

WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA TOMORROW
BLACK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Mrs. Elizabeth Mary Hyatt Gibson (G)

Interviewer: Lorraine Crittenden (I)

Date: 1986-04-29

Location: Jackson County

Duration: 0:55:33

Lorraine Crittenden: Mrs. Gibson.

Elizabeth Gibson: Yes, ma'am.

I: What is your family source of entry into North Carolina? In other words, has your family always lived in North Carolina?

G: Well, as far as I know. You mean grandmother and them?

I: Right!

G: As far as I know they have. Of course, they come before I, you know, born.

I: So your grandmother and grandfather were from this area, from North Carolina?

G: Yes.

I: Do you have any other relatives who lived elsewhere and came to North Carolina?

G: Well, not that now, none but my grandmother, she came here.

I: From where?

G: Well, she said Georgia here.

I: What part, do you remember?

G: Well, one time she said, " Rabun, Georgia", then she said, "No, it was Blue Ridge, Georgia." Now, whichever place, I don't know, and we just took it to be sometime we'd say Rabun and sometimes we'd just say Blue Ridge, Georgia. But

I: Rabun isn't too far over the North Carolina line?

G: So, my grandfather, my mother's father, I don't know where he was born at, but he supposed to be, as far as I know, I hear him talk, from here.

I: From Sylva?

G: I don't remember where he was from, Sylva, I never hear him say because he died before I was born and I don't really know. All I know that she said she married and they lived in, they used to call it the Watson Cove, his people, but since they built these roads, they call it Little Savannah now.

I: Oh!

G: So, I really don't know, now he and great-grandmother on Momma's side...

I: Do you remember her name?

G: Mary Hyde.

I: Mary Hyde?

G: Yes. She was old when we were small cause my grandmother took us over there to see her and to visit her cause that was her husband's mother, Pa Hyatt's mother, and she just sitting in the chair, she was sick and she couldn't do nothing, and so we spent the weekend over there with her and then she took us back to Webster where we lived.

I: So your mother and grandmother lived in Webster?

G: Webster.

I: Now, during that time, was that far from where your grandmother lived? Your great-grandmother?

G: My great-grand well, well, yes, it's a little distance, cause where they call Little Savannah now, see you can go through Little Savannah and go to Cullowhee.

I: Oh, that's right.

G: We lived back this a way. We lived just at, they called it Webster District, but it was as close, they said, to Cullowhee as it was to Webster because it was seven miles from there to Cullowhee. And you could walk to Cullowhee or you could walk to Sylva?

I: Sylva?

G: Yes, there was no cars back then.

I: Now, would you trace your family tree as far back as you can remember and give me the names of your ancestors, if you remember?

G: Of the old folk? Well, tell the truth that's about all of them that I know of.

I: So you remember your great-grandmother? Your grandmother's mother?

G: No, I don't remember her. That was my mother's mother.

I: Right.

G: Grandmother.

I: No, your grandmother's mother.

G: My grandmother's mother. Well, that's what I say, my grandmother's mother, no, I don't remember her.

I: All right.

G: Because she's been dead, I reckon, before my grandmother come here, because my grandmother, her mother, that was back in slave time. And she, I reckon, just went here and yonder till she got that far, got back here, you know.

I: All right, do you remember your grandmother's name?

G: Rosetta Casey.

I: Rosetta Casey?

G: Yes.

I: Do you remember your grandfather's name?

G: Grandfather Casey, that's who they said my daddy was, Bill Casey, cause we called him "grandpa" all the time as I was raised up, you see, because I didn't know no better and they didn't tell me no better till I just hear them talking, you know, after I got older. Then I just took it that he was my daddy.

I: So you don't remember your grandmother's husband?

G: No, her first husband.

I: Did she remarry?

G: Well, see, she remarried, from Pa Hyatt, she married Bill Casey.

I: So she was a Hyatt at first?

G: Yeah. She was a Hyatt first, then they called her Rosetta Casey after she married the last time.

I: Rosetta Casey. All right, now, how many children did your grandmother have?

G: She had, let's see, Momma, Uncle Arthur, Uncle Jim, Aunt Louella, she had five.

I: Five children? Would you name those children?

G: Well, my mother Effie, and one girl named, just a minute now, I'll tell you, it just slips my mind, Aunt Louella and Aunt Mammie, and Uncle Arthur, and Uncle Jim. Three girls and two boys.

I: Three girls and two boys. Now, where was she living?

G: Just always, everybody said Webster.

I: What kind of house did you live in?

G: Well, it was, part of it was a log house and then she had some added to it.

I: Can you describe the house?

G: Well, you mean, where it was sitting?

I: What it looked like, where it was.

G: Well, it was, you know, back then log houses use to be very nice houses and back then they built log houses on the outside where they used cement now, they used what they call mortar dirt. They mix it up and be kind of stiff and they what you call dabbing houses in between on the outside and on the inside, you see, it had planks, nails, you know, on the inside.

I: Now, was this one room or was it divided into rooms?

G: Yes, it was divided into rooms and because she had, let's see, one, two, two bedrooms. That's pretty large bedrooms, and then, when I was growing up, she had two bedrooms and the kitchen and living room.

I: What kind of floors?

G: Wooden floors.

I: Wooden floors?

G: Yes.

I: Now, were these sanded or covered with anything or were they just plain?

G: No, just the seals when you build a house, you know, you have seals underneath and you just nail wide planks down on that, you see, and they join together close like that and no air can get up through them and that's what they had.

I: And I assume that you used lamps for light.

G: Lamps for light, lamps and lanterns.

I: What about water?

G: We had our own spring, our own water.

I: You had spring water?

G: Sure did, good spring, just take a big old sink bucket and dip it down there and get it full, carry it on up to the house.

I: Now, were all the children responsible for doing this or was it assigned to one child to bring the water in?

G: Well, see, back then, Aunt Louella had two children, that's her daughter, and she died. And Grandma raised her two children.

I: So, were these children responsible for carrying in the water?

G: Well, they carried a little bit, but they didn't carry that much, they carried a little, but I was about the main one to carry water, you know, help my mother carry water.

I: Right.

G: Up from the spring and fill up tubs and pots and, you know, things like that.

I: Was this a daily chore?

G: Yeah, you had to do it until they got the washing, you know, and things done, you know. Now that they got what they call caught up, they call that caught up, then I might could get to go to school, you know, Momma would let me go to school then, you know. But Momma was the type of person she wasn't quite at herself good. I mean her mind, you know, and my grandmother looked after and showed her how to do and tell everything, you know, like that, but now she could work and do like that. But my grandmother would have kind of scotch out for her, you know, and everything. We would say, "Let us go to school tomorrow, cause we kind of caught up." Well, Momma would say all right, and then I'd go to school that next day, and, of course, we'd have to walk seven miles. We'd have to get up early.

I: Where was the school?

G: Riverview.

I: Riverview?

G: Yes.

I: Seven miles to school and seven miles back?

G: Yes, and we had a good time. There were several of us going, but we all wasn't in the same location, but back then what they call Little savannah, there were several blacks that lived over there, you see. And we'd all meet at a certain place and about the same time. Sometimes there'd be about five or six of us, and we'd have a good time going and walking, going to school.

I: So you played on your way to school?

G: Oh, we played on our way to school, played on our way back, but we always got home now, on time, we always got back home.

I: What time did you leave if you had to walk seven miles?

G: Well, we'd leave about, well, seven, seven-thirty, something like that in the morning.

I: How long would it take you to walk?

G: Well, I don't know, we didn't keep count of nothing like that, you know. Schools, I think, open around nine-o'clock, something like that, you know. And if we weren't there by time it opened, we got there just after it opened up, you see, or sometimes we'd get there before it opened up and we could play a little bit, about thirty minutes or sometime outside, you see, and then they'd ring the bell, had a little old bell and they'd ring it, and all of them would go running and trying to get in the school to get a seat. We all had a nice time.

I: Now, did you have books at home?

G: Well, no, I didn't take my books home then, I just left them at school, you know. They had desks where you could lay your books up on top and learn and they had like a shelf under them, you could put your books under there, you know, and they'd stay there until you went back.

I: Were there books in your home at your grandmother's house? Were there books there for you to read?

G: No, well, she had like a Bible and things like that, but never did read none. And, of course, my grandmother couldn't read either.

I: Your grandmother couldn't read?

G: No, she couldn't read nor write, she'd have to get somebody to do it for her.

I: Now, if you could only go to school about one day a week, did you learn to read?

G: Yeah, I learned to read. Sometimes I'd go one day and sometimes, I say, I'd get to go two days out of a week, and I went the whole week if it would be bad weather. They'd wash a certain one's clothes and they'd spread a towel in the bottom of the tub and put them all in that one tub, or in a dish pan or something and they'd wash about two or three washings. They kept them separated, none never did get mixed up. They knew whose was whose. Then, if the sun come out, even if it was just about half a day, they'd rinse those clothes and hang them up. As they got almost dry, they might be just a fraction damp, they'd take them down and hang up more. We had a big front porch and had lines across here and she'd hang them on them lines, you see, and they'd finish drying and they just took them down that way. And lots of time she'd let Momma start ironing on them, you see, and things like that.

I: So how did your grandmother and mother make their living?

G: Well, by washing and ironing.

I: Did the people bring the wash to them?

G: No. She had what you call a two-horse wagon. You could use two horses or two mules. She had two big mules. And a man would go pick them up and then she got them washed and ironed and he'd carry them back. And if it's bad weather in the winter time where she couldn't get every one of them clothes washed and ironed and took back on Saturday morning, she'd send back the ones that she had finished. Then Monday morning she'd get up early and start to ironing while they were gone to gather up them, you see, and start to ironing, get the rest of them ready.

I: So once a week on Monday the clothes were gathered and on Saturday...

G: They'd be delivered back.

I: And how did she wash these clothing?

G: Well, on a rub board and on her hands.

I: So, what kind of soap did she use?

G: Lye soap and part time she'd make her soap.

I: How'd she make it?

G: Well, out of bones and pieces of fat meat or something like that, put it in and boil it up, boil it a certain amount of time, then she'd add red devil lye.

I: Well, did she have just the one, I assume it was a big black kettle pot?

G: She had about three of them.

I: And they all would be going at the same time?

G: Yeah, just about all of them going at the same time. They'd have two together setting side by side and they'd be going, and she'd have another one kind of off to one side and it'd be going, too. She boiled them clothes and what you call batting. You take them out piece or two piece at a time and lay them up on the line. You just bat them and bat them, turn it over and bat them and bat them, that water just flying everywhere! They got good and clean and white! (laughter)

I: Really?

G: Sure did.

I: They beat the dirt out.

G: Well, part of it out and part of it rubbed out and part they boiled out.

I: So those were some clean clothes. (laughter)

G: They sure was. They was real clean and hang them out in the air, you see, that made them smell good. Now clothes smells good to dry out in the air, better than they do at they laundromat.

I: Were your grandmother and mother paid much for this washing?

G: Well, no. they weren't paid much back then. Something small would get you seventy-five cents and some would be a dollar and a half, and they'd get on up to three dollars. Well, they thought they were making, back then, they thought that was right smart money back then because most everybody farmed and they made most of their living on that farm. But they took in these washings and things and make the extra money to buy the other stuff that they needed from the store.

I: What did they have to get from the store?

G: Well, like they bought flour. Of course now they raised wheat and flour. They had their own flour, but they call that homemade flour and it was not as white as that you buy in the store, and she'd buy so many bags of a 24-pound bag of flour at the store and that was for baking and stuff like that.

I: Well, what was wheat flour used for?

G: Well, the wheat flour was used to make biscuits in the morning and things like that.

I: Now, I started to ask you what did they buy at the store, you said, "Flour."

G: Oh, yeah, they bought flour and they used coffee, and they'd buy rice and they'd get these big old boxes of Mother Oats that was for the cereal and they'd get peanut butter and jelly. Of course, my grandmother made plenty of jelly. If she took a notion to buy a jar of jelly that she'd seen, why she'd go ahead and buy it, you see, and stuff like that. But the rest of the stuff was raised on the farm, beans, peas, and these clay peas. She canned hundreds and hundreds of cans of beans and peas you could take them when they got ripe and turned yellow. Raised our own potatoes and own garden stuff, cabbage and beets and all stuff like that in the garden.

