

# Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical Society  
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Lola Berry

Interviewer: Joe White

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*An Oral History with Lola Berry, Volume 1217, Part 1*

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## Biography

Lola Wilson Durr Berry was born in 1926 near Mendenhall, MS to Charlie Walker and Roberta Wilson. Berry began sharecropping in cotton fields at the age of seven. Due to the necessity to work, Berry was unable to matriculate past a fifth grade education. In 1942 Berry married Clarence Durr, with whom she had thirteen children, ten of which survived. Clarence was killed in a car accident in 1975; a year later she remarried to Oscar Berry. Lola worked at the Universal Plant for thirteen years, and as a cook at Genesis One School for twelve years.

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AN ORAL HISTORY  
with  
LOLA BERRY

*This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi Simpson County Project. The interview is with Lola Berry and is taking place on September 14, 2003. The interviewer is Joe White.*

**White:** My name is Joe White. Today is Sunday, September the fourteenth, 2003. This interview is conducted under a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council as a part of the oral history project directed by The University of Southern Mississippi. Today we're interviewing Ms. Lola Wilson Durr Berry at her home near Mendenhall. Ms. Berry, what was your name when you were born? What was your maiden name?

**Berry:** Just plain Lola Wilson.

**White:** Lola Wilson. You didn't have a middle name?

**Berry:** I didn't have a middle name.

**White:** We've run across a number of people in Simpson County that didn't have a middle name. That's just fairly common around here, I think.

**Berry:** That's right.

**White:** Several of them have had folks that told us that they had to make up a middle initial in order to keep from getting confused with somebody else. But you didn't ever have that problem?

**Berry:** No, I didn't have that problem. Just plain Lola Wilson.

**White:** When were you born?

**Berry:** I was born January the sixth, 1926.

**White:** Nineteen twenty-six. Were you born near here?

**Berry:** Right here between here and the community called Dry Ridge Community down [Highway] 28, all the way down there, from the Highway 28 crossing.

**White:** Do you still call this community Hawpond Pond, or you're close enough to the church you call it Hall Pond?

**Berry:** We call it Hawpond (inaudible) the highway up; they give us the name Hawpond because it's on the Hawpond Church Road. But we used to be the St. Peter

Community. That's the name of our church. (Inaudible) Missionary Baptist Church, named after my old great-uncle.

**White:** Is that right?

**Berry:** Right.

**White:** And what was his last name?

**Berry:** His name was Peter Loftin(?).

**White:** Loftin. I thought you said Peter Lawford there for a minute. (laughter) I thought you were talking about the actor. And by the way, you need to settle one big question for me. Is Hawpond one word, or is it two words?

**Berry:** Well, I connect it together, H-A-W-P-O-N-D, uh-huh. Some people separate, but I connect it when I write it.

**White:** I have seen it separate a number of times before, but I noticed it's one word on the road sign out here. It's sort of like New Hebron. I think it depends on which side of New Hebron you live on as to whether you spell it with one word or with two words.

**Berry:** Well, that's the way I spell it (inaudible).

**White:** But Hawpond is one word usually around here. What was your daddy's name?

**Berry:** His name was Charlie Walker.

**White:** Did he live around here?

**Berry:** We lived about a mile, about two miles down 13 Highway, (inaudible) down about two miles (inaudible).

**White:** Close to Highway 28.

**Berry:** Yeah, uh-huh, (inaudible).

**White:** Where [Highway] 28 and [Highway] 13 cross?

**Berry:** Right, uh-huh, just about halfway, where the sign says, out there on the highway says Ella Walker Road. At the right, that was my grandmother's place.

**White:** And what did he do for a living?

**Berry:** Oh, he never did anything but sharecropping. He was a farmer.

**White:** And what was your mother's name?

**Berry:** Her name was Roberta Wilson.

**White:** And she wasn't born in Simpson County, was she?

**Berry:** No, I don't think. She was born between, I think it was Jeff Davis County and Simpson County, back in that way somewhere. I don't know the exact spot.

**White:** On down close to the Jeff Davis/Simpson County line.

**Berry:** Line, yeah, down in that area, down that way.

**White:** And you said her name was Wilson.

**Berry:** Roberta Wilson.

**White:** Do you remember what her parents' names were?

**Berry:** Never got that. I said the worst thing we could ever done, we didn't get the history of our mama's people, but she was raised by her auntie. I don't know anything about my grandmother or nothing like that. Her auntie, and this man in our church named Peter Loftin raised her from (inaudible).

**White:** Is that right? He was married to your auntie?

**Berry:** My mama's auntie.

**White:** Yeah. That's what I mean, your mama's auntie. I'm sorry. Yeah, we try to get as many names of family members and things as we can. Do you remember who your dad's mother and father were?

**Berry:** Oh, yeah. Lily Walker and George Walker was my daddy's mother and father, Lily Walker and George Walker.

**White:** And did your dad have any brothers and sisters?

**Berry:** (laughter) Yeah. He's got six of them boys, I think, and wasn't but two girls, Aunt Annie Maude (inaudible), Aunt Lola. (Inaudible) two girls (inaudible)

**White:** Frank and Charlie.

**Berry:** Frank, Charlie, Hance, and Claudell. And it's another one. But what's his name?

**White:** I'm going to really test your memory today. (laughter)

**Berry:** Yes. That's the ones I know, Uncle Joe. See, they live around George and Frank and Claudell and my daddy. That was four. And Hance was five. That's five of them.

**White:** That was the last one, Hance. How you spell that? H-A-N-C-E?

**Berry:** H-A-N-C-E.

**White:** That's an unusual name, isn't it?

**Berry:** It is.

**White:** You don't know where he got that name, do you?

**Berry:** Sure don't. I really don't. That's five boys, and the girls Mary Lola, and Annie Maude (inaudible) two girls.

**White:** And your mom got married twice later, I understand, according to this biographical sheet.

**Berry:** She got married once.

**White:** I'm sorry. This was you who got married twice, wasn't it?

**Berry:** That was me but (inaudible).

**White:** I always look at these forms wrong that we get filled out here. Well, we'll talk about your marriage later, then. First off, you grew up right around in this community.

**Berry:** It was right in this vicinity, around here.

**White:** Did you go to school here?

**Berry:** Went out there at that little two-room school, down there. They call it Hawpond School.

**White:** And you know a lot of people went to school there, I gather.

**Berry:** That's right. A lot of them, especially my age and older. My older sister went there and brother.

**White:** Yeah. That was before, a long time before the schools integrated around here.



**Berry:** Oh, my, yes.

**White:** And there were a number of white and black rural schools around the county, and they didn't go up through high school. You remember how many grades that one went through?

**Berry:** I know it went about the fifth grade; I know, at that time. That's before they integrated the schools. I mean, that was when I was going (inaudible). In [19]42 I didn't—yes, I did. I went back to school in [19]42, but I got married in [19]42, and my husband was in service. I went back to school one (inaudible). (phone rings, brief interruption)

**White:** We were talking about Hawpond School, in the early days there. Who was your first grade teacher? Do you remember?

**Berry:** Shellie Williams(?) (inaudible).

**White:** Shellie?

**Berry:** Shellie Williams. She lived right down underneath here, you know where Dorothy Michael(?) (inaudible) used to live, right down here in that old, big house, coming this way from Mendenhall. Well, that's where she was living at. I think they told me about forty-one years, I believe it was. She told me, and walked every day of it back and forth.

**White:** Had a long career and walked a million miles back and forth to school. Did you walk to school, too?

**Berry:** Walked to school, come right down (inaudible) cross over there about half a mile. We walked, come through that fence line and go right to the schoolhouse.

**White:** Almost everybody walked to school back then, I imagine.

**Berry:** We walked the days it wasn't rainy, now. All the pretty days we would walk. If it was bad raining or too cold, we couldn't go because we had to walk.

**White:** Oh, you just didn't go to school if it was bad weather then.

**Berry:** No. If it was raining, something like that, that was it.

**White:** Well, school didn't operate all year round either then, did it?

**Berry:** No. We just had about a few months because early in the fall we couldn't start until we got through gathering everything, and then when got through gathering everything, then we started school then, after about March. We maybe went part of

March, and then we had to stop and get the cotton stalks and corn stalks out of the way for them to start tilling the ground. And so that's what we had to do then. And so we couldn't go. We just had to turn in the books at that time because we couldn't go anymore. We did because my mama, she would do day work (inaudible) farm was farming with the same with our uncle. But he was farming; my mama would help out, and she would take us childrens to work during the day. That's how I started working the field when I was seven year, when I started chopping cotton. She showed me how to chop the cotton, how to keep it standing up and not leave it laying over and all that stuff. So I made a good hand.

**White:** You weren't very old when you started working the cotton fields.

**Berry:** No. And when you start picking it, we had to get it. When that cotton over in September, you'd have to hit it.

**White:** There wasn't any going to school. You just had to get it while you could.

**Berry:** You had to get it. If it was October or November till you got through with it, you had to pick it, and even though you picked the cotton, if it any more opening at the top, you had to go back and scrap all that up.

**White:** How many pounds could you pick in a day?

**Berry:** Well, I learned after I got grown (inaudible) I had to pick it really two hundred, two hundred and fifty pound, like that, I could get that any time, easily. And I had two childrens could pick it, but I had some just couldn't do it. Them later ones couldn't, (laughter) because about three of them didn't get in on the (inaudible) at that time, my last three.

**White:** But you said your mom sharecropped with an uncle.

**Berry:** Yeah. Then she did most (inaudible) like work; it was sharecropping then because she had to work on the farm where we was at. She didn't have herself; she hoped the people that she was taking care of her when she was living, that helped take care of her, we were working together. They worked together. They just holped one another back in those days.

**White:** What farm were y'all living on then?

**Berry:** Well, at this time we was living over here in the old Groker(?) (inaudible) Community, right over here from this white church over here, over where I was telling you the Williamsons live in there. The old man was named Netum Loftin(?) (inaudible).

**White:** Netum Loftin.

**Berry:** He was our uncle by marriage, Uncle Netum Loftin, and Aunt Laura(?) was his wife. And we were just a family, most like. You know, like a family-like.

**White:** But y'all lived on their place over there.

**Berry:** Yeah. He had a little, old place, a little, small place, and he'd make a couple of little, old bales of cotton, and (inaudible) raised us some food to eat and had two or three little head of cattle and hogs. And that was about it.

**White:** Well, you said you children. You had brothers and sisters?

**Berry:** Oh, yeah. I had my older brother named Kelly Woods(?) (inaudible), and my older sister named Juanita(?). They was a lot older, and then I got another sister Mary Hayes(?) (inaudible) that lives up in St. John Road. She and I was closer together. And my baby sister that lives in Atlanta, Cathy(?), she's a (inaudible). But she was the baby girl. My brother Ardelle(?) (inaudible) lives in Jackson.

**White:** What's his name?

**Berry:** Ardelle.

**White:** Ardelle.

**Berry:** He lives in Jackson, Mississippi, and he was the very baby. My mama had six children.

**White:** But some of them weren't real good cotton pickers, or all of them were?

**Berry:** Well, most all of them (inaudible).

**White:** Just some of your children weren't good cotton pickers.

**Berry:** My children (laughter) on the later end didn't get to get none of the hard work.

**White:** That might have had something to do with the times, too.

**Berry:** Right.

**White:** They didn't have to pick cotton as hard as you did, did they?

**Berry:** No.

**White:** Well, let's get back to the school just a minute. Who were some of your best buddies when you started to school?

**Berry:** Oh, well, I had a lot of them. My best buddies was like I had a cousin named Velma Berry(?). She was my cousin, but she was also my friend, too. And then my brothers and sisters, and then all of the school. Back in those days, everybody was sister and brother and went to school. Everybody was just together. They loved one another. They shared their little lunches and what they had. We'd bring like sugar candy to school, and we'd break it up and divide it among all the kids. And we played ball out in the yard, just kind of (inaudible) today. Everybody was (inaudible). Nobody was selfish. We shared.

**White:** What kind of lunches did you bring, and how'd you take them?

**Berry:** In this little brown paper bag, maybe, or in a little bucket, the little bucket when they buy shortening or something in. And they would pack the little biscuits and sausage and stuff like that in there. And we would even share that. All sat down on a little log or somewhere, and we'd break and give this and that, and then they'd share theirs with us. And we just had a time.

**White:** Did your mama make pretty good biscuits?

**Berry:** Oh, she made excellent biscuits. Oh, boy, good size. You could share them and still have something left.

**White:** You didn't ever stick a thumb down in it?

**Berry:** No. (laughter) That was the funny thing about it. They was so much love there, people, whatever they had in their lunch, nobody made fun. Now, they's kids that make fun if you ain't got money to buy lunch with. Whew! But now then, we shared what we had and was proud of getting what we had, and we were thankful for what we had. That was the main thing.

**White:** The reason I ask about sticking that thumb down in the biscuit and putting something in there, we've interviewed a lot of—

**Berry:** Oh, we'd do that when we had, pour syrup in them, now, (inaudible).

**White:** OK. That's what I was talking about (laughter) because that's the way I came up with biscuits, too.

**Berry:** Well, I did, too. That's the way I came up with that, too.

**White:** When we didn't have syrup sometimes when we were little, we'd mix a little butter and sugar to put down in there, too.

**Berry:** Now, that was real good. Did they let you eat as much butter as you want? You had to share it; get you a little bit and put it like this and put your little stuff on top of it.

**White:** Y'all didn't make your own butter, did you?

**Berry:** Well, yeah, where we was living. I have to tell you where we was living at, with my aunt and them. They had a cow, (inaudible) cows, and made their own butter and everything. But you don't see that no more. I been trying to find some (inaudible) butter (inaudible), and I can't. This in town don't taste like it.

**White:** No, even if you buy the real butter, it doesn't taste like it. Sure doesn't. Do you like buttermilk?

**Berry:** Love it. I don't know nothing that I can't eat some of it. I love just about anything that grows, well, just everything. What is it that I don't like? I can't think of anything that I don't like. I could eat some of it, whether I like it or not. I could eat.

**White:** Did you start cooking pretty early, helping your mama?

**Berry:** Yeah. Oh, Mama make you start cooking when you had to stand on a box to get to the old, wooden stove. Get up there, you had to get up. Let me see. It was four of us girls; well, it was three because my oldest sister (inaudible). We had a week apiece. I washed the dishes a week. She cooked a week, the older sister, older than me, and the other one cleaned the house. We'd know when to reverse it back around. Each one do that over and over. We turned it over and over. I'd do mine a week, and she'd do mine a week. We had to go in the woods and gather stuff to go in the fire, and the oldest sister would get in there and chop it up with the axe, and we young ones would carry it to the house, turn-by-turn, till we get enough for the winter till somebody hauled us some in the wagon.

**White:** Right, put it up kind of, and let it kind of dry so it would burn better, huh?

**Berry:** Dry, um-hm. Most of the neighbors was good to my mama because she didn't have nobody to cut her wood, and they would cut it and take the mule wagon and bring it. And we had what they called a wood pile outside, and we would go out there, and we took care of that wood just like it was money almost because we couldn't burn as much as we wanted to, just as we needed. We had to need it.

**White:** Well, did you heat by wood, too?

**Berry:** Open fireplace, wood, we'd heat by wood, and we had Hercules Powder got all that stumps. We'd go in the woods and find a fat lighter stump and trim off to make the kindlings, we called it. That's what we did.

**White:** That Hercules Powder Company tried to get all the stumps around here, didn't they?

**Berry:** They just about cleaned up in here.

**White:** We were talking about lighter knots or whatever you want to call them. Hercules Powder Company, I think, when they bought the timber, they were really interested in the stumps, weren't they?

**Berry:** They cleaned out in this area. You can't find one around here now, anywhere. One of my friends got one, her husband, when they was hauling, Hercules was in here. Was that in the [19]40s, Hercules?

**White:** Forties and [19]50s I think.

**Berry:** Uh-huh. She got one stump, and I wish you could see it now, a great, big one. And that's the only one. Ain't no telling what she could get for it.

**White:** She still chopping on it, or does she use it?

**Berry:** No, she don't. Well, she got a fireplace, but she don't use it. She use gas now.

**White:** Most people leave it in the fireplace if they've got gas hooked up in it (inaudible).

**Berry:** That's right.

**White:** I don't know what they did with those stumps. Do you know what Hercules did with those?

**Berry:** They made some kind of powder, I think, for the Army, some kind of explosive, something (inaudible).

**White:** Some explosive. I don't know exactly what they did with them, but it was—

**Berry:** My stepdaddy used to work for Hercules Powder Company.

**White:** Your granddaddy did?

**Berry:** My stepfather. My mother married in 1941. Did I tell you about that?

**White:** Well, we started talking about it a while ago. This would be a good time to mention it again. She married in 1941. Who did she marry?

**Berry:** Ernest Shanks(?) (inaudible).

**White:** Ernest Shanks. Was he from around this area, too?

**Berry:** He was from Hattiesburg. I believe he was from out of Hattiesburg.

**White:** Did they live around here after she married?

**Berry:** Yeah. They lived—well, we did. After he married my mother in [19]41, we was living on twenty acres here on [Highway] 13. And we moved from twenty, thirteen over to Wells(?) (inaudible), what they called Mr. Digg(?) Wells' (inaudible) son, Henry Wells. That was Mr. Digg Wells' son.

**White:** That's on the other side of Hawpond.

**Berry:** Yeah, right, going like down [Highway] 28.

**White:** Yeah, North [Highway] 28.

**Berry:** That's where (inaudible).

**White:** Let's see. In 1941 you would have been [19]26 to [19]41 is what? Fifteen years old when your mom got married?

**Berry:** Fourteen or fifteen, uh-huh.

**White:** Right. Fourteen or fifteen, somewhere—right. (Inaudible)

**Berry:** Yeah, because we was old, and it wasn't but a year or so before we all scattered because we were grown, and we married, and that was it.

**White:** Well, you did sort of marry sometime pretty soon after that, didn't you?

**Berry:** Oh, I sure did. I got thirteen children to prove it. (laughter)

**White:** Thirteen.

**Berry:** Yeah. I was the mother of thirteen children. I got ten living now.

**White:** And you got married the first time when?

**Berry:** Forty-two, was it July of [19]42? I believe it was.

**White:** July 30, I believe I put down on that—and you married?

**Berry:** Clarence Durr.

**White:** Clarence Durr.

**Berry:** Yes.

**White:** And you obviously had one or two children?

**Berry:** The ten was Clarence Durr's. I didn't have none by the second husband. The ten children were from the first husband.

**White:** Well, can you name the children?

**Berry:** Oh, yes. The oldest is Clara Nell(?), William Glenn(?), Charles Irving(?), James Alan(?), Ricky Nelson(?), and Maurice is the boys. Well, now, let me get the boys. I mix a girl in there. Let me get the girls first: Clara Nell, Patricia (Pat they call her), Patricia Ann(?), and Mary Lynn(?), and Diane(?). And how many did I get?

**White:** Gosh, I lost count there, too.

**Berry:** Oh. Diane and there's another one there somewhere. Let me get it. Catherine Carol(?), that's her. That's the girls. And the boys is Glenn, Charles—I won't give the middle names—Glenn, Charles, James, Maurice, and Ricky. All of them have middle names.

**White:** But you'd rather not give them? (laughter)

**Berry:** (Inaudible) middle names, (inaudible) middle names.

**White:** But you said you had thirteen children.

**Berry:** Thirteen, I lost three, and I still got (inaudible).

**White:** Did you lose them at childbirth, or (inaudible)?

**Berry:** Two of them were stillborn, and I was about four months when I lost the other one. I don't know what it was, but two of them was a boy and a girl, (inaudible).

**White:** And not to jump up here in time, but just to get it for the record, and then we'll go back. You got married again.

**Berry:** Oh, yeah.

**White:** Did your first husband die?

**Berry:** Yeah. [He] got killed in a car accident.

**White:** What year was that? Do you remember?

**Berry:** Seventy-five [1975].

**White:** Seventy-five.



**Berry:** On 13 Highway.

**White:** And you didn't wait very long. About a year later you got married again, didn't you?

**Berry:** Yeah, a little, bitty year, something like that. I sure did.

**White:** And you married?

**Berry:** Oscar Berry.

**White:** And you got married when?

**Berry:** That was around in December. I think it was in (inaudible).

**White:** I think you had filled out on this biographical form that it was December 22, 1976.

**Berry:** I bet it was.

**White:** I was born November 22, so that twenty-second is a good date there. All right. We need to jump from all of this back to school, again, and get our mind back to Hawpond. It wasn't Hawpond School.

**Berry:** Hawpond School, that's what it was, Hawpond School. That's what we named the little school.

**White:** I keep getting it and the church confused over there right now. You went through about the fifth grade, you said,

**Berry:** Well, yeah, uh-huh, fifth grade.

**White:** And you left school when you got married. Is that right?

**Berry:** Well, I went to school one year after I got married because my husband went in the service, and I went back to school then. And so I went back that year and finished the fifth grade, and then I didn't go back anymore. Then my oldest child came along.

**White:** Well, you know, children do have a tendency to keep you from going back to school.

**Berry:** That's right.

**White:** You stayed pretty busy after that, too, didn't you?

**Berry:** Oh, did I! (laughter)

**White:** How long was your husband in the service?

**Berry:** He was in there three year, nine months, and twenty-six days.

**White:** You do remember all of that time, it sounds like. Somebody had to work and raise children during that time, didn't they?

**Berry:** I certainly did. I mean, I did.

**White:** Where did your husband serve?

**Berry:** Oh, he served in Germany. He was at Fort Benning, Georgia; I think it was. Went to Camp Shelby, Fort Benning, Georgia, and somewhere, and Camp Forrest, Tennessee, and where else? Somewhere else, and then overseas.

**White:** Right. Seemed like a long war at the time, didn't it?

**Berry:** Oh, I tell you.

**White:** And what did he do when he came back from service?

**Berry:** Well, mostly what he always did was truck driving. We farmed some, (inaudible) year, and then it was just in his blood. He just had to drive. And he drove until his health failed him to drive a truck. He started having heart attacks.

**White:** How soon did y'all buy your own place?

**Berry:** Well, we didn't own a home place at that point all while he—the only time after he started having heart attacks, after he got on his disability, we bought our first home in Mendenhall in [19]69, I believe it was.

**White:** Where'd you live before that? On your uncle's land somewhere?

**Berry:** Yeah, (inaudible) before we got our own house, we were living in a apartment up here at Mendenhall, in one of those apartments.

**White:** Oh, you rented a place.

**Berry:** Right, apartment (inaudible).

**White:** So you didn't always live out in the country, then, huh?

**Berry:** Well, mostly before I went to Mendenhall I did, but when we was farming here and there and there and there, (inaudible) everywhere, we was living in the country. Live a year here, year there. “We going to move at Mr. so-and-so this year, and we’re going to move there that year.”

**White:** Oh, you kept sharecropping for a number of years there.

**Berry:** Yeah, for a number of years.

**White:** That was the easy way to do it then, wasn’t it?

**Berry:** Well, yeah.

**White:** Well, no it wasn’t. I said, used the word easy the wrong way. I’m sure it wasn’t physically very easy, was it?

**Berry:** Well, it wasn’t, but I kindly liked it. You know, I liked it so well I still tried to do it, and the kids won’t let me even pick up a hoe this time. Arthur (inaudible) said, “You ain’t”—he wouldn’t even let me work in the flowers. I just leave it alone. Well, I think I’ve done enough when I raised them ten children and sharecropped around, worked in the Universal Plant for thirteen and a half years.

**White:** That was one thing I was going to ask you about, too. Thirteen and a half years you worked at the Universal Plant?

**Berry:** Worked about twelve years at Genesis One School, and I worked at the nursing home about six months, down at Mendenhall Nursing Home. And I enjoyed that. I just, I couldn’t work there long because them old peoples. I love old peoples and children, and it just got next to me some way.

**White:** Yeah. That can be pretty tough. When did you go to work at Universal? It opened about 1965, somewhere along—

**Berry:** It was about four or five years after it opened up before I started to work there.

**White:** What kind of work did you do there?

**Berry:** I worked in the lamination department where they made these little four, four, six or four, four, three units. I guess it’s (inaudible). I used it, I think because my arm hurt. I had to twist the wires on these little units about so long, about so wide. They had all sizes, now. They had some eight, twenties and all like that, but I did four, four, sixes and four, four, threes. That’s a special kind. We had to do a lot of them. Before I left, I think we had to do about five hundred of those, to get our count.

**White:** Kind of a piece work, huh? They keep track of how many you made and everything.

**Berry:** Yes, sir. We had a little thing there to tap. Every time you make one, you had to tap it.

**White:** Did you make pretty good money down there?

**Berry:** Yeah. Well, at the time I thought it was great. That was more money than I had ever made when I first had to work. But they went up a little bit. It was good. But after that I guess I put too much in it. I'd leave there and go do some private home work when I'd leave the plant and so forth. And it got next to me, and I almost had a nervous breakdown, so I had to quit there.

**White:** Trying to do a little bit too much, weren't you?

**Berry:** (Inaudible)

**White:** And raising ten children at the same time, too, huh?

**Berry:** Raising ten children. And then I had three of them was working. I had some old enough to work at the plant, too, and work here, and they worked there, just kindly a combination of work. We was all working together. We were doing pretty good. We were working together. (Inaudible) worked, and they could bring me money and help take care of the bills and things, so we got on pretty good.

**White:** You could make a living then.

**Berry:** We could make a living at it.

**White:** Yeah. And you worked at Genesis One School, you said for—

**Berry:** Uh-huh, as a cook there. When they first opened up, I started there as a cook. I think we had about eight students when we first started, and maybe they got over a hundred there now (inaudible).

**White:** Was that Reverend John Perkins started that, I believe, didn't he?

**Berry:** I believe he did. (Inaudible).

**White:** I think it was part of Mendenhall Ministries, (inaudible).

**Berry:** It was part of the Ministries. Yes, that's right.

**White:** We had interviewed him and his wife and Dolphus and Rosie Wearie who also came through Mendenhall Ministries and everything.

**Berry:** Oh, they're people (inaudible) great people.

**White:** But that school is going strong now.

**Berry:** It is.

**White:** It started with eight students. I don't know how many they've got now, but it's—

**Berry:** Yeah. When they started, you know, this dream they had to put it together, they believed they could do it if we tried and see would it work, and it did work. Every year they began to grow a little more, a little more, a little more, and it just worked out good, and it just—

**White:** Well, basically, if I understood Reverend Perkins right, when we talked to him, the school was basically to provide a Christian education.

**Berry:** Exactly. That's what it's based on.

**White:** And at one point it was also to prepare the students to get ready for school integration.

**Berry:** (Inaudible) that's again, because a lot of times they said they'd be so far in advance when they (inaudible), the kids would get bored, "Oh, we done had that. We done been through that." It just, I don't know. It was just good for the kids, good for the community. A lot of peoples didn't have nobody to keep their kids when they worked, and send them to school; they could stay there while they worked. They would be in school, you see. It just helped out in a lot of ways.

**White:** We had talked earlier a little bit, too, about the scarcity of schools, particularly in the black community, but in the black and the white community, in rural districts.

**Berry:** Right.

**White:** And when the schools came along and integrated, it was somewhere around 1970.

**Berry:** (Inaudible)

**White:** Well, within a few years before that, too, a lot of the schools had been consolidated.

**Berry:** Right, again, that's true.

**White:** And they closed out the rural schools.

**Berry:** That's true.

**White:** Is that when they lost Hawpond School?

**Berry:** That's when they lost that. Dry Ridge(?) I think lost theirs. Let me see. It was a school close by called (inaudible) Skiffery(?). I guess you heard of the Skiffery being down on the end.

**White:** Oh, yes. Yes, uh-huh.

**Berry:** Well, they closed all them little, rural schools, I call them. They mostly closed them out when they consolidate some of these other bigger schools.

**White:** But even when you were going to school here, had you chosen to go on far past the fifth grade, you would have gotten—

**Berry:** Oh, I would have if things would go—

**White:** You would've had to go somewhere else?

**Berry:** I would've had to went somewhere else. That's right. And see at that time, wasn't any transportation just like there is now. They got convenient ways, busing them here and there and busing them to tutoring school and all that stuff, now. But back then we didn't have that.

**White:** I guess the closest school was Harper School in Mendenhall.

**Berry:** It was. And the Magee school.

**White:** Right, and I've forgotten the name of the Magee school. McLauren(?)?

**Berry:** No. McLauren Attendance Center?

**White:** McLauren, I believe it was then. We had interviewed a couple of people who'd gone to school down there and mentioned that, too.

**Berry:** But that's as far as I went. All my kids went to—I had some kids to go to Mendenhall for a couple of years when we was living down on Skiffery. My daddy was living down there for (inaudible) years, and he was a sharecropper, too; my daddy was. And so after we moved back up here to Mendenhall, all of them went to school at Mendenhall.

**White:** And did some of your kids get on to college?

**Berry:** Well, my baby girl, she went to Jackson State, and most of them finished the twelfth grade, but they preferred work. When they got out of school, they wanted to work.

**White:** The reason I asked, you had said something about a number of them going to a ballgame this weekend. (laughter)

**Berry:** They all love ball, boys and girls. Yeah, most of them finished high school, but Nita(?) my baby girl the only one that went to college.

**White:** And while we're talking about children, how many grandchildren do you have right now?

**Berry:** I don't have a calculator to count them up. (laughter) (Inaudible) one of my girls has got Pat, the one you said (inaudible). Well, she's got the record (inaudible) it's way in the forties, grand. I got two or three, five or six or seven great-grands. I think I got about four generations in some instance, and one or two in the house. (laughter) I got them. They had to put it on paper (inaudible) know I forget. "Mama, while I got it in mind, I'm going to write this down so you'll have it."

**White:** I was going to say I'm not going to ask you to name all of them (laughter) then. I've got one grandchild, and I have trouble remembering his name sometimes. (laughter)

**Berry:** Well, I got, ooh, I got so many. All of my children, I got here but one daughter, the one live in Texas. She doesn't have any children.

