creek.

BENHAM: All right. Did your mother work outside of the house? Did she go off on a job away from home?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: Where did you go to school?

JOHNSTON: Where did I go to school?

BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: All the time I was just in Mississippi.

BENHAM: Do you remember where you went to school? Where did you go to school?

JOHNSTON: The first school I went to was Hooker I believe they called it, and continued there the biggest part of the time because I just went to high school.

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

JOHNSTON: I was seven (7). Because I was always small and I was sickly and I started about six (6). I didn't go as early as they do now.

BENHAM: That's all right. I didn't start till I was ten (10), so it doesn't really matter when you start, you know.

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: It just matters whether you really want to go to school or not, doesn't it?

JOHNSTON: That's the necessary part of that.

BENHAM: Right. I was sickly too when I was little, you know. I had to be taught a lot at home. What kind of materials did you write on when you were in school? Did you have paper to write on? What did you use to write on?

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JOHNSTON: We used to have these, we called them "rough tablets," These old blue-striped, rough tablets they called them.

BENHAM: Did you ever write on any slates?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: You did? I wish in a way they'd come back, you know, and use that in the schools.

JOHNSTON: I do, too.

BENHAM: That was good, wasn't it? Did you have recess at school like they do now?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: What kind of games did you all play when you all were children at school?

JOHNSTON: Well, we played base.

BENHAM: Base? What's that?

JOHNSTON: Ma'am?

BENHAM: Can you tell me about that? What is it? How do you play that game?

JOHNSTON: Well, you marked off, If you were playing, you would be playing on a big square you had for your base games and you'd mark that off and then you'd run all those lines, you know. How long it took you to run, who'd run the most. And there's different ways. Just like if you had a square marked off here and then it marked off into squares, well then every time you'd come where those squares crossed, that was called a base, you know.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: How quick you made it to that base and the next base. All

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such as that is what we played.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: Just different kinds like that.

BENHAM: Is there any other kind of game that you played? Any other kind of game that you played besides base?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am, not unless it was base or... I bet that's some woman coming here this morning to see me.

BENHAM: That's all right. That's all right. No, I'll stop the tape if somebody comes into the room. All right?

JOHNSTON: Always. Let me see. What else did we play? I've forgotten some of them. But we had toad frog and all such as that we played.

BENHAM: Toad frog? What kind of a game is that? What kind of a game is that?

JOHNSTON: Well, each one is a toad frog and he sees who jumps the most and can jump the best. If you have your toad frog. One of them you call your toad frog and then another one and another one and the one that can jump from one of them to the other the quickest, down the lines, you know. And like if this one would jump in five (5) minutes and this one would jump in three (3) minutes, and jump this different, different names for them, you know. Two (2) and one (1) and three (3) and five (5). This has been a long, long time ago.

BENHAM: I know.

JOHNSTON: It's hard for me to think about it now.

BENHAM: Right. I never did hear that but is that a game that most young people played, children played?

JOHNSTON: Not all of them did.

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BENHAM: All right, Did you bring your lunch to school? Did you bring your lunch to school?

JOHNSTON: Yes, we brought it to the teacher,

BENHAM: Oh, you brought your lunch to the teacher and what did she do? Did she keep it for you?

JOHNSTON: Well, she'd keep it till time to eat and then she'd give it to you and tell you whereabouts to go to eat that now, Wherever she told you to go sit down out there and eat, that's where you'd eat.

BENHAM: I see. Well, where did you put your lunch? Did you put it in a box or a lunch box?

JOHNSTON: A little lunch box or basket, A lot of them had little Indian baskets, Some just brought it in a paper bag and their syrup in a bottle.

BENHAM: And what did you have in your lunch box? Can you remember?

JOHNSTON: Well, we had mostly fried sweet potatoes and we had baked sweet potatoes and we had - we called them molasses cookies and I don't know what you'd call them now, Cookies made out of molasses and that's what we called them. And sometimes we'd have sugar cookies, but very seldom did we have sugar cookies. We didn't have them.

BENHAM: Sugar cookies is an old-time favorite, isn't it?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. An old-time favorite and it is yet with me.

BENHAM: That's right. I love them.

JOHNSTON: I do, too.

BENHAM: How long did you go to school, Mrs. Johnston? How long did you go to school?

JOHNSTON: I was just studying, I didn't start until I was seven (7).

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Well, I went until I finished what they call high school. And that's high school yet, twelfth grade.

BENHAM: How old were you when you stopped going to school? How old were you, do you remember?

JOHNSTON: When I quit going?

BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: Well, you might say I quit when I finished high school.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: I never did go to college.

BENHAM: No, but you don't remember how old you were when you stopped high school, do you? Do you remember how old you were when you stopped high school?

JOHNSTON: I think I was twelve (12) when I quit.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: I'm guessing at that and I...

BENHAM: All right. How old were you when you met your future husband? When did you meet your husband?

JOHNSTON: Oh, I'd known him ever since I was a little bitty fellow of four (4) or five (5) years old.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: We lived close together and I'll say, but I don't want to tell a story, I'll say he must have been about, I imagine he was about ten (10) maybe.

BENHAM: Well, how old were you? Oh no, you've known him ever since you were about four (4) or five (5) years old, is that right?

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JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. Yes.

BENHAM: Well, do you remember when you got married? Do you remember your wedding day?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. I remember my wedding day.

BENHAM: Well, can you tell me something about it?

JOHNSTON: Well, I couldn't tell you anything that would be of any interest. But I...

BENHAM: Well, we'd be interested to know. Did you wear a long white dress?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am. I wore gray.

BENHAM: A gray?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. A gray. It had a, I believe it had a, it had a gray silk collar. But it was the same color as the dress, light gray. And my hat was a light gray felt.

BENHAM: Did it have a feather on it?

JOHNSTON: Ma'am?

BENHAM: Did your hat have a feather or did it have flowers?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: It had a feather.

JOHNSTON: It had great big wings where you lay some kind of, a gray flannel wing on the side of it. I remember that. And it was on the - I don't remember very well if it's the correct date or not, but we went to Silver Creek to marry, to his aunt's - she lived in the Silver Creek - and got that Silver Creek pastor there, but I can't remember his name.

BENHAM: Well, that's all right.

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JOHNSTON: And my sister and her husband went with us.

BENHAM: Yes. Do you remember how old you were when you got married?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: How old were you?

JOHNSTON: I married in June. I was twenty-two (22). (Pause)

BENHAM: What was your husband's full name, Mrs. Johnston?

JOHNSTON: George Washington Johnston.

BENHAM: When was he born?

JOHNSTON: Well, he was about - I can't tell you. I've forgotten. The Bible was here.

BENHAM: Well, about how old was he when he died?

JOHNSTON: He was seventy (70) - no, he was sixty (60). I was thinking about my daddy. Oh, I've got it all down in the Bible but moving down here. This hardly, it doesn't seem like home, because there's so many new things.

BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: I was just asking Garson the other day, I remember he bought me a big-printed Bible and gave it to me because I could read it good. And I said, "Son, who's got my Bible?" And he said, "Lloyd's printing in it." I said, "I don't want nobody to do this." Because I went and stayed with Maxine nearly a year and came back over here and stayed with Kathleen nearly a year. But it wasn't with me at neither place and I thought maybe Garson had it, but he said he didn't. And so half of my stuff is at one place and at the other. I can't tell anymore where my head is hardly.

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

JOHNSTON: But now I had several. But he was about sixty (60); I believe if I'm not mistaken, he was sixty-nine (69).

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BENHAM: When he died?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. He's buried there at Wanilla.

BENHAM: All right. Do you remember where your husband was born?

JOHNSTON: There's a Hooker then, Hooker Post Office. Same place where I was born.

BENHAM: All right. What kind of business did your husband do?

JOHNSTON: Well, just different things. He practiced chiropractor, if you know anything about that.

BENHAM: Yes, I do.

JOHNSTON: He did that several years and then he farmed several years.

BENHAM: All right, all right. How many children did you and your husband have?

JOHNSTON: Four (4).

BENHAM: Can you tell me what their names are?

JOHNSTON: Eva Ernestine.

BENHAM: All right, who else? What's the next one?

JOHNSTON: Now what was it you asked me?

BENHAM: I asked you what was the name of your children.

JOHNSTON: Yes. Eva, and Kathleen Suett.

BENHAM: Kathleen who?

JOHNSTON: Suett.

BENHAM: Do you know how you spell that?

JOHNSTON: Kathleen is separate and Suett is different.

BENHAM: How do you spell Suett?

JOHNSTON: S-U-E-T-T.

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BENHAM: All right, and who is the next child?

JOHNSTON: Maxine.

BENHAM: The next child, Maxine?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: What's her middle name? What's Maxine's middle name?

JOHNSTON: Let me think just a minute. Well, what is her name?

BENHAM: Well, that's all right. That's all right if you can't remember. I'll call up Garson and find out.

JOHNSTON: And I have one boy.

BENHAM: All right, his name is Garson. What's his middle name? Garson what?

JOHNSTON: George Garson.

BENHAM: Oh, George Garson. All right, is this the house that now you are living in, the home that you came to as a bride?

JOHNSTON: No.

BENHAM: Where did you come to when you got married?

JOHNSTON: Over at Hooker Store, station.

BENHAM: Oh.

JOHNSTON: Not, why I wouldn't even call it a county, no? Well, it just closed up is all I know. Hooker Post Office.

BENHAM: Is that where you went?

JOHNSTON: No, we were married at, who was it who married us?

BENHAM: No, no, you didn't understand me. I said where did you go when you got married? Where were you living when you got married?

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JOHNSTON: I was living in the same place.

BENHAM: Oh, Hooker?

JOHNSTON: But we went to Silver Creek to get married at his aunt's.

BENHAM: Yes, but what house did you live in? Do you remember the house you lived in when you got married?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. It's still standing.

BENHAM: It is? Where is this house?

JOHNSTON: You pass it every time you go to Silver Creek, I imagine.

BENHAM: I see. All right, that's good.

JOHNSTON: It's just a kind of a small house. Small frame house.

BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: Built on his daddy's place here. He bought his place and my father and mother lived not too far the other side and his father and mother not too far this side.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: So we lived pretty close together.

BENHAM: That's good. Well, can you describe your first house that you came to when you got married? What did your house look like?

JOHNSTON: Not much more than a chicken coop.

BENHAM: A little chicken coop, I see.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. Just a frame. Let's see, it was four (4), no, five (5) room house - a very small five (5) room house - and a porch, of course. We lived there the first year, I believe, right down close to the creek, Crooked Creek.

BENHAM: Crooked Creek. All right. Is this where your children were

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born and raised? Near there?

JOHNSTON: Let me see. I had, I don't believe I had but two (2) born there, and as you say, just about raised them. It was close to, not too far from Crooked Creek Church.

BENHAM: All right. How long have you lived in Wanilla, Mrs. Johnston?

JOHNSTON: Wanilla?

BENHAM: This is right where you are living right now. How long have you lived here in this house?

JOHNSTON: Well, we've lived here about, I reckon we've lived here about five (5) or six (6) years, I believe, before we moved and then we came back to it.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: I would say somewhere near that.

BENHAM: What did Wanilla look like when you first came here? What did Wanilla look like when you first came here to live?

JOHNSTON: Well.

BENHAM: Did it have a school here?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Where was the school? Do you remember?

JOHNSTON: Let me study now. Now, before we lived here we bought a home in Rockport or Oma - I don't know which you would call it and we lived right, well, we bought a pretty good little farm - about three hundred (300) acres out there between Oma and Rockport. Up on the called it the old Steel place. Bought it from Mr. Homer Little. And we had chills so bad we couldn't stay there and so we moved then down to Wanilla, right straight on down the river.

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BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: And we had chills all the time when we were in Oma. Had to keep the chill bottle sitting on the table. And after we moved to Wanilla we never did have, but one of us one time had one chill. That's all we ever had.

BENHAM: I'll be. Well, I never heard of that. Well, what did Wanilla look like? What did Wanilla look like when you came here?

JOHNSTON: It looked a whole lot like it does now, but it was, I reckon almost the same; I can't say. Just as well as I remember when we bought it. There was a difference in it, but not too much to talk about, I don't reckon.

BENHAM: Well, can you tell me, did you ever have a flood around here when Pearl River would flood? Did it ever flood up here in Wanilla when Pearl River would flood up in the spring?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. It did about once, I believe.

BENHAM: How did the people get around?

JOHNSTON: Well, they had to stay at home most of the time.

BENHAM: Well, when they did get out, did they go in a boat?

JOHNSTON: Boat, yes. And they had some that wouldn't have gotten in that boat; I wouldn't.

BENHAM: No, I don't think I would either. I wouldn't have gotten close to the river anyway, would you?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am. I wouldn't.

BENHAM: Do you remember way back there where I live, where the Hilliards lived, did the water come up over that road? You know the road that runs in front of my house?

JOHNSTON: Goes to Oma, used to be?

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BENHAM: Right. Was that road all flooded?

JOHNSTON: Well, now I don't know because I didn't get out enough to know.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: I think it was.

BENHAM: Do you remember what year that was?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am, I don't.

BENHAM: Did anybody drown during that flood?

JOHNSTON: Well, if they did, I don't remember it.

BENHAM: All right. Do you remember about the tornado? Have you ever heard about the tornado from maybe from your parents of 1882 that demolished all of Lawrence County except for one hundred fifty (150) persons living then? Did you ever hear about this tornado that wiped out almost all of Lawrence County? Do you remember that? Did you ever hear your mother talk of that tornado? Or your grandmother?

JOHNSTON: I probably have, but I don't remember it now.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: But I do remember both of my grandmothers.

BENHAM: You do?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: What were their names?

JOHNSTON: One of them was named Williams. One of them was Preacher J. P. Williams' wife and Grandma on Daddy's side was Jolly. Her husband was a Sunday School teacher. They were both named John. The preacher's name is John, but I never did see neither one of them. They died before I was born.