I: Now, did you have to work in the garden?

G: Well, no, I didn't work too much in the garden. She mostly done that herself. Children didn't mess too much in the garden without she sent them to get something out of the garden. You got what she told you to get, then you was back out of the garden.

I: Oh, so you didn't go in there and just run through the field?

G: No, no, she didn't allow that, if you did, you got a whipping for it. You did just what she told you to do.

I: You said you had two sisters. Now, did either of those sisters have more education than you?

G: Well, my oldest sister, the oldest one of Momma's children, now, she finished high school.

I: Now, what was her name again, please?

G: Sue Ella.

I: Sue Ella?

G: Sue Ella Hyatt. That's what they called her.

I: Now, how was she able to get a high school education?

G: Well, she just, she stayed with my grandmother, see, and my grandmother let her go to school.

I: So, at Riverview the school went from first grade through twelfth?

G: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I: What were the main subjects taught?

G: Well, like, uh, reading and geography and grammar and spelling and arithmetic.

I: Did your younger sister...

G: No, my younger sister, see, she didn't, she wasn't old enough to go to school, she got burnt up.

I: How did that happen?

G: Well, she went in the house. My mother was out shucking some corn. She wanted a drink of water so Mother just let her go in. She was going to get a drink of water but there were some matches a laying there because she going to light the lamp when she went back in. And, I reckon, she got a hold to those matches and struck one to look for her a baby doll where she had cut out of books and things. I imagine her dress caught a fire or something, her being small, you know, not knowing. And when Momma seen her come running out the house, around the house, Momma jumped up to run around to catch her, see, what was all about and the blaze was up over her head. And they said they told her back then that she swallowed the blaze, and she didn't live but just a little bit, you know, after that.

I: That was a terrible thing to happen.

G: Then we were here in Sylva, then she called to Sylva then and told me.

I: What were you doing in Sylva?

G: Well, that was when I was first married and I lived here in Sylva.

I: How old were you when you married?

G: Thirteen.

I: Thirteen? That was quite young.

G: Yeah, it was young, but I married to get away from home.

I: Was the boy from Webster?

G: No, he was from Jacksonville, Florida, the man was.

I: Well, what was he doing in North Carolina?

G: Well, he cut poplar wood, they called it pulp wood or something like that back then, and he sold it.

I: So he was just coming through?

G: He was just a stranger through here.

I: Well, how long did you know him before you married him?

G: Well, I didn't know him that long, but just something to get away from home, I reckon.

I: So, your home life wasn't that good?

G: No, it wasn't that good. It was all right though, I was just a way out on my own.

I: So, did he build you a home here in Sylva?

G: No, I was with my Momma. Momma then stayed with my grandmother, stayed with me some. No, didn't build no home and he died here.

I: So, all your married life you stayed with your mother. She had moved to Sylva?

G: No, she was at Webster, not at Sylva. She was at Webster.

I: Oh! I misunderstood you. I thought you said she, you were in Sylva.

G: I said I moved to Sylva after I married, you see, while we rented and we stayed with her a while. Then we come to Sylva and stayed.

I: You started your family here in Sylva?

G: I started my family in Webster.

I: Did you have a child? How old were you then?

G: Oh, well, I was fifteen.

I: Fifteen?

G: Yeah, I was just fifteen years old and married.

I: When did you leave Webster?

G: Well, I left Webster, I don't know. My second child was born in Sylva and she was yeah, she was born in Sylva. I can't tell you exactly the place, but do you know where Keener cemetery is?

I: Keener? Yes.

G: Well, back over the hill above there is where Mattie was born at. And then Mildred. Grandmother and her husband lived there, lived there on Hill, they call it now. And he had a little old house, kind of just like coming around from Reverend Smith's. A big old plank house, just one big room, and we moved in it. And we lived there and that was when Mattie, the second child was born there. And we stayed there for a while and after he died, after Mildred's grandmother's husband died, and Aunt Miss Rosie, she come to live with the Rosie Enloe, that

was his wife, came and stayed with Mildred out here. And then we moved in that house and we lived there a I was married again after that because my first husband was dead.