**White:** We had talked about the number of jobs that you've done over the years and everything, and you said that you had worked out in private homes—

**Berry:** In private homes.

**White:** —several times, too. What type work did you do?

**Berry:** Oh, what in private homes, like you do washing, ironing, clean the floor and mop it, just general housecleaning in private homes like that (inaudible). I didn't ever do too much cooking (inaudible). I was working for the McIntyre, Gerald McIntyre(?) (inaudible) used to have a store down here on [Highway] 49. His wife, and I kept their kids while they were working (inaudible) I had to fix a little lunch for the kids when they were growing up, and then I used to help Ms. Myrtice Steverson(?), Mr. Will Steverson's wife. My mother-in-law Lizzie(?) was their main cook (inaudible) my first husband mother, and that's where she worked at until they moved to Chicago. And I also worked, well, I worked around different private homes in Mendenhall. At Delton Johnson's(?) wife, Katie Bell(?), I used to work for her. Mr. Johnson used to have the Chevrolet place. I used to work in private home there, and I used to work for Mr. Bill Grubbs' (?) wife Dianne(?) between (inaudible) Good Water Road, down

there where the Good Water Church is, down (inaudible). (end of tape one, side one, interview continues on tape one, side two) And oh, what's (inaudible) other name? He's kin to the Ashleys(?), but his, Hayne Parish's(?) son was my (inaudible). Used to have that store right over here on (inaudible).

**White:** Right, up on the corner of [Highway] 13 and [Highway] 28.

**Berry:** One of the twins is my mail carrier.

**White:** Is that right? Did you ever know anybody who lived around Old Westville(?)?

**Berry:** Old Westville, I get a lot of talk about that from the old man that we used to stay with, (inaudible) Loftin I was talking about. He would talk about they had some place he said they called the poor house over there.

**White:** Right. It was close to Old Westville.

**Berry:** When the people didn't have nowhere to go, no place to stay, they would take them in till they go on their journeys, wherever they was headed to. I never did know that much about it until I got grown. I went through (inaudible) a while back. I said, "I've long heard talk of this. Now, I see it." There's a road that goes up through there.

**White:** Yeah. There used to be an old school building.

**Berry:** Um-hm, that's what they told me. I never did see that.

**White:** Big buildings there. That's where the county seat was before they moved it to Mendenhall.

**Berry:** Right. That's what they told me, um-hm.

**White:** That's kind of off your beaten path. I just wondered if you had some friends (inaudible).

**Berry:** I remember that, and I remember my old uncle. I think he said Mendenhall was named after some guy that come in here from somewhere, said his name was John Mendenhall.

**White:** Tom Mendenhall.

**Berry:** Tom Mendenhall, that's it. I know it was Tom or John.

**White:** He was an attorney, I think.



**Berry:** Well, that's what he said they got them name from.

**White:** Well, among all these other—I hate to get back off of that on another subject.

**Berry:** Go right ahead.

**White:** But all of this that you listed as something you really like to do, other than your livelihood, and two of them have to do with your livelihood, cooking and cleaning, but the third one was quilting.

**Berry:** Yeah, quilting.

**White:** I want to talk to you about quilting.

**Berry:** Oh, quilting used to be our specialty. Well, fact of the matter, when I was living in Mendenhall, before I moved out here, the senior citizens would get together and different big cities and things, when the Mendenhall Ministries start, they would send, start a thrift store with stuff they would send down here out the North and different places. The Ministries was made up of the board members from all over the States and different parts of the state. And all that stuff, we'd tear up all that stuff. We saved the buttons. We ripped all this stuff, and we made quilts out there. We had a place right across the street from where the gym is, and we would, us old-age women, would get there, and we'd quilt (inaudible). Just a bunch of us old, senior citizens. We made quilts, quilts, quilts. And then I would get home; I'd make my own. And I could quilt one out in a day, but just not hemming it, but I could go round it and then roll it and do the circle (inaudible). I could do that. I have done so much work. Whew! (laughter) And I still, like I would do it now, but I said, "Ain't no use for me to do it. I don't use it. I got quilts I don't even use, which I did way back."

**White:** When did you start quilting? You said way back.

**Berry:** Oh, I was young. When I was fifteen years old, my first husband mother, used to be a place to go called the Magbond(?) or something. She'd get this scrap stuff, and some of it be so little, we'd cut some square paper out, and we'd take these little strings, and we'd sew it on the paper, and then we'd sew another till we get enough to make that paper out, and we'd take it out, and after we'd sew all the little things together, then we'd tear the paper off the back and sew the squares together, and we would make quilt tops like that.

**White:** You built it from nothing, then, basically, didn't you?

**Berry:** From nothing, that's right. And like we'd take these fertilize sacks when we'd get the fertilize out and boil them out and get the print out of the sack and ripped them out, use it for the lining of the quilt and all that. And we'd use them for a sheet sometime. We'd use some of them for sheets. We'd make sheets out. And I remember I had one old auntie once; she made her some bedspreads, and they would

do embroidery work in the center of it. That was so pretty. They would starch and iron them and on the pillowcase, and that was just marvelous to see that. You thought you was getting on up if you had that in your house.

**White:** Well, that's pretty stuff. I've seen some of it, too.

**Berry:** Uh-huh, handwork, you know. They would take and make little scarf. Take them fertilizer sacks and flower sacks. They'd use them and make the prettiest little things out of them you ever saw. We didn't waste nothing. Kids are wasting nowadays. We didn't waste nothing. We'd get a whipping if we waste stuff around, like food. If we want it, "Eat as much as you want, but you better not have enough to rake out because if you didn't want it, don't get it." It was just that (inaudible). They didn't believe in wasting. They said it was a sin to waste food. (Inaudible) waste food, and so we didn't do it. So if we asked for seconds, we'd better tell them how much to put on that plate and what not to put on there.

**White:** Well, when you did your early quilting, when you first started and everything, did y'all use quilting frames?

**Berry:** Oh, yeah. I guess them frames about six foot, or maybe seven foot long, and they'd bore holes all down the side where you could take it up short as you want or let it out wide as you want, and they had some thing that screw up in the top of the house. Most of the house didn't have the loft in it; you just had things run across there, and you could always hook them across there, and they had ropes, them good, old ropes. We used to have a well rope; we could tie it around there, and when we quilt, maybe only hours at the time, then we rolled it up till the next morning or whatever time we'd (inaudible).

**White:** Just pull it up to the ceiling, huh?

**Berry:** Put it up there out of the way where the kids couldn't touch it.

**White:** Well, you probably didn't have an electric light up there to hide. You didn't have to worry about pulling it up there.

**Berry:** We did have to, we had to work (inaudible). Now, when we got able, we mostly had torches on the buckets, turned down. But when we got the lamps, oh, we was good. We had a lamp with a globe; keep that globe shined up, and we could quilt at night.