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BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: But I saw both of my grandmothers. (Pause)

BENHAM: All right. When did you decide to open your store in Wanilla?
When did you open your store in Wanilla?

JOHNSTON: You want when I opened it just right by myself after my husband died?

BENHAM: No, when your husband was living.

JOHNSTON: I don't know whether I know how many years or not.

BENHAM: Was it about thirty-five (35) years ago, maybe?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. It's been every bit of that long.

BENHAM: Or maybe forty (40) years then.

JOHNSTON: Kind of hard to remember because you see me and my whole family was here then. Well, then after he died we got rid of the store and then I went back and bought me another one and put in a store again and I stayed in it. I believe something like over five (5) years or it might have been more years than that. Wasn't nobody but just me, you know, in there.

BENHAM: That's right. I remember.

JOHNSTON: But I don't think I - could find out by looking at some of the books, something. Just how many years I stayed in there.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: And I tended to it, you might say, myself. The children were all gone away from home. Garson was in the post office close to me and he helped me out all he could, but I tended to it lots of times just by my lone self. Nobody but just me.

BENHAM: I know you did. I know you did.

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JOHNSTON: And I enjoyed it. It was just like a whipping when I left it.

BENHAM: I know it. I know it.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. Only I don't want to go back.

BENHAM: I know. I remember that. I remember. I remember you used to have a post office in your store.

JOHNSTON: Yes, that Garson put his office in there when he was working. He had it up in one corner and he helped me out in the store when he was in that post office.

BENHAM: Well, why did they put the post office there? Do you know why they put the post office there?

JOHNSTON: Well, you see when Mr. Sam Wilson bought that land where the post office was and let's see now, I believe that was when the, it seems like that was when the post office was between there and Mr. Wilson's store and then the Mississippi Central Railroad.

BENHAM: It's still there; it's still going in front of there.

JOHNSTON: Yes, it's still there. Yes, I know it is. I think that's the reason why he moved it down there, because they bought that land there from the Mississippi Central Railroad.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: Well as I remember.

BENHAM: All right, all right. What kind of things did you sell in your store? What kind of things did you sell in your store? Do you remember?

JOHNSTON: Lord, I don't know. In the dry goods line and then things like that. I didn't have no, well, I had all kinds of meats and cloth. I didn't have any fine cloth. Well, all kinds of cotton goods, sheets and bedspreads and

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all like that. Right smart in the dry goods line and the grocery.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: From a nickle stick of candy on up.

BENHAM: I remember that, right. How did you keep warm in the wintertime in your little store? How did you keep warm?

JOHNSTON: Just by a heater, an iron heater. I finally got gas, but I didn't have it for a good while.

BENHAM: All right. When the mail came to your little store, you know, your little post office, how did you get the mail sent out to the people around here? Did they come and get it or did you send it by somebody?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am. They came and got their mail.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: It wasn't connected with my store at all.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: Garson framed off a place up in the corner and then put a wall in where it wouldn't and they'd come. He cut a door where they could come in from the outside in the post office without coming in the store.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: Unless they wanted to.

BENHAM: Yes, I see. Okay. Do you remember this railroad that went through Wanilla? It came all the way from Jackson and went to New Orleans. You remember that?

JOHNSTON: Yes.

BENHAM: What was the name of that train? Do you remember the train?

JOHNSTON: That one that came down from Jackson?

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BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: Oh, that was the G. M. & O.

BENHAM: And what was the name of the train? It had a name, you remember the name?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am, I don't.

BENHAM: Was it ever called the "Rebel?"

JOHNSTON: It was called the Gulf and Ship Island.

BENHAM: Yes, but they called it another name. Where the passengers got on the train to go to New Orleans and they called it, do you remember what they called that train? Did they ever call it "The Rebel?"

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: The Rebel.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. Now I recall, that's what they called it.

BENHAM: I remember.

JOHNSTON: That's the Rebel.

BENHAM: And did you have a depot station there?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: I remember that, too. Do you remember when they took that train off of there?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. I remember, but I don't remember the date.

BENHAM: Why did they take that train off of there? Do you remember why? Why did they take the train off?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am, I don't.

BENHAM: All right. Do you remember who the depot agent was?

JOHNSTON: Well, that's the furthest back I remember one I believe is -

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oh, pshaw, I couldn't even remember my own name now. Oh.

BENHAM: Was Mr. Barr ever the depot agent?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am, it wasn't Mr. Barr. Mr. Barr was one that was there but this wasn't Mr. Barr. This was further back than Mr. Barr.

BENHAM: Did they always have a depot agent there?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: All right. Well, that's all right.

JOHNSTON: I know it well as I know your name but I just can't think of it right now.