I: Well, when you moved to Sylva, was your husband still in the pulp business?

G: No, uh yes.

I: Was the Tannery open then?

G: Yes.

I: Did he work there?

G: No, he still worked. He quit cutting the wood and he worked on these roads like they build, these new highways. He worked on that.

I: So, he did construction work?

G: Yeah, he did construction work and then he got sick. And like going through Cullowhee, he worked back up that way on them roads. And they had little old houses, something that they stayed in at night. Then he got sick and he come back and it wasn't long til he died.

I: Oh, my goodness, did he come home on weekends before he died?

G: Not all the time.

I: Not all the time?

G: Part of the times he did, but...

I: So, you had to raise the children by yourself?

G: Mostly by myself and I was pregnant when he died.

I: You were pregnant when he died?

G: Hattie Sue, the one that is in West Virginia now. And he died like this week and she was born the next week.

I: Oh, my goodness. Did you have to work while he was doing construction work on the roads?

G: Yeah, I helped my grandmother, you know.

I: Well, you didn't work out from home?

G: No, no, I just helped her, you know, wash and iron things like that, and she divided with me.

I: She divided the money with you?

G: Yes.

I: Now, you said you married a second time. Was this man from Sylva?

G: Yes, he was from Sylva. Thad and Rosalie, and Hannah, and Walt Muse...

I: I didn't hear the last name?

G: Walt and Bryson, do you not know him?

I: No, ma'am.

G: Well I thought everybody knew him. [Laughter]. Yeah he's married, he married a Gibbs. And all his children go, yeah Walt Vison [inaudible] and Rosalie, and...

I: Did your first-born children live with you? So, eventually you had eight children in the house?

G: Yeah, till Mary got old enough to, you know, get out, you know. She went to school and she got, when she got old enough to get out on her own, she worked. Geneva, my first cousin, took her to Franklin and she stayed over there and worked.

I: Well, did she live with someone?

G: Yeah, she lived with my first cousin. When she come back, then she worked at Bryson City and she stayed at canton and worked in Canton. And, you know, places like that.

I: Now, during all these years, you never worked outside of the home?

G: Well, yes, I have. I worked outside the home.

I: What did you do?

G: Well, I just done house work, they called it back then, but now they call it maid, like somebody come and holler you call you a maid. But back then they just called it house work.

I: Well, did you do this every day or just a couple of days a week?

G: Well, no, sometimes I worked a whole week and then sometimes just one or two days a week or something like that, but mostly I worked the whole week.

I: So, did you work for different families or just one?

G: Yeah, different families. I go one day here and I'd go early in the morning if I had two places. I'd go early in the morning, work two places in one day, then the next day I'd go to another place and work one place and get off pretty early, then the next day I had to work at two places, something like that.

I: Now, how did you get to these different homes?

G: Walked.

I: You walked?

G: T, P, and W.

I: What's T, P, and W?

G: You don't know what that is?

I: No, ma'am.

G: Take pains and walk. (laughter)

I: Take pains and walk? I'll have to remember that. Now were your children able to get a better education than you were able to get?

G: Well, yes, they sure was. All of them went to school and got, I reckon, a fairly good education.

I: Now, did any of your children leave home because they couldn't find work here?

G: Well, no, not back then, they didn't. All of them just worked around in different places. Different one's homes and things and worked and babysat and things like that.

I: You had only the one son?

G: I had two.

I: Two sons?

G: But one's dead and the oldest son, he's living.

I: Were either of your sons in the armed forces?

G: Yeah, my baby son, well, both of them went to be examined but they wasn't in service. They went to be examined. And, of course, Walt, they didn't keep him. He was wanting to go in service, but when they checked him out they asked him did he wants to go back to Webster. That's where he was from. He told them, no, that he wanted to get in service. And they told him

Webster needed him worse than they did on count of his back. But he had never had the backache and why they said that, he don't know.

I: Well, that's unusual.

G: It is. It is. It sure is. And his back never did bother him until after he was married and worked in the Tannery Plant where he's working now.

I: He still works in the Tannery?