**White:** Coal oil lamp?

**Berry:** Coal oil lamp, that's us.

**White:** Where'd y'all buy your coal oil?

**Berry:** Well, if it was the store, (inaudible) had a little coal oil stand where (inaudible) at the gas station. We had to buy enough when we go. You couldn't go to town, about once a week. You had to get enough coal oil (inaudible) jugs to last, according to how you burn it. And I thought it was very pleasant when we got the oil lamps because most time, most peoples didn't have the lamps. They had them big, long, what we called lighter splinters, and they would light them and stack them on something wouldn't burn, something to see how to eat supper by them.

**White:** Kind of smoke up the house, though, wouldn't they?

**Berry:** It'd smoke up the house. Yes, it would.

**White:** I'll bet that'd keep the mosquitoes out, though, during the summer, wouldn't (laughter) it? If you could stand the heat from it.

**Berry:** If you could stand that, that's right. (laughter) But most of the time when we used to farm, we eat a little before sundown, so wouldn't have to come in contact with (inaudible). At least my mother did because my mama was very cautious. She was very clean, and we had to get dishes washed before dark so she could make sure she could see was it clean.

**White:** Well, talking about not having electricity and stuff like that, did y'all have an icebox, or did you ever have any ice?

**Berry:** No. The only way we kept a little ice was in the fireplace. Get a big bundle (inaudible) and wrap it up real good, and it'd stay for two or three days till the iceman run again.

**White:** What would you wrap it up with?

**Berry:** Wrap it, it didn't make any difference. They was going to put some clean, like some clean fertilize sacks they done washed clean. And then they had an old quilt or something. They'd wrap it around there where it'd stay in there a long time. And it'd last the longest in that chimney. I don't know why, but it would. And the first icebox I ever saw, let me see. Where was we living at? The (inaudible) we lived on that place had one, used to put the ice in the top. It was kind of like a little—it would keep it cold down in here. That's the first one I ever saw because we had what they called the old safe, you know, with screen over where you put your food in.

**White:** Right, pie safe, we called it.

**Berry:** And then we had the old stoves, had the thing with the water on the side, hot water on the side, and your things up here you put your food in. That's the kind of stove.

**White:** When you'd build a fire in the stove and everything, it would automatically heat the water on the side.

**Berry:** It would automatically heat the water on the side. We kept that full. That's where we kept our hot water for baths and stuff.

**White:** Did y'all ever can, putting any food up?

**Berry:** Oh, we canned in fruit jars at that time, but we didn't have no—well, it was later years till we had pressure cookers, and then we would put the fruit—my mama would (inaudible) the fruit jars and put them in the wash pot and boil them (inaudible) in the wash pot. That's what we did then. Wrap them up in some clean rags. That way wouldn't bump together, you know, and put them in that wash pot, and boil them so many hours, and take them out, and that's what we used. Dozens and dozens jars of peas, butterbeans, whatever you name.

**White:** You had plenty to eat then?

**Berry:** We had plenty to eat because they raised it. And then we had plenty of peanuts and stuff like that, you'd raise, and pick them off and carry them to the smokehouse, hang them up where the rats wouldn't get them. And sweet potatoes, just banks of sweet potatoes, stacked up. They had a way of digging in the ground, putting them down, and covering them up with straw and stuff like that.

**White:** You'd cover them up and protect them, keep them out of the light and everything.

**Berry:** Protect, right.

**White:** Some people put them under the house, and some people had a cellar.

**Berry:** Some peoples had built little sheds.

**White:** Little, low sheds, weren't they?

**Berry:** Right, they was low sheds over them. That's right.

**White:** Yeah. I remember some of those. Did you ever help them butcher hogs or anything like that?

**Berry:** When I got, after I got married, I learned how; I could do that. I could do one just as good as my daddy-in-law, though he was a professional at that. And he learned me and my baby sister. We married brothers. He learned us how to do all that, how to start, where to cut, and how to go around everything, how to come down the center, how to cut the neck before you let it drain. He learned us how to do all that.

**White:** Hang it up in a tree and let all the blood drain out.

**Berry:** (Inaudible) let all that blood run out. And I could cut and trim them hams up just as he could. He taught us how to do all that, cut the fat. Now, I goes up, in Mendenhall (inaudible) they got a farm; they raise hogs and things (inaudible).

**White:** On the other side of Mendenhall from here, yeah.

**Berry:** Right, up there where it used to be Steel Mill Road (inaudible).

**White:** Right. I've been out there.

**Berry:** And so we'd go out there, and so the girl come by here, and she knew I'd know all that, and I used to go out before I started having this arthritis and fry the cracklings out, and they'd sell those crack[lings], and they would be real good. She said they didn't nobody know how to do it so—

**White:** Oh, you the one that used to cook those.

**Berry:** I—

**White:** And I used to get some from them. (laughter)

**Berry:** I used to go out there and cook them out, and they would sell every one they'd cook out. I said, "Lord, have mercy."

**White:** Yeah. They raise money every year by doing that.

**Berry:** (Inaudible) by doing that, and they'd sell peanuts. We'd parch peanuts and send all the board members some for Christmas, and I used to work with them all in the ministry here. I enjoyed it. I wanted to move out here. I said, "I'm going back home." But I misses them (inaudible) a lot of things I like to do and the Christmas part of it is what I like. I like that part.

**White:** Well, you've obviously always been, for a long time been a church member and active in the church.

**Berry:** (Inaudible) all my life.

**White:** We hadn't gotten around to that part of it. You mentioned your church one time.

**Berry:** (Inaudible) church. That's where I was reared up, I think, in church. Mama carried us to church. She didn't have no problem (inaudible). She lined us up on the back, and if we'd be troubling something, she'd get our eye. And that's all she had to do. We'd be scared the whole time. We know there was a whipping coming

(laughter) we got back home because we talked in church. So we didn't do that. We was good in church. We walked. Every Sunday, we walked. She'd get us ready first and put us ahead of her. She'd come on behind us, and we'd be at church, and we had to walk it every Sunday. Wasn't no rides. Sometimes when revival was going on, our old uncle (inaudible), he would put us all in a mule wagon and take our (inaudible) to church in the wagon and then tie the mules under the trees and carry them a little block of hay to eat and then have a little tub where they could water them because the church stayed there all day. Church used to stay all day at the church. We used to have revival, when I was a little girl.