BENHAM: Well, that's all right. Well, it doesn't matter. You were telling me something about playing an instrument. What kind of an instrument did you play?

JOHNSTON: No kind that's worth anything much. Now, I can play an organ but I don't play a piano.

BENHAM: All right. What else did you play?

JOHNSTON: I played a French Harp and a Jew's Harp.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: Regular kid nigger playing, I reckon you'd call it.

BENHAM: And you said you played the violin, didn't you?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. No, ma'am. I didn't play the violin; I couldn't.

BENHAM: Who did?

JOHNSTON: But my father was a fine violinist.

BENHAM: All right. And you played with him along on something else, didn't you?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. I played with him so much.

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BENHAM: Do you remember any songs that you played? Can you remember a song that you played with your father?

JOHNSTON: Oh, well, he could play most anything he wanted to.

BENHAM: Well, can you remember a song that you played together or maybe just by yourself? What kind of music did you play on it?

JOHNSTON: Well, sometimes it was regular old break-down music and singing and then again it was regular sacred music. He could play most any kind. Music or "frolic songs" I call them.

BENHAM: What do you call them?

JOHNSTON: Frolic.

BENHAM: Frolic songs, I see. That was kind of a gay, ragtime kind of song.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: What is your favorite song?

JOHNSTON: The one I can think of right now, his favorite song was...

BENHAM: No, your song. What's your favorite song? What is your favorite song?

JOHNSTON: Well, the, I'd say the one I heard him play was, "Home Sweet Home." I thought it was the prettiest but he played any kind of instrument, I mean any kind of music, sacred songs, and I call them "break-downs" or anything else.

BENHAM: I see. Well, what is your favorite song? What song do you like the best?

JOHNSTON: I like that "Home Sweet Home" the best.

BENHAM: Do you know how to sing it?

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JOHNSTON: Ma'am?

BENHAM: Can you remember how to sing it?

JOHNSTON: Oh, I couldn't tell. I don't know if I could carry the tune now or not. Because since I, you see I fell and hurt myself when all this started and it seems like everything is changed about me.

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

JOHNSTON: I don't know, I might carry it, but I don't believe I could.

BENHAM: That's all right.

JOHNSTON: I know how it goes in my own mind.

BENHAM: Yes. All right. Well, if you can't sing, that's all right. How do you feel about people going up to the moon? Do you think that's a good idea?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am, I don't.

BENHAM: Well, why do you feel that way?

JOHNSTON: Well, look what weather we've had since they went up there. I know Garson asked me the other day, he said, "Mama," he says, "do you remember what you said to me when there was the trip they made to the moon?" And I said, "I don't know. There's no telling what I said." He said, "You said that they were fixing up now to go to fooling with the moon and first thing you knew we were going to have all kinds of weather." And he said, "Now what are we having?" I said, he said, "I thought about it the other day," he said, "I told Eula (?) it's turning out just like Mama says." He says, "Mama says did you ever see such weather as we are having now?" And he says, "Doris said, 'No,'" And says he says, "Well," he says, "the first thing Phillip and I thought about when I..." I hate to be scratching but I got moles all over me.

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BENHAM: That's all right, just go right ahead.

JOHNSTON: And he said, "She said, 'Yes, they're fixing up now to get the moon all messed up so we'll have all kinds of weather,'" and said, "Now, what are we having?" And he said, "I thought about that the first thing about what you said." I said, "Well, I hadn't thought about it, but I said I reckon I was right." Well, you don't, you never do, you never have seen the weather like we're having now.

BENHAM: It's been so, it's terribly hot.

JOHNSTON: Yes, it's just all of it. It won't rain only in spots and when it does it comes a flood. Our ground, it's just as dry out there as it can be. I don't know how in the world Thomas has made anything, but he has. Because he works so hard, I reckon. I said, "Well, that's the first time I thought about what I said to you about that." He said, "Yes," said, "you said, they're fixing up now to get the moon all of it in a mess, get it all messed up with this weather." I said, "Yes, son, I remember saying it, but I haven't thought about it." No, ma'am. I don't, I don't like it a bit. I don't think it's right. The moon's the moon and it's got it's own ways to do and do by God.

BENHAM: That's right.

JOHNSTON: Not to go controlled by us.

BENHAM: I know it. I think that I believe they have carried it too far.

JOHNSTON: That's what I think. They've carried it too far.

BENHAM: You know, they want to change the whole personality of a baby before it is born and all of that and that's not good either.

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am, I think it's silly too.

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BENHAM: I think we ought to try and learn how to get along with each other. That's more important, isn't it?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. That's what I think.

BENHAM: Help each other, love each other because God told us that was what we were supposed to do anyway.

JOHNSTON: That's right. But I hadn't thought about saying it, but I remember then that I did say it.

BENHAM: Have you done much traveling in your lifetime, Mrs. Johnston?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am. Never had any desire to.

BENHAM: What are some of your hobbies?

JOHNSTON: Work, I reckon.

BENHAM: Well, years ago did you do any quilting?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. Quilting, crocheting, knitting - just most anything - picking cotton and spinning thread.

BENHAM: Spinning thread? You made your own thread? You made your own thread?

JOHNSTON: I made a many a yard of my thread.

BENHAM: My goodness.

JOHNSTON: You pick the cotton and then you have some little "cards" they call them and you made your cotton into rolls about as big again as my finger and get that in rolls and then you spin that into thread and when you get enough thread spun that you wanted, why then, you put it on another "spool" they call it. Now I...

BENHAM: Well, how did you spin the thread? Did you have a spinning wheel?

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JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Oh, a spinning wheel. And that's how you made your thread was on a spinning wheel. How did you make your thread?

JOHNSTON: Many times I made cotton into rolls, they call them.

BENHAM: Oh, I see.

JOHNSTON: About that long.

BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: About as big as my finger and right about that long.

BENHAM: Was that about twelve (12) inches long? All right.

JOHNSTON: The last thing you made was you made the thread on your loom.

BENHAM: Oh, on your loom? I see.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. Make your cloth.

BENHAM: Oh, I see.

JOHNSTON: You take them quilting, the rolls you put them on the spinning wheel and there's where you made your thread.

BENHAM: Oh, I see.

JOHNSTON: And then you turn it round down there and it would make that spread and then when you get through with that you'd get it on the loom. That's a great big frame, big as that fire thing there, I reckon. Big old looms.

BENHAM: Would that be about two (2) feet square?

JOHNSTON: Bigger than two (2) feet.

BENHAM: Bigger than that?

JOHNSTON: You can make it just as many yards as you want to.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: And make it about that width, I reckon. That would be about

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as wide as we had any.

BENHAM: About thirty-six (36) inches long, maybe?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Something like that?

JOHNSTON: Not less than that.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: And then they dyed it.

BENHAM: Oh, you dyed it too?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: What kind of dye did you use?

JOHNSTON: Well, I think they just used what we call "Diamond Dye" now in different colors so your clothes would be different.

BENHAM: Did you ever make your own dye?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am. I never believe, yes, most of the time they got wild peach, it made, I believe it made green dye, and I forget what it is that made red dye.

BENHAM: Did you ever use elderberry to make dye?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. And oh, so many different kinds. Well, good morning. (Pause)

BENHAM: Mrs. Johnston, how long did you say you had your glasses? How long have you had this glass?

JOHNSTON: I don't know.

BENHAM: You said about ten (10) or twelve (12) years?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am, maybe twenty (20).

BENHAM: Twenty (20) years. How did you get those glasses?

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JOHNSTON: I got them...

BENHAM: This one? How did you get it?

JOHNSTON: You don't have to pay nothing. Every time you bought a can of coffee, pound can of coffee, you get a glass given to you.

BENHAM: Oh, yes.

JOHNSTON: And that's the way I got mine.

BENHAM: That's a nice way.

JOHNSTON: That hand, I know you were wondering if I shake that way all the time. But when I fell, I hurt that hand.

BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: The doctor said, and for a while when I got anything in my hand I'd just shake it. I'd pour it all out. But that stopped and just here lately I notice I'm worse at it again. But the doctor told me that I'd shake and would be bothered with it a good while. And he said I hurt that hand.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: But that's the way I got them glasses. I got them when I was running the store.

BENHAM: They're beautiful.

JOHNSTON: Ma'am?

BENHAM: They are very unusual glasses.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: They are good and thick, too.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. They are, they're heavy.

BENHAM: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about?

JOHNSTON: What's that?

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BENHAM: Is there anything that you would like to tell me about?

JOHNSTON: Well, it doesn't dawn on me now, but I will think about it when you leave.

BENHAM: Yes, I know.

JOHNSTON: Then I'll think, "Oh, pshaw. I didn't tell Mrs. Benham so and so."

BENHAM: Well, when you played those instruments, did you ever take any straw and use them for an instrument and something?

JOHNSTON: I wish I had a dollar for every straw I did, because you know Anna Sills at New Hebron that's been in the bed for so long with arthritis? I bet you, I'd be no telling how many times for that girl. You know she could play a violin. She was fine playing a violin and we would sit down alongside of the road when we had to go about a mile together from school. And every time they had anything to do at the schoolhouse, they'd tell that girl, now to bring her violin. They wanted her to play for them and have music for them, you know, and she'd have that violin.

(Begin Side Two of Tape)

BENHAM: You were telling me about taking the straws. What did you do with the straws? What kind of straws were these?

JOHNSTON: Just regular old broom straw - it doesn't matter. You have to have two (2) so you have one in each hand.

BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: And as they play the violin, you beat them straws.

BENHAM: Where would you beat them, against each other?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. On them, you see there is three (3) strings, four

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(4) strings on a violin where the music comes in with the violin first you see. Four (4) or five (5), I don't remember which it was now.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: And you stand there and beat on them straws as that other person plays. You beat them and you can hear it if you make a sound, you know. Like that straw, like that wire on that.

BENHAM: Oh, oh, you mean the straws were what you played with on the violin?

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: No, that's wrong.

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am. They have wire strings on that.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: And you got them straws there and whipping on them strings, you know.

BENHAM: Oh, oh, yes.

JOHNSTON: And that's making the music and...

BENHAM: Yes, oh, you took the straws and played it, whipped it on the strings of the violin. Oh, yes.

JOHNSTON: And she wanted me to have the violin strings and she played. She'd sit down and play the violin. Just like this was the violin, she played close to the strings and I stood here and hit them strings with this thing and that all went together, you know, and it made it a whole lot prettier.

BENHAM: Oh, yes.

JOHNSTON: And we'd stay there, I think sometimes we'd stay there an hour beating with that straw, you know, on that violin. And when we got ready

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to go we knew they were going to ask us how come us so late. Now, Mrs. Sills said not long ago, said we always had a story ready, said the story we'd tell them. We'd tell them the teacher kept us later that evening and that's how come us so late. And she said she knew they didn't believe it and that's just what we said. We said, "Teacher kept us late." And then we'd go to running. We'd turn off and go our path. She'd go on her straight path until we got home. And she laughs about that yet. Said she is all the time sending me word to come to see her, but when I did, be sure and bring my straws. And I thought I was going to get to go not very long ago. She is right close to my age. She is not quite as old as I am. So she always sends me word now to bring my straws. She wanted me to beat my straws for her. She couldn't play the violin of course, for they say she's just all, her fingers are turned back this a way, just every which way.

BENHAM: Oh, oh.

JOHNSTON: She can't walk, she can still talk, but her fingers are just turned this way as that a way. It don't make no difference which way they are. She couldn't play to save her life, but she thinks she can or believes she can. I told her I'd give anything in the world to go beat straws for her just one (1) hour and I would. I'd give anything in the world.

BENHAM: I bet you would. Where does she live?

JOHNSTON: She lives in Hebron.

BENHAM: Oh, New Hebron.

JOHNSTON: She's been down in bed now, oh, she's been in bed a year, about a year. But she's been down where she has to have a walker or can't write or

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anything like that for I don't know how many years.

BENHAM: And what is her name?

JOHNSTON: Anna Sills.

BENHAM: Oh, Anna Sills.

JOHNSTON: She was Anna Scarborough. She was, this nephew of mine that was here, she is his aunt.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: It's his daddy's, his mother's sister. She's been down I don't know how long she has been down.

BENHAM: All right. Where did you play this violin? Was it at school that you played?

JOHNSTON: At school and on the road, on the road home.

BENHAM: On the road home.

JOHNSTON: When we were supposed to be going home.

BENHAM: I see.

JOHNSTON: We were going in the right direction. We were on our way home, but that's the way it was. It was when we were turned out in the afternoon after the practicing was over with. Well, we would get up about that far, about a mile or a mile-and-a-half and then we'd sit down on a log or something or other to do that playing. And the rest of them would stand there listening to us. Just the ones that were going our way. We'd stay there until we felt like we had better go home. It might be too late.

BENHAM: That's right. What is your philosophy, Mrs. Johnston? What is your philosophy about life in general? How do you feel about life?

JOHNSTON: About life?

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BENHAM: About life. How do you feel about life? Do you feel that you've had a good life? That you'd do it all over again if you had a chance or how do you feel?

JOHNSTON: About life. Well now, yes, I would. I would. There wouldn't be no use to say I wouldn't live it all over again. If I could, I certainly would. I've always had to work. I've worked all my life, but I didn't mind that. I appreciated that work. Now, Daddy didn't work us too hard and he always paid us or gave us something for the work. But I would live it over. Because I've had some mighty hard days. But I'd go back and live them over. I surely would.

BENHAM: Well, how do you feel, you know, when somebody asks you what is your philosophy about living, Do you have a philosophy about living? Do you believe that if you treat a person right they would treat you right? Or somebody else would treat you right?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. I certainly do.

BENHAM: Do you believe in the Golden Rule?

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am. I believe it if you treat anybody right, they'll treat you right. You usually get what you send.

BENHAM: That's right. My mother believed that, too.