G: Yeah, he's worked up here at this hospital and he's worked in the Tannery, he's worked around mostly everywhere.

I: Well, do you remember any event during your life which affected a lot of people such as a flood?

G: Yes, I remember the floods. Way years ago, I don't know what year that it was in, but I remember the floods. As far as I remember, I mean the best I can remember was the first one that they had, I was above Cullowhee, up there a helping some people and it come that flood and washed away the bridges and things like that. And we finally got back down to, you know, were Moss's Store is in Cullowhee? Well, if you go around Moss's store [inaudible], we got back own, you know, there's a little bridge over from Moss's store. Well, we got back down to that bridge me and this man did, and we didn't know the pillars, were washing out from under it. And the water was up to the bridge, top of the bridge, and we struck matches. It was after night. And we walked across that bridge and just as we got this side of it, that bridge fell.

I: It collapsed?

G: Collapsed! Sure did.

I: That was a close call!

G: It sure was! But we were trying to get back to Webster.

I: Oh!

G: That's been years ago.

I: Now, were any homes lost or anything like that?

G: Yeah, homes were lost and chicken coops, and I don't know what all that people lost then because it come that flood. They said a cloud bust or something and it come that flood. And you could just see water just come up out of the ground just like a great big river and things like that. And the river got up out of banks and everything. Sure did.

I: Was your family affected in any way by this flood?

G: No, my uncle we didn't live close to the river.

I: You didn't live close to the river?

G: No.

I: You were higher up?

G: No, we were, well, we wasn't high in a way we was, in a way, we wasn't much higher than the river. But I can't, I don't guess you don't know where we lived at but, and you probably have traveled the road too. Do you know where Frank Davis live?

I: Yes.

G: Well, we didn't live on that side. We lived on the other side, but as you come on down the river from Frank Davis's, where all those houses are on up side of the road. There was a bridge cross there and we went across that bridge and back up that way. That's in what they call, they call it the Old Settlement now but we called it back then a whole lot of the Irish lived there, and we called it the Irish Settlement, then. But they call it the Old Settlement now. We lived back up in that way and, see, there wasn't no water back up in there, no rivers, big branches and things to get up. There were branches too, but they didn't get up that high at a bankment.

I: So, you said there were a couple, at least two floods in your lifetime?

G: Yeah, there was another after that because the river got out of the bank and you couldn't travel it, you know. And well, tell the truth now, I'll say three floods because since that, there was another one that got up from Dillsboro down here.

I: Homes were lost then, too?

G: Well, they wasn't many homes that got lost that I can remember, but it got up right at them and close to them. Because I know in Dillsboro, like going across that bridge going towards Franklin, where you turn to the right, I believe it is. Go up that way like you're going up the river. Why, it got up in the roads next to some cabins, right against them cabins and some of the people had to move out, you know, because they were scared it was going to wash them away. And one cabin, I think, the water got in it (After a glitch in the tape, Mrs. Gibson begins with) They didn't call it the flu.

I: What was it called?

G: They called it the influenza.

I: Influenza?

G: Yes, back then and that was before I was grown because my Uncle Jim, Momma's brother, was in the service then. And they called it the influenza.

I: Were many people ill because of this?

G: Well, there were several of them, but they called it here the grip.

I: The grip?

G: The grip.

I: How was it treated?

G: Well, they mostly just treated their self. Made tea, took black draw, you've heard tell of that.

I: That's a laxative, isn't it?

G: Yeah, and salts and different things like that. There wasn't that many doctors back then.

I: If you needed a doctor, what did you have to do to get him?

G: Well, you, somebody would have to walk and go get him because I tell you, there was no cars not a whole lot of cars back then. And you would just have to walk and tell him who's sick and where to go and everything, and some had a horse and buggy.

I: So, the doctor would come to the home?

G: Yeah.

I: Did you try home remedies first?

G: Well, yeah, lots of them tried home remedies, making tea, taking different things.

I: Did you ever learn which roots or herbs to use?

G: Of making tea?

I: Right.

G: Yes, ma'am.

I: How did you learn that?