**White:** Yeah. We did, too, at my church. We had dinner on the grounds. Is that what y'all called it?

**Berry:** That was it. Honey, we'd just run and get there and get that dinner because that was the best day of our life when they had that dinner on the grounds. And we would go, and when we got teenagers, we wanted to get back to the church and get off the wagon and walk. (laughter) We (inaudible) boys—

**White:** You didn't want to be seen.

**Berry:** We didn't want the boys to see us riding a mule wagon and then Mama (inaudible), "I dare you to get off there." Oh! Sit down (inaudible). We didn't want them to see us ride up on the church and riding in a wagon. It was so funny. We laugh about that now. Sunday, them was the good, old days. Everybody loved one another. If we just had a part of that kind of love nowadays. People is concerned about one another nowadays. I think this would be better, life would be better with everybody, be concerned, one by another. (Inaudible) faith without word, word without faith? You know, we got to have both of them together for them to work.

**White:** When did you join the church? Do you remember?

**Berry:** Oh, I was in, I believe it was in 19(inaudible) look like about seven years old, I think it was. I can remember way back because I think Reverend E.C. Reed(?) was the first pastor I remember. It was at the (inaudible) church.

**White:** Is that Elder Reed? Is that the same person who, in Mendenhall—

**Berry:** No. He was from (inaudible) Spring.

**White:** No. The Elder Reed I remember was from Mendenhall.

**Berry:** Elmer Reed used to be in Mendenhall. That's holiness Reed (inaudible), Elder Reed. I (inaudible) him some, too. I used to go to the Holiness Church up there, too, and my church was a (inaudible) Missionary Baptist Church up there in Mendenhall before I moved back home to my regular church.

**White:** You're back at your home church now?

**Berry:** (Inaudible) home church now.

**White:** Well, they still have pretty good attendance there?

**Berry:** Yeah. We got big, nice attendance out here now. Oh, it's just growing. Well, in fact we always have because this community (inaudible) young ones there ever was. We always stay growing and growing till we have a church full, and then now we got peoples coming all from around Mount Olive, Magee, and right here, joining our church. I mean, we got a big group of—

**White:** I've heard from several people that the church is very big and growing.

**Berry:** It is growing. We had to add some more; we done added some more to the church.

**White:** Who's the preacher over there now?

**Berry:** Larry Buoy(?) from Georgetown, Mississippi. Reverend Buoy is our pastor now.

**White:** And we have—y'all might have heard of W.H. Hind(?). He was a pastor here for about eighteen years, uh-huh. And then Reverend Brown(?) and then Reverend Clarence Louis(?) (inaudible). And we just had several ones. And Reverend, the last one before we got Buoy was—what was his name, now? He was from Jackson. I was at Mendenhall during the time. I'm not too familiar with that.

**White:** Um-hm. You kind of kept an eye on them, but you didn't come out here every week.

**Berry:** Yeah. On every revival, now, I had to come down here day and night, too, at the revival. I always come back home, but I had joined up there, and I stayed up there. When it was my second marriage, we belonged to the (inaudible) church, and I goes back up there and visit them now just like I used to visit, coming down here now. (inaudible) Reverend Phillips. You might have heard of Clarence Phillips(?).

**White:** Right.

**Berry:** Well, me and his wife always—she's like my sister now. We calls one another all the time.

**White:** Well, when did you move to this place where you're living?

**Berry:** Oh, I've been out here about seven years, September.

**White:** You got a pretty big place here?

**Berry:** No, just two acres and this house.

**White:** Two acres? That's pretty big when you start having to cut grass.

**Berry:** (Inaudible) believe my boys fuss every time they go around my flowers. "Mama, don't put out no more flowers. Don't put out no more trees." I said, "I'm going to get up some of this stuff out of y'all's way this fall. I ain't going to fool with all these flowers."

**White:** Are you living here by yourself now?

**Berry:** Well, I got one boy that's not married. You know how they're in and out.

**White:** (laughter) Yeah. They're around when you need them sometimes.

**Berry:** Right when you need them, they're never around, but he's in and out.

**White:** Did your second husband die, then?

**Berry:** My second husband died, yeah, (inaudible).

**White:** When did he die?

**Berry:** Well, he's been dead about two years before I come down here. (Inaudible).

**White:** Oh, he died when you were still living in Mendenhall. Is that right?

**Berry:** Still in Mendenhall. He was a wonderful man; I tell you. He was a number one husband, my last husband. My kids all—you couldn't tell whether he was all my kids' daddy because that's the way he treated them, just like they were his children. Everybody thought, "OK." A lot of people would ask me, "Is that the children's daddy?" I said, "No, but he would do anything for my kids under the sun. He would do it." And he was just a father for them.

**White:** Well, that's good to see. Did he have children from a former marriage?

**Berry:** No childrens (inaudible). He was married once before; his wife died. And I didn't have no dreams about it. My sister knew him when they were—they grew up—my older sister and brother grew up kind of like. He was a lot older than I was, but I don't know why. But I just (inaudible) he was good to me. He took care of me, and anything I wanted, he was there. I never had to want for nothing or anything like that.

**White:** Well, you've been blessed in a lot of ways.



**Berry:** I've been blessed in a lot of ways, and I thank the Lord for it because it wouldn't have happened if it wasn't (inaudible) given me the know-how: you had to treat people like you want to be treated; you have to know the difference between a good person and a bad person, but you had to distinguish the difference between people because some peoples you think is, is not. But the Lord just showed me that he was the right man that I needed. And so I never regretted one moment, and the kids didn't either.

**White:** Well, that's good. You had told me earlier, before we started taping, that you had pretty much enjoyed life in Simpson County.

**Berry:** Oh, yes, Simpson County. I don't down Simpson County, not at all. Simpson County is my home, and I guess I'll always be here. Good place to live.

**White:** If you got to live, it's a pretty good place to live. (laughter)

**Berry:** Pretty good place, a good place to live, you know, because I think Simpson County, in a lot of different ways it's different from other counties. You know what I'm saying? I think Simpson County's a pretty good county. I would rate it number one in my book.

**White:** That sounds like a pretty good time to end here. I appreciate you talking with us today. Thank you very much.

**Berry:** Well, thank you for letting me do it.

(end of interview)