JOHNSTON: Yes. That's the way I do. I've always had to work a lot and stayed home. Didn't go too much. Had no money to go off anywhere on, because my daddy was a farmer and a farmer didn't have any money. We had lots of stuff to eat. We had homemade stuff to eat and fresh and all like that, but he never did have a whole lot of money because he was a farmer.

BENHAM: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about? Can

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you remember some things you would like to tell about now at this time?

JOHNSTON: Well, if I could remember well enough, I expect I have. But I don't know whether I could remember it now or not.

BENHAM: All right. I want to thank you for giving us this interview, Mrs. Johnston.

JOHNSTON: Well, you're certainly welcome to it. I'm not doing a thing.

BENHAM: Well, you've told me something and you know it will help somebody, you know. Anything that is said on the tape is going to be used for people who want to research and want to know what life was like in this county, say sixty (60) years ago or a hundred years from now. They'll say, "Well, let's listen to this tape by Mrs. Johnston." And then they'll know that people used to make thread and all sorts of things that you told me.

JOHNSTON: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: All right, and I want to thank you in behalf of the program for giving us this time to talk to you.

JOHNSTON: Well, you are certainly welcome to it. I wish I could do better, but you know just all of a sudden to tell you when if you wanted to know different things. You can't make your mind come to it to save you life. Now, I'll think of a lot of things that just won't, I don't know, that just won't come to me now.

BENHAM: That's all right.

JOHNSTON: Sometimes I think I am losing my mind.

BENHAM: No, no. I think all people are like that. I'm forgetful; young people are forgetful. It's not just old people that are forgetful.

JOHNSTON: No, ma'am, it's not.

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BENHAM: It's everybody, we're all forgetful.

JOHNSTON: We're all forgetful.

BENHAM: In a way it's good, isn't it? I'd like to just remember all the good things so that's probably a good thing anyway. All right, this is the end of the interview, Mrs. Johnston. Thank you again.

JOHNSTON: Well, you're perfectly welcome for what little I've told you, but what little I told you was the truth.

BENHAM: All right.

JOHNSTON: But I didn't tell you very much. But I did have a pretty good mind, but I've just been here too long and then me being sick and ____ too. I can't remember things like I used to do.

BENHAM: Well, I think you did a very good job of remembering.

JOHNSTON: Well, I asked the women here sometimes. These two (2) women that stay here with me, they don't stay here with me at night. Thomas comes and stays here with me at night. They said they both have invalid husbands and one, her's already died. He was paralyzed. He had a stroke and he's been dead now about, oh, I don't know, long before I knew her. Well, that great big stout woman that was talking with you, her husband is in bed most of the time. He sits up a little bit. But he can't walk, they have to carry him. The other woman that takes and brings him down here and then takes him back every evening, she's not here today. She'll be here tomorrow. And this one that was so big and fat, she's cripple. She's got arthritis; it's that old arthritis is in her legs. This leg sometimes she can't hardly walk. You see how big and stout she is and he's in bed. He usually gets up, I believe she said, about eleven o'clock nearly every day, and he can't do anything, no kind

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of work that he can do. But he can get up and sit up for about a half a day, I think. And he's been that way I don't know how many years. They have some children, but they're all married - all except one or two. They have to work to make a living.

BENHAM: That's right.

JOHNSTON: They're both mighty good women. They're just as good...

BENHAM: Yes, they look like they are.

JOHNSTON: Just as good to me as they can be.

BENHAM: That's marvelous.

JOHNSTON: They tell me that I'm the best patient that they've ever had. I told them I'm pretty near the oldest in here because they're all strangers to me and I was to them. But they know most of the people in and around Monticello.

BENHAM: Yes.

JOHNSTON: They lived down there or lived between here, these two that stayed down here with me except at night. They go back home, but they live about halfway, oh, I reckon about halfway from here to Monticello. It doesn't take them any time to drive it and they both drive. They've got children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

BENHAM: My goodness.

JOHNSTON: This big, fat one here, she's got a great-grandchild was born, I don't know, about two (2) weeks ago, I reckon. So they are just as good and nice to me as they can be. I try not to lift things heavy and I try not to call them to do anything only just what I have to.

BENHAM: Yes.

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JOHNSTON: Because they said, "Well, Mrs. Johnston, don't mind calling on me. That's what I am here for." I said, "Yes, but you're not here to wait on me all the time. You've got to have some rest." And I try to do the same thing.

BENHAM: That's good.

JOHNSTON: I try to be good to them and I always brag on the food, about how good it is. And this boy does too, my nephew. I said something about, "Thomas, does their cooking make you think of my mother's cooking?" And he said, "Yes, ma'am, just like Gramma's cooking." Well, you know if it's like grandma's cooking, it's all right.

BENHAM: That's right, that's right. All right, I'm going to stop the tape.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Evelyn Benham)