G: Well, I just seen the rest of them and as I got older, why, it just stayed with me and I just made tea and stuff for my children and when they take colds or something like that, why, I just get me some herbs and make some tea. They didn't want to drink it, but I'd make them drank it.

I: I remember those days. It was bitter tasting stuff.

G: Yeah, it was bitter. I drunk many a cup full of it.

I: But it worked.

G: Yeah, it worked back then, but now people don't know what herb is like that.

I: Now, in Webster was there a church for you to attend?

G: Yeah.

I: There was a church in Webster? Was it Baptist, Methodist?

G: Baptist.

I: It was a Baptist church in Webster?

G: Yeah, and there was one that (Was that church built then at Cullowhee, that Baptist church?). Yes, it was built then, there was a Baptist church built up there then.

I: So, there was one in Webster and one in Cullowhee?

G: Yes.

I: Which one did you attend, you and your family?

G: Well, we mostly went to Webster.

I: Webster?

G: Yes.

I: Now, were there any special occasions at church other than just the regular church services?

G: No, they, back then, they didn't have nothing much but just, they'd have a little singing every once in a while. But back then there wasn't that much of that going on. They just have church on Sunday and they have two services a day, in the morning and in the evening and people would cook their lunch and carry it with them.

I: To church?

G: Yeah, big, what you call dinner baskets, and so, we'd, they'd put it out and all eat you know and everything. Then after that why about two or two-thirty, something like that, or three, they'd have evening service and everybody go back home.

I: So, you stayed in church all day Sunday?

G: Just about all day. And sometimes they'd just have Sunday school and in morning service. But when morning services, there would be a pretty good crowd and they'd hold (church service) a good while, you know. And they'd have things like that, some kind of little program for children, you know, cause back then they had small children, they had little cards for them to read and learn about the Bible off of where they don't have them now.

I: I see. Do you remember any other church customs that you had then that we don't have now other than the reading off the card?

G: Well, that was for the small children, but the other ones, why they just mostly have a book, ask the questions something out of the Bible or something like that, you know. They'd give them a Bible and everybody read a verse, you know or something like that the older folks would.

I: Were there any special church meeting?

G: Well, yes, they'd have church meetings. They sure did, and if they'd select their pastor where one would preach so long, or if he resigned or quit or whatever, he called it. Why, they'd select somebody else, different ones, you know, they'd have different pastors and things.

I: Now, I've heard mentioned May meetings, did you have May meetings?

G: Yeah May meetings, like Mother's Days and things like that?

I: No, there was a special church meeting during the month of May, when people from surrounding counties would come. Did you have that in Webster?

G: Yes, they had that as far as I can remember, they had that. And well, it's not been that part of that church is standing over at Webster now.

I: Is it?

G: Yeah.

I: Well, how were nowadays the people are baptized in a pool.

G: Yeah, they are now, but they didn't back then, they went to the river.

I: You were baptized in the river?

G: Yes.

I: How was that ceremony?

G: Well, you just got wet and you went from the church on down to the river where Webster Bridge is.

I: Yes.

G: Well, they baptized you in that same river but my, not right there. They would come down more toward River View. They had a place where they said it was more shallow or something like that to baptize would be better. And we'd come down there and they'd baptize.

I: And when you were baptized you were dipped under the water?

G: Sure was.

I: Did you have to dress in anything special?

G: Well, yes, just like they do now, you suppose to dress in something well, it wasn't special neither, but not your dress clothes. You dressed in something old, you know, put some old clothes on or something like that. Tie up your head, you know, towel or something back then. Like now they have caps. They can get caps, but back then they just tie a towel around your head and keep you from getting your hair wet, you know. Dip you under.

I: Do you remember any other religious customs that you had then?

G: No. I can't remember right now if there was.

I: Do you remember the first time you attended a wake?

G: Well, no, not exactly, no, I don't remember the first time. I've been to wakes back then, but I don't remember the first time.

I: How were the wakes then?

G: Well, they just sat up at the home. They didn't go to the church when somebody passed. The crowd would go to the house, you know, and people would cook and carry something to the house just like some do now. Of course, not all of them, but some do, carry it to the house and then they didn't carry none to the church and feed them at the church back then like they do now. They'd just carry some food to the house and everybody just gathered out to the house, you know.

