

# Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical  
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Jack Locke Herring

Interviewer: Joe White

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Louis Kyriakoudes, Director  
The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage  
118 College Drive #5175  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
601-266-4574

*An Oral History with Jack Locke Herring, Volume 1217, Part 8*

Interviewer: Joe White

Transcriber: Stephanie Scull-DeArme

Editor: Stephanie Scull-DeArme

## Biography

Dr. Jack Locke Herring was born to Maurice Francis Herring Sr. and Dorothy Willie Locke in Duck Hill, MS in May 1930. His father taught throughout Mississippi, including Utica, Oxford, Duck Hill, and Edwards before teaching at Hinds Junior College (now Hinds Community College) for over twenty years until finally retiring. Herring's mother graduated from Mississippi State College for Women, though she devoted most of her life to being a homemaker, occasionally teaching and serving as a substitute dietician. Herring is the fourth of five children. He graduated from high school in Hinds, and attended Hinds Junior College before transferring to the University of Mississippi ("Ole Miss") to complete his undergraduate education. Herring completed two years of medical school while at Ole Miss. He received his MD degree from the University of Tennessