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Mrs. Jaycee Lester

Interviewee

L.C. Medical Center

Mantoloking, Miss

Address

Priscilla P. Gohansen

Director

Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin
Regional Library

July 18 1978

Date of Agreement

Communities of Sontag, Nola, and Tryus in Lawrence County, MS.; people,

places, and events.

Subject of Tape(s)

Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History
Data Sheet

March 16, 1977
DATE

Lawrence County Medic Center
PLACE OF INTERVIEW

Joysie Mae Smith Foster
INTERVIEWEE'S NAME

FULL NAME Joysie Mae Smith Foster
ADDRESS Lawrence County Medic Center, Monticello PHONE _____
BIRTHPLACE Lawrence County, MS DATE OF BIRTH 1900
EDUCATION attended Douglas School and Tryus School

OCCUPATION Housewife

TRAVELS Iowa, New York, Tennessee, Canada

SPOUSE'S FULL NAME Isaac Arthur Foster
BIRTHPLACE Nola, MS DATE OF BIRTH _____
OCCUPATION Blacksmith

NUMBER OF CHILDREN Eight (8)
NAMES OF CHILDREN _____

FATHER'S FULL NAME Joseph Smith
BIRTHPLACE Wesson, MS DATE OF BIRTH 1876
OCCUPATION Farmer; Mail carrier

MOTHER'S FULL NAME Mattie Sutton
BIRTHPLACE Nola, MS DATE OF BIRTH 1868
OCCUPATION Ran a boarding house, then worked in one

MAJOR NATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL EVENTS OF IMPORTANCE DISCUSSED _____

INTERVIEWEE'S AREA OF INTEREST AND/OR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY
Towns of Sontag, Nola, Tryus; Shiloh Baptist Church; Songs; Poetry;
Stores, post office, schools, doctors; Tornado; Peeley Ivy Bridge;
Lorenzo Bridge; Douglas Schoolhouse; Fascinators

An Interview with
Joysie Mae Smith Foster
March 16, 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 Joysie Smith Foster, Lawrence County Medic Center, Monticello, Mississippi, March 16, 1977. Interviewed by Evelyn Benham. Mrs. Foster, what is your full name?

FOSTER: Joysie Mae Smith Foster.

BENHAM: What is your address?

FOSTER: It's Medic Center, Lawrence County Medic Center, Monticello, Mississippi, at the present.

BENHAM: When were you born?

FOSTER: I was born in 1900 between Sontag and Shiloh Baptist Church. But when I was born, we lived about a half a mile off of the road and the post office was on the opposite side of the road and it was in the corner of Mr. Allen White's yard. And he had a son, a boy, and he called him "Son" and a dog they called "Tag." And my daddy was the first mail carrier, Joe Smith.

BENHAM: Did you work away from home?

FOSTER: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: I'll get back to what about the Sontag, but we want to get this in first.

FOSTER: Okay.

BENHAM: What is your father's full name?

FOSTER: Joe Smith, Joseph Smith, but he was called Joe for short.

BENHAM: When was he born?

FOSTER: Well, my daddy was only twenty-nine (29) years old when he got

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killed and he got killed in 1905 and I was just five (5) years old. He was the first mail carrier.

BENHAM: Well, when was he born? Do you remember when he was born?

FOSTER: No, ma'am. Let's see, it was back in 18... No, I don't remember just what year. I have it in my Bible record.

BENHAM: That's all right. If you don't remember, you can just say, "I don't remember."

FOSTER: I've got it in my Bible.

BENHAM: And where was he born?

FOSTER: He was born near Wesson.

BENHAM: What kind of work did your father do?

FOSTER: He was a farmer and a mail carrier.

BENHAM: What is your mother's maiden name?

FOSTER: Mattie Sutton.

BENHAM: When was she born?

FOSTER: Well, I can't tell you that either, because my mother was sixty-six (66) years old when she died and she's been dead, she would have been one hundred and nine (109) years old if she had been living now, so she was born in about 1800 and...

BENHAM: Well, we will find out, we can go back, you know, sixty-five (65) years ago. And where was she born?

FOSTER: She was born at Nola.

BENHAM: Where did you go to school?

FOSTER: My first year of schooling was at the old Douglas Schoolhouse at Sontag. I started at the age of five (5).

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BENHAM: What was the name of the school?

FOSTER: Douglas Schoolhouse.

BENHAM: Can you remember who your teachers were?

FOSTER: Miss Jenny Douglas was my first school teacher.

BENHAM: All right. Can you name some others?

FOSTER: Well, we didn't go there but just a, you know, year or two before they moved the school to where it's at now.

BENHAM: How large was the school?

FOSTER: It was just one big room.

BENHAM: And they had all the grades in this big room?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Well, how many grades were in the school?

FOSTER: Well, as well as I remember, they didn't teach no higher than eighth grade at that school.

BENHAM: And so all those grades were in one big room?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Well, how did the children get to school?

FOSTER: They walked. And they went down under the spring and toted water up in the old water buckets and they drank out of, everybody out of the same dipper.

BENHAM: Yes, I have heard about that. What subjects were taught in the school?

FOSTER: Well, you know, I was tiny - that was my first year in school and I don't remember too much, you know. There was reading, arithmetic, and primer they called it then, you know.

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BENHAM: Yes. What did the children do when they finished elementary school?

FOSTER: Well, there weren't too many of them that finished, you know, at the old Douglas Schoolhouse. But when they built the new school, they taught then until the eleventh grade. And at that time, they had consolidated that school in Monticello, you know.

BENHAM: Yes. Well, what did they do when they got through with the school? Did they go on to high school or college?

FOSTER: A few did, a few did. Now, I had a cousin, Ben Hemphill, he was a preacher and a school teacher too. And he stayed at my mother's and finished his school years there and then he went on to college, you know. There were a few went on to college, but most of the people back then thought they needed the boys on the farm, you know.

BENHAM: And what did the girls do?

FOSTER: They were doing the washing, starching, ironing, and mopping, you know. It was awful for a girl to work, seeming they thought.

BENHAM: Yes. What kind of clothes did children wear then?

FOSTER: Well, they wore high-top button shoes and the little dresses about halfway between the knees and the ankles. And they called them little fascinators, you know, when it was cold; you call them head scarves now. And the little coats and sweaters were pretty much like they are now, but, you know, they all wore mostly long coats to school because we had to walk to school. And I've shaken the icicles off my little fascinator several mornings when I'd get to the schoolhouse. It would be drizzling and freezing.

BENHAM: Where did you get your clothes?

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FOSTER: Well, we got most of ours, you know, in my childhood days, there in Sontag from old man Jim Armstrong's. He had a store there and he had groceries and dry goods. And he supplied all the colored folks up at Brackett's, you know, and he would take a deed of trust on a little old one-horse wagon and mule, you know, and he would supply them for the, make the crops, you know. And sometimes he would have more little wagons and mules than he had any need for.

BENHAM: I see. What did you do after school? Did you have to help at home?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am, because after my daddy died, Mamma had five (5) little mouths to feed. And Sam Morton came in and bought up the timber through the country and my mother sold our home and bought a home in Sontag. And it is now in the heirs of Callie Lee's family, our old home there is. And she took in boarders and we children, you know, had to help her with the chores.

BENHAM: Yes, and where is that house? Is it still standing?

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

BENHAM: And where is that?

FOSTER: It's in Sontag and Mr. Jim Armstrong's store used to be right down mostly in front of it, you know, but it's been done away with. You go through Sontag; it's very easy to see, because the front room was round, you know, oval-shaped on the outside. You can tell it and it's still a beautiful old home standing there.

BENHAM: Next time I go through Sontag I am going to find out where it is so I can go and look at it.

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FOSTER: It won't be anything, you know, not to find, because it's a big nice house. Did you ever know where Jimmy Douglas' store was?

BENHAM: I don't know. Yes, I remember Jimmy,

FOSTER: It's just across, out in front of him. There's no house between ours and the road, you know.

BENHAM: I see. Oh, well, yes, I'll go there and see. Yes, I remember Jimmy very well. We used to get cow feed and chicken feed from him, you know, when they had their little store.

FOSTER: Yes, yes.

BENHAM: What kind of toys did you have?

FOSTER: Well, we mostly had homemade toys, you know.

BENHAM: I think they're the best anyway.

FOSTER: Yes, that's right. Stuffed rag dolls, you know.

BENHAM: Yes.

FOSTER: And Christmas times if we got an apple, an orange, and a piece of candy, we had a great Christmas.

BENHAM: Yes, you were satisfied with a little. And that's what I think we all need to be, don't we?

FOSTER: I do too. We sure do. Because children don't know when Christmas comes now.

BENHAM: No, unless they have just gobs of things and then they're not very happy. What kind of games did you play with other children?

FOSTER: Well, when we were in school we played what they called "town ball," you know, and baseball and when I got up larger, I played basketball. I was on the first string on the basketball and I'm going to add this little

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bit to it. And whenever we'd go somewhere and play another school, there'd be some farmer would bring his mule wagon and take us in wagons because there weren't any cars, you know, then.

BENHAM: Yes.

FOSTER: And we played Tryus. There used to be a school at old Tryus. And we went out and played them and when we went to leave, the little yell that they said back to us was:

Chew tobacco, chew tobacco

Spit, spit, spit.

Sontag, Sontag

Git, git, git.

When we came back home, our coach said, "If you all ever say that to another school, I'll never take you to play another game with anybody." Because he didn't like it, you know. Because he was telling us to get on, because we won the game.

BENHAM: What holidays did you celebrate during the year?

FOSTER: Well, about the only ones we were ever out of school was just a day or two for Christmas. And if Christmas came on Friday, we went back to school Monday morning.

BENHAM: How did you celebrate them?

FOSTER: Well, we mostly just had, old Uncle Billy Gibson had a gin right behind our house and in the later years he put in a peanut thrasher. And we weren't farming then, you know, we could get the peanuts for twenty-five (25) cents a peck. And my mother had a big old comfort range because she had so many boarders to cook for. And we'd get a peck of peanuts, you know, and parch them and we just enjoyed sitting round the fire eating peanuts,

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you know. And my mother had an organ and the young folks about two (2) or three (3) nights out of the week would come and we'd stand around the old organ and then we'd sing gospel songs. It wasn't like the songs they sing today, you know. But when nine o'clock came, the old folks said, "It's bedtime," and everybody knew to scat, you know.

BENHAM: What song did you like the best that you sang?

FOSTER: Well, there was one of the boarders that boarded at our house was named Mr. Lon Prine. And he could play and sing, I thought, the sweetest "Life is Like a Mountain Railroad." I know you've heard it. "Life's Railroad to Heaven," I believe, is the name of the title of the song.

BENHAM: And what's the title of the song?

FOSTER: "Life's Railway to Heaven," I think is the name of the song.

BENHAM: "Life is Like a Railway to Heaven?"

FOSTER: "Life is Like a Mountain Railroad," with its engines and its curves, you know.

BENHAM: Yes, I see. And that was the song that you liked the best?

FOSTER: Yes, that stands out in my memory more than any one else.

BENHAM: What kind of food did you eat at home?

FOSTER: Well, we mostly ate vegetables and of course as I said, my mother having so many boarders, you know, there were cakes once in a while. And in the spring of the year, she'd buy quite a few huckleberries because the colored folks would bring them in there for about twenty-five (25) cents a gallon.

BENHAM: I remember that.

FOSTER: And we'd have huckleberry cobbler pies, you know.

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BENHAM: There's nothing that can beat that, can it?

FOSTER: No. And we had plenty milk and butter; we had that, too.

BENHAM: What did your mother cook?

FOSTER: Well, she was the chief cook and bottle-washer at our house, you know. She was the main cook, you know. And whenever I'd come in from school every evening, I'd make for that old range stove to get a soft baked potato and a piece of fat meat out of the pot of where she'd boiled collards or peas or whatever vegetables she had for dinner, you know.

BENHAM: And that really tasted awfully good, didn't it?

FOSTER: Oh, yes, it did.

BENHAM: Where did she get her groceries?

FOSTER: She got them down at Mr. Jim Armstrong's store because he was right there right at us, you know.

BENHAM: Where did you go to church?

FOSTER: At Shiloh Baptist Church. Then for a few years after I got up some size, they decided they were going to build a church there in Sontag. A Methodist and a Baptist church. And I went there, you know, for a little while, but came a tornado and blew them down and so everybody went back to Shiloh. And my granddaddy was a founder of Shiloh Baptist Church.

BENHAM: Is that so?

FOSTER: Old Granddaddy Bear.

BENHAM: What was his name?

FOSTER: Bear.

BENHAM: Bear? How do you spell that?

FOSTER: B-E-A-R.

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BENHAM: B-E-A-R. That's very interesting. They tore down that old church.

FOSTER: Yes, it was first one little log room and then they tore that down and made one a little larger and this is the third building that they have at Shiloh now. And now then it has twenty-two (22) Sunday School rooms, a library, and a large, you know, auditorium. And it's beautiful and about a fifty thousand (50,000) dollar pastorium. And all of our ancestors are buried there, you know, along with part of my family.

BENHAM: You are a landmark. That's a landmark for your family in a way, isn't it?

FOSTER: That's right. My mother and granddaddy and my daddy and great-granddaddy all are buried down in there. Most of my relatives and my husband and three (3) of my sons are buried there.

BENHAM: What was church like on Sundays?

FOSTER: Well, it was just wonderful now. We lived at Sontag and there would be a road full of us would walk to Shiloh to Sunday School every Sunday morning. And our teacher was Mr. Allen White. And I can still remember little things that he would tell us, you know, in our Sunday School class. And it was just, oh, you know, just a happy get-together. But we just had church service once a month, you know. But everybody enjoyed it, you know. There was nothing common about it, because it was neat, fresh, and new to everybody that came once a month, you know.

BENHAM: What was one thing that you can remember that he said that sort of made an impression on your life at that time?

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FOSTER: Well, he told us a little story in our Sunday School class, you know. He said, "Now, this is just a little story but I want you to get the moral of it." He said, "There was this man and his wife," He said, "His wife would go to church every Sunday," and said, "she just fussed at her husband because he wouldn't go." But said, "While she was at church, he was at home reading his Bible and meditating on God's word. And he said to her one day, he said, 'Why do you think you are so much better than I am?'" Said, "You go to the same places I do and you say the same things that I say." And said, "Finally this woman died." And said, "When she got to the Pearly Gates, she said, 'St. Peter,' says, 'Oh, let me plead one more time for my husband.' Says, 'He's lost; I could never get him to go to church.'" And said, "He says, 'Let me look in the Lamb's Book of Life and see if his name is there.'" And said, "He came back and said, 'His name's there, but lady, yours can't be found.' Said, 'What you did was for self-praise and for people to see what I've done.' And said, 'He's at home humbly seeking God's will and see, his name's here, but yours is not.'" And he said, "Now that moral of that story is don't do anything just to see and be seen; do it for the love of God and, you know, have the love of a human being in your heart."

BENHAM: That's a very good moral.

FOSTER: Yes, it is.

BENHAM: And I am going to remember that.

FOSTER: And my Granddaddy Sutton, over in Nola part of the world, you know, he gave me a little story when I was a kid that has always gone with me. He said, "Joysie," he said, "let me tell you a little story and then I'll give you the moral of it." He said, "Back in my days, there was no such

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thing as ice." And said, "Everybody had a shed over the wells." And said, "They'd put the churn under the shed, out at the well on the well shed and put water in it so the milk wouldn't ruin before it was late that evening, so we'd have fresh buttermilk for supper." And said, "She just tied a cloth over her churn." And said, "There was two frogs jumped up on that cloth and when he did, he was so heavy, went down in it." And said, "The frogs began to kick." And said, "One of them said, 'Oh, I am tired. I'm going to give up. I got all this old cream all over me,'" And said, "The other one said, 'No, don't give up, just keep kicking.' He said, 'No, I'm going to give up.'" And said, "He gave up and died." And said, "That other frog just kept a kicking and in that sour cream, after a while, there was a little ball of butter came up there and the little frog got up on it." And said, "When the woman came out and saw that frog in the churn," said, "She dashed milk, frog and all out, and so the frog went off saying, 'Don't ever give up, just keep kicking.'" And he said, "Now, Joysie, don't ever give up in life, just keep a kicking." He said, "If you'll just keep a kicking, you'll be successful."

BENHAM: And did you do that?

FOSTER: I've tried to.

BENHAM: That's wonderful. And it shows right now the way you are.

FOSTER: Yes. I've tried to. I've tried to just keep a kicking.

BENHAM: I can see it in your face.

FOSTER: And my mother always said, "What can't be helped now must be endured and endured with patience and let very well alone." So I've always tried to take those three (3) things as my motto of life.

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BENHAM: That's very good, That's very good, We're going to let you rest for just a few minutes and I'm going to turn off the tape recorder.

(Pause) Mrs. Foster, can you describe the church that you went to?

FOSTER: Yes. It was just a little one-room log building and just a front door to go out at. And around the church were just little water oaks, you know, and they had what they call riding blocks. The ladies would ride to church horseback and they had those blocks for them to get off on, you know. And they served the lunch on the outside and some would spread their lunch on that block because it was about four (4) feet square, you know, and didn't have any such thing as a place to eat on inside of the building then. And they brought the water all the way from the spring down under the hill for the water, you know.

BENHAM: And what was the name of your church?

FOSTER: Shiloh Baptist Church.

BENHAM: Shiloh, yes.

FOSTER: It's still standing, but it's not the same building.

BENHAM: Yes. Right, I already asked you that. Mrs. Foster, could you please describe your house for us?

FOSTER: Well, it was a four (4) bedroom house with the dining room led out on the front porch and so did the living room. And it was huge bedrooms, you know, where there could be two (2), three (3), four (4) beds in the same room and a stacked chimney in the middle of the house, you know. And mother and us would occupy the stacked chimney in our bedrooms and the boarders would occupy the other side of the chimney in the living room, you know, and their bedrooms were all on the front and ours were on the back.

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BENHAM: What kind of furniture was in each of the rooms, you know, just to say like in the dining room? What did you have in the dining room?

FOSTER: We had nothing in the dining room but just a huge table and had chairs all around it. Now, that was what was in the dining room. And in the kitchen, it was just the kitchen and the cook table just by themselves, because they knew nothing about sinks. And our water, we had a pump at the back doorsteps, you know, and pumped the water and carried it in. And had no water works or no lights or anything like that.

BENHAM: What kind of a light did you use?

FOSTER: Kerosene lamps.

BENHAM: Well, let's see now. What other room? What about your bedroom?

FOSTER: In one bedroom she had a couple of beds and a chifforobe and in the men's, the boarders' bedrooms, it was just the beds and a washstand with a pitcher of water on it and towels hanging in, you know. And in our little back bedroom was just a table and a couple of beds, you know.

BENHAM: Well, can you tell me sort of roughly how many boarders you had?

FOSTER: Well, she had sometimes eight (8) or ten (10).

BENHAM: That was enough, wasn't it?

FOSTER: And Mr. _____¹ he put a sawmill up there, you know, and he had quite a few boarders too.

BENHAM: Oh, Mr. Small, wasn't it?

FOSTER: No.

BENHAM: No, that's right. No, he had a gin.

FOSTER: Well, you know, Will Covington had a big mill there before

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Small came in there.

BENHAM: What was the most exciting time of the year?

FOSTER: Christmas. Because we'd always have a little concert at school, you know.

BENHAM: Did you have a play?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. My mother, when I was small, gave me voice and my older sister music. And I told her she ought to have twisted it around and given me music and her voice. And Dwight Newton, one of the little Newton boys and me - he had a beautiful voice and just a little songbird - and we'd always have to sing, and some of the little songs, I thought of them the other day. One of them was "Stingy Kid" and the other one was "Daisies Won't Tell" and "Put On Your Old Gray Bonnet," you know.

BENHAM: Well, can you sing one of those little songs for us? What about the stingy, stingy what?

FOSTER: "Stingy Kid."

BENHAM: Why don't you tell me about "Stingy Kid?" Can you sing just a few lines of it?

FOSTER: Stingy kid, stingy kid
Your apples all you've hid-
I don't know just right off.

BENHAM: All right. Well, which song can you remember the best?

FOSTER: Well, I don't know whether I could sing all of them, you know, through or not. But I just remember just a few words of all of them.

BENHAM: Well, that's all right. I think that's good.

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FOSTER: Put on your old gray bonnet
With the blue ribbons on it,
While I hitch old Dabney to the shay.

BENHAM: Did you go traveling around a lot?

FOSTER: Not in my young days I didn't, but I have in my older days. I had the pleasure of going across to the Niagara Falls and over into Canada part of the world.

BENHAM: Oh, that's marvelous,

FOSTER: And I visited in Iowa and in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and in New York, _____, New York, and Buffalo, New York, I've traveled right smart in my old days, but I didn't get to travel when I was young.

BENHAM: Well, that's what I mean, How did you go?

FOSTER: Well, we went by train a time or two and then we went through the country a time or two.

BENHAM: I'm talking about when you were little. The little bit of traveling you did do, how did you go?

FOSTER: Well, it was either in the buggy or either afoot. You know, people didn't mind then walking two (2) or three (3) miles to church and Sunday School.

BENHAM: Well, it was safer too, wasn't it?

FOSTER: Yes. And there'd be a plumb roadful of us and we just enjoyed it, you know.

BENHAM: That was a part of the ...

FOSTER: Growing up.

BENHAM: Of the growing up was to walk and to walk together, wasn't it?

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Please tell us what the towns of Sontag, Tryus, and Nola were like long ago. Take Sontag, for instance.

FOSTER: Well, Sontag was, it was a friendly place. And old Uncle Jim and Aunt Ella Douglas was just the mother hen to all of us. And Aunt Ella, she would gather up all the little girls in summer about two (2) or three (3) times a week and carry us all to the swim hole, they called it, you know, then, down dry creek and she taught us all to swim. She'd bring two (2) syrup cans and a cracker bag and put them under our arms - that won't let you go under - and taught us all to swim. And we just enjoyed it so much. And Uncle Jim, he would take us all possum hunting and we would just get the most fun out of that, you know. And we'd go up in what was called the sixteenth section possum hunting, and his little daughter, Gertie - she married a Wilson, some of you might know her, you know - and she'd beg to go and he'd say, "Gertie, you aren't big enough to go. When you get a little larger you can go with us." So finally, one night he said, "Well, you can go with us tonight." And she got up and she got crying, said, "Daddy, I'm tired," And he said, "We're possum hunting, Gertie," And when he carried her back home that night she wasn't willing to go with us anymore. But we all just enjoyed it and we have so many sweet memories about Aunt Ella and Uncle Jim Douglas.

BENHAM: Well, did they have a school at Sontag?

FOSTER: Well, they built one after the Mississippi Central, you know, they put the railroad through here. They built a school where it's at today. And it's just across in front of Smith's grocery store now.

BENHAM: Yes.

FOSTER: But that school there is called Uncle Jim's Community Center.

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When Uncle Jim Douglas realized his days here were about over, he bought the old school building and donated it to Sontag for them to have their home demonstration clubs or any kind of meeting they wanted there, you know, and it's called Uncle Jim's Center and so he's left something behind him, you know, that people are still enjoying today,

BENHAM: That's good. I wondered what they were doing with that old building.

FOSTER: Ms. Ollie V. White - she comes down here regularly and she's a member of the home demonstration club and she doesn't miss a meeting out there. And they invite different bands and different singers to come, you know, and they have a little charge, you know, to come in and hear them and that helps them out with their home demonstration club. And the home demonstration Club bought a lamp and put it in the Governor's Mansion. And they were invited this last summer for tea because they were recognized, you know.

BENHAM: That's quite an honor, isn't it?

FOSTER: Yes, it is.

BENHAM: Well, did you have any doctors at Sontag?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. We had Doctor Everett Woods.

BENHAM: How many doctors did you have?

FOSTER: Just one, Dr. Everett Woods, you know, Well, Eugene Little was there for a while but he left from there and went to Nola when Nola built up and so did Dr. Everett Woods. And he was our doctor there when the tornado destroyed his home.

BENHAM: And what year was that tornado?

FOSTER: Well, honey, no, I don't remember what year it was. But anyhow,

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there was a man there, Mr. Jim Polk - George Polk, I believe they called him - and he told them, you know, that he saw a certain bird go through and where it went and he said in certain days, so many days, there was going to come a tornado through there and destroy, you know, and be a bad one. And everybody, they'd see a bird go through, they'd say, "There goes one of Mr. Polk's tornado birds," you know, making light of it. But that morning that he told them it'd be that day, Doctor Everett, it began to cloud up, he said, "Well, I'm going to run to the post office and get my mail before it starts to raining." And while he was in the post office it turned awfully dark and he ran out on the porch and he got out there just in time to see his home, Mr. Newton's home, and Mr. Marvin Watts' home just going to the breeze, you know, and when he ran to the house as fast as he could go, he called his wife (her name was Bertha) and she answered and all the children but the baby - it was too small to answer; it was in the cradle asleep. And he called them all by name and they answered. If you've ever seen a man shout, he shouted when his family answered him there. In the years to come, Miss Bertha got a lick on the back of her head that caused her mind to be bad and her oldest son, Frank, made a doctor of himself and when he was in World War II he had the experience of operating on several boys, removing bullets and you know, bruises and things that caused the pressure on the brain. And when he came back, he begged his daddy and his family to let him operate on his mother and it was a year or two before they'd ever consent. And so finally they consented and today if she's still a living, she's got her right mind and happy back with her family. And his name was Frank Woods. And when I was in the hospital in Jackson last, he was in the Baptist Hospital. One of the doctors up there,

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BENHAM: Oh, really? Oh, then you had a lot to talk about with him, didn't you?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. That's right.

BENHAM: Oh, that's very interesting. Well, did you have a drug store at Sontag?

FOSTER: No, ma'am. The doctors then furnished their own medicine. And you know, back then, medicine for children then was castor oil and turpentine, you know.

BENHAM: I remember taking that castor oil.

FOSTER: And the doctor would pull their teeth, you know, and he was our all-around doctor, you know.

BENHAM: Well, did you have a picture show?

FOSTER: Once in a while there would be someone come through. They'd call them Little Magic Lantern shows, you know. That was all of it.

BENHAM: You had a post office?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. The first post office in Sontag was in the front of Mr. Jim Douglas' store. But they came along, you know, and said it couldn't be that anymore. It couldn't be in a public place like that. And so they built a little one-room house for the post office. But today they have a modern post office there in Sontag. But the old Uncle Jim Douglas store is still standing. And he had living quarters in the back of it, you know. They just ruled out that having a post office, you know, in living quarters like that.

BENHAM: You were describing the different little towns. Can you tell us something about Tryon?

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FOSTER: No, ma'am, I can't tell you too much about that. All I know that I had a first cousin that lived out there in the late years, Ras Case, and he had a grist mill, you know, and pretty well everybody farmed out there. But I went to Tryus School at one time, you know. They used to have a little school out there and played basketball against them. And I don't know too much about Tryus, you know.

BENHAM: All right. And did they have a church at Tryus?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. They called it Little Bahali Chapel. And it's still standing - the Methodist church.

BENHAM: Yes, I know. I've drawn it many times. Well, did they have a post office at Tryus?

FOSTER: Well, I just don't know whether they did or not.

BENHAM: I see. You don't know too much about it.

FOSTER: No.

BENHAM: Well, what about Nola?

FOSTER: Well, the Nola Post Office - Mr. Jim Douglas was the first Postmaster and it was in the corner of his store and Mr. Bob Pittman, I mean, was his name Bob? Anyhow, Mr. Pittman was the first mail carrier and you know, he had a little house like built on his buggy so he could take the bad in cold weather. And then after he - I don't know whether he retired or what, but then Mr. Douglas was the mail carrier and they carried mail all up through Little Bahali Community and all back up through that way, you know.

BENHAM: Well, did they have a school at Nola?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. They had a nice school.

BENHAM: Do you know the name of the school?

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FOSTER: Well, I'll tell you where Nola got its name.

BENHAM: Yes, tell me,

FOSTER: Nola got its name - Mr. Nola White, he had a huge family, ten (10) boys and three (3) girls, And the first store in Nola, they called it the company store and it was a huge store, He handled everything from farm supplies, groceries, dry goods, and then had the post office in front of the store and everybody called it "Nola's Store," And from that that's where Nola got its name, And then when they built the Nola church, they called it Nola Baptist Church. And my granddaddy and old Brother Scarborough and old Uncle John Gibson and old Uncle Joe Main was the founders. My granddaddy was David Sutton - was a founder of Nola Baptist Church, And Brother Scarborough was pastor at Shiloh at that time and we had service in the schoolhouse. And so some of them said, "Brother Scarborough, I can't understand why we don't have a church here in Nola." He said, "Well, what's hindering us? Let's get started," And so from that they built the church, And we have a nice little church out there at Nola.

BENHAM: Well, did they have any doctors over there?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. They had Eugene Little was the doctor there and he was a good doctor too. He left from there I understand, and went to Louisiana.

BENHAM: Well, how did Tryus get its name?

FOSTER: I don't know how Tryus got its name.

BENHAM: Well, what about Sontag? You were telling me something a little bit about that.

FOSTER: Well, Sontag, the way it got its name, my dad said every time

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you'd go to pick up the mail, there was Son and Tag. The little dog was Tag, you know, and from that, you know, just as a byword to the community got to saying, "Well, let's go over to Sontag and see if we got any mail." And they had to, you know, get a few little needs such as castor oil and turpentine, soap, soda, and matches and you know, just a few little things. And candies and chewing gums. And that little boy was always there when you got there, because he was too small to be in school - anywhere else but right out there under everybody's feet, you know. And that's where Sontag got it's name, the names from the little boy and his dog, Sontag.

BENHAM: I see. The little boy's name was Son.

FOSTER: Son and the dog's name was Tag.

BENHAM: That's really interesting. Have you told me about the tornado at Sontag?

FOSTER: Yes. Tore up the homes, you know, three (3) of the largest homes there were in Sontag.

BENHAM: Yes. And what were those homes now again?

FOSTER: The Newton home and Doctor Everett Woods' home and Marvin Watts'.

BENHAM: All of these towns - Sontag, Tryus, and Nola - they all had their own churches, didn't they?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. Well, they did in the late years but Shiloh was, you know, the mother church of all of them. Shiloh Church is quite over a hundred years old.

BENHAM: All all of them came to that one church?

FOSTER: Yes, this was all sprung from that and so did Wanilla. And when my granddaddy told them to build a church, they said that was the center,

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you know, to put it there at Shiloh right up there in those old hills right by itself, you know. The only house near it now is the pastorium.

BENHAM: How many people - can you remember? - lived in Sontag?

FOSTER: Well, there were quite a few people there. It built up mighty fast. There was Mr. Jim Douglas and Mr. Bob Douglas, I'll tell you about his barber shop.

BENHAM: Good.

FOSTER: Mr. Bob Douglas had a barber shop there. And the way he had his water, he'd put a lighted lamp down in a keg and set a wash pan over that keg and that's where he had to heat his water, you know; he had the barber shop there. And then Gibson, he had the gin and Bob Terry had the sawmill and they had the loading ramps down next to the railroad, you know, where they'd load the cotton and the lumber on the train and ship it out. And in the late years, Mr. Will Covington, he put a mill in there and cut the timber on what was called the sixteenth section land.

BENHAM: And can you sort of roughly judge how many people there were in Sontag?

FOSTER: Well, when I was growing up, oh, right in Sontag I'd say there were about thirty-five (35).

BENHAM: About thirty-five (35) when you were growing up. And then Nola, about how many people you think there were there?

FOSTER: Well, there weren't quite that many in Nola when I moved over there; we moved over there when I was fifteen (15) years old. The logging camps went to Nola and my mother sold her home in Sontag to Robert Day and bought over there and she - old Aunt Sarah White and Uncle Levi White, they

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ran the boarding house there. And my mother got a job with her working in the dining room for ten (10) dollars a month. Imagine feeding five (5) little mouths on ten (10) dollars a month, but you know, it kept soul and body together.

BENHAM: Well, money went a lot further then,

FOSTER: It sure did,

BENHAM: You could buy a lot more for a dollar than you can now,

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. I can tell you one instance in my mother's lifetime. She washed the Sunday shirts for the boarders, you know, because she had to work in the dining room when the dishes got all put away and everything and she had the evening, you know, off and she'd wash, do up the men's Sunday shirts and then it was the wash pot days, you know, and draw your own water. And one morning she started to wash. That morning she was going to put all her clothes to soak so she could get them done that afternoon and she said there wasn't a mouthful to eat in the house. And she said she heard the bell ring because we lived right at the schoolhouse, you know, and she heard the bell ring to take in from recess and she said she commenced to crying. She says, "My five (5) little kids will be here for dinner and I ain't got a mouthful to eat in the house to cook." And about that time somebody knocked on the door and said, "Mat?" And she went in there and there stood Aunt Sarah White with a lap full. She had shelled peas for the hotel and she had more than she needed. And she said, "Mat, I brought you a mess of my first peas and I thought they'd taste good to you because I knew you had to fix dinner for the children before you come to help after dinner to clean up the dining room and I didn't know whether you had any meat or not,

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so I come by the smoke house and cut you off a piece of meat and Levi just got back from the grist mill and I brought you a hoe cake of fresh meal." And she said she went in and cooked those peas and bread and we just enjoyed our dinner just as much as if we had everything on the table, And she said that was one time that she could remember so well God coming to her rescue, you know. There wasn't no thing such as welfare and help from the government, you know; you just had it the hard way. If your neighbors didn't help you, you didn't get it.

BENHAM: Well, the thing about it is, people trusted and believed in God. That's where we got messed up. We got away from God and we thought about the welfare. Now what we have to do is get back to God, don't we?

FOSTER: That's right. And I'll tell you another little incident if it will be interesting to you. The teachers sent us all home at recess one morning and when we come there, Mamma said, "What'd you all come home for?" And we said, "Well, the teachers told us to come home." And naturally, you know, whenever something touches you especially if it's yours, you just imagine the bad things and she commenced crying. She says, "Well, I can't help it because you all can't dress as well as the rest does and I reckon they sent you all home because you're little orphan children." And she took a big cry about it.

BENHAM: And who is this?

FOSTER: My mother. And after a while the bell tolled, you know, to turn out for dinner and we saw the entire school coming two (2) abreast, you know. And honey, when they got through piling groceries on Mamma's table and a wagon from down in Nola - Uncle Ed Sutton, my mamma's older brother, and Mr. Lee Ivy

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had a store in Nola - and they came and brought sacks of flour and gallons of syrup, you know. When they got through piling groceries on my mother's table, she didn't have to buy any groceries for three (3) months. If people today could still put their faith and trust in God like they did then, how much better off we'd be.

BENHAM: Yes, you are right. That's right. What kind of social life did you have?

FOSTER: Well, about mostly our social life, we'd gather two or three times a week, you know, and have a singing and go in the kitchen and parch a big stove full of peanuts, you know.

BENHAM: What was your husband's full name?

FOSTER: Isaac Arthur Foster and I was married to him at the age of seventeen (17). And he was the son of Mr. J. J. Foster, Jim Foster he was called. And everybody knew him throughout the whole entire county, because he was a blacksmith and he made tables, you know, had a turning lathe and made dining tables, beautiful dining tables. He had a grist mill and he made syrup for everybody in the country and made wagon wheels. And one day he met my husband's sister. There was a Mr. Lambert from down here in Monticello came out for him to make him a wagon wheel and Nettie said, "What is your name so I can tell Daddy when he comes home who it belongs to," He says, "I'm a Mr. Lambert." And she says, "Lambert, Lambert. I'll think of a little lamb and I'll know who to tell Daddy who it was." When his daddy come in, she says, "Daddy, Mr. Sheep says make him a wagon wheel and he'll be back after it Saturday." And Mr. Foster didn't know anybody by the name of Sheep, but he went ahead and made the wagon wheel. And Saturday, Mr. Lambert came

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and picked it up, you know, and Nettie laughed about that so much all through life, you know, about her. It's like a man he said that he tied a string around his finger to remember something and forgot what he tied the string around his finger for.

BENHAM: Right. Can you remember when your husband was born?

FOSTER: No, ma'am, I cannot. I have it in my Bible up yonder, but right off I don't remember. It was on August the fifteenth.

BENHAM: Well, do you remember how old he was when he died?

FOSTER: Yes. He was sixty-two (62) when he died.

BENHAM: Well, then we can check back. Do you remember where he was born?

FOSTER: He was born in Nola on the old Foster homeplace.

BENHAM: And you already told me what he did?

FOSTER: Yes.

BENHAM: How many children did you have?

FOSTER: Seven (7) boys and one (1) girl. And all seven (7) of my boys were in the service. And Brother E. E. Hedgepeth was our pastor for eighteen and a half (18½) years there at Nola. And he'd say, "Ms. Joysie, how in this world can you smile and go on like you do with all your boys in service?" And while they were in service, my husband passed away, you know, and I couldn't let them know because then it was a secret when they were going across, you know, afraid the enemies would find out something. I said, "Brother Hedgepeth, every one of mine will come back." I said, "They may come back without any arms, they may come back blind, no legs, but every one of them can say "Mamma" when they get here." And that's the way I felt about it. And honey, my seven (7) boys came back with not a scratch on them. There was

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one of them was in a fox hole with Clem Parkman here in Monticello when he got his leg off. Dropped a bomb, you know, and he just got a little bit of shrapnel in the back of his neck, but not enough to ever hurt him. They all came back home safe.

BENHAM: What hobbies did you have years ago?

FOSTER: Well, before...

BENHAM: Before you came to the nursing home when you were growing up or when you were keeping house or...

FOSTER: Well, when my children were growing up, my husband was just a child with them. And every little boy in the country would come down for him to play baseball, you know, or marbles or whatever they were playing and that's the reason it was so hard for my children to give up their daddy. He died when my baby was five (5) years old. But my hobby then when we moved to Nola, I had WMU work and Sunday School teacher and I was the song director for about sixteen (16) years in the church and I have always enjoyed, you know, helping anywhere I was called on to help.

BENHAM: Did you ever go to a Fourth of July picnic?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am, a good many times. They used to have a political picnic at Wanilla every Fourth of July and that was after the Mississippi Central, you know, began to go through. And we could go down that morning and get there by nine o'clock and come back that afternoon for fifteen (15) cents, you know. And so we'd go down to picnics there and then I attended a few on Fair River at what they call the Peeley Ivy Bridge.

BENHAM: I remember that Peeley Ivy Bridge.

FOSTER: Peeley Ivy Bridge, yes, ma'am.

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BENHAM: Oh, is that what the Fair River Bridge was called?

FOSTER: Well, on the New Zion and Nola road it is, but the Fair River Bridge from Monticello to Sontag, they used to call that the Lorenzo Bridge.

BENHAM: Lorenzo Bridge.

FOSTER: There was a little store there once and the tornado blew it away.

BENHAM: Yes. That's interesting. I wish I could have lived way back a long time ago and seen what this place looked like, you know. But of course, then I would want to keep on living all the time.

FOSTER: That's right.

BENHAM: You were telling me about a poem, about being a grandmother, how to take care of a grandmother, what to do with a grandmother. And would you read that poem? That's one of your favorite poems, isn't it?

FOSTER: Yes, ma'am. It says:

Who will take grandmother?
Who will take grandma tho it. Who will it be?
All of us want her I'm sure you will agree,
Let's call a meeting and get together, the whole clan.
Let's get it settled as soon as we can,
In such a big family there is certainly one,
Willing to give her a place in the sun,
Strange how we thought that she'd never wear out,
But she has the walk now, it's arthritis no doubt.
She's apt to insist on the silliest whims,
When people get older they become such a care.
She must have a home, but the question is, where?
Remember the days when she used to be spry, baked her own
cakes and made her own pies?
Helped us with our lessons and tended all our seams.
Kissed away our troubles and mended all our dreams.

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Wonderful grandmother, we all loved her so,
Isn't it dreadful she has no place to go,
One little corner is all she will need,
A shoulder to cry on and a Bible to read,
A chair by the window with the sun coming through,
Some pretty spring flowers still covered with dew,
Who will warm her heart so she won't mind the cold?
Oh, who wouldn't take grandmother now that she is old?
Won't nobody want her?
Oh, yes there is one willing to give her a place in the sun,
Where she won't have to worry or wonder or doubt,
She won't be a problem to bother about.
Pretty soon now God will give her a bed,
But who will dry our tears when our dear grandmother is dead?

BENHAM: Thank you, Mrs. Foster, for talking with me.

FOSTER: It has been a pleasure. Brings back lots of memories.

BENHAM: That's fine. This is the end of the interview.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Evelyn Benham)

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Transcriber's Notes

¹Mr. Terry