I: Now, how long does the wake last?

G: Well, it would be a certain night, you know, when before that day they buried him like tonight and they'd bury tomorrow. Something like that.

I: Do you remember any special social customs that you had? Any customs that were fun?

G: No, I never did go out to none like that.

I: You didn't get to go to any of the fun things?

G: No, because they weren't that much fun back then a going on.

I: So, the only time you got away from the house was when you went to church?

G: Yeah, that's most of all the time.

I: Or went to school?

G: Yeah, went to school and the four parents would go fishing or something like that, you know.

I: Well, what games did you play?

G: Well, back then there was no games to play for the whites and neither the blacks. There wasn't much games.

I: Well, how did you entertain yourself?

G: Well, we just entertained ourself with one another at the house.

I: Just talking?

G: Yeah, just talking, when we were small children, we get out and these big old broom sage that grow now. Well, we'd take that and we'd get out and take the little sticks and little planks like we live on, one lived right here, one lived right here. We'd pile up rocks and make like a chimney and we'd get old piece of plates where they were broke. We'd hunt around and pick up them, you know, and we'd have, that'd be our dishes and we'd build up like a fire place and put little sticks across, you know, like we was cooking. We'd take that broom sage and plant it like that was our children. (laughter) Now, that was amusement that we got. That's the truth. And then we'd pick up chinquapins and chestnuts and things like that.

I: What are chinquapins?

G: That's something you eat like a cake. You've seen a chestnut, haven't you?

I: I know what a chestnut is.

G: Well, that's smaller. That's real small.

I: Did you pick berries?

G: Well, yeah, I pick, oh, yeah, I pick blackberries, dewberries, raspberries.

I: Now, was that work or fun?

G: Well, it was all right. It wasn't hard and it wasn't much fun because I never was, never did call it no fun to pick blackberries. But I'd pick some, not all that many, but I picked them.

I: Well, Mrs. Gibson, can you think of anything else about your family that I haven't asked you?

G: No, I can't, I can't think of nothing else. That's about all I know.

I: Do you see a difference in the relationship between blacks and whites now as compared to your earlier days?

G: Well, yes, I do. Because back when I was coming up, some of the whites you could associate with and get along with and then later years they just pull from that and you stayed your distance and they stayed theirs. But when the segregation come along where the blacks could go in anywhere they wanted to.

I: You mean integration.

G: Yeah, integration is what I mean. Can go in and eat just like the white can and they'd serve them just like they do the whites. They can ride the bus and sit in a place on the bus. Just like the whites can, and one is treated 'bout like the other one, not much difference in you. And they more friendly to you now than they was back then. You can just associate with them. Well, just, if they liked you the same as they are.

I: Do you remember when there was a change in the relationship, because in the beginning you said at first you were neighborly, you got along together, but then white people began to pull away. Do you remember when that happened?

G: Well, when that happened that was back when I was younger. That was back before I was married. When all of them, because I remember they used to come to my grandmother's house and she'd divide what she had with them, and if somebody, a white man or somebody, come to her house and he was dirty, she'd take him in and have them pull off they clothes and she'd give them some of her husband's clothes to put on and she'd wash they clothes and iron them and let them stay all night and give them some food. Then the next day they could go on about their business. She didn't have to know them. She just never turned nobody away from her door.

I: No one went hungry or dirty away from her house?

G: No.

I: And then you said before you were married, you noticed a change.

G: Yeah, before I married. I don't know what happened, but anyway I remember my grandmother said, "Well, I've tried to be as nice as I could and if they don't want to come around

us, that's all right." So she stayed at her place and they stayed at theirs. They never would come around. Now, if they seen her out, why they'd speak and keep going.

I: But you noticed this as a child, too?

G: Yeah, I noticed it as a child because, see, where she didn't go to their house, she didn't let the children go and play with their children.

I: Oh, so you couldn't play with your white neighbors anymore?

G: No.

I: Did you question?

G: No, I didn't ask no questions because I was a child.

I: So you just accepted?

G: I just went on like they told us to do. If they say, "Don't you go over yonder," we didn't go.

I: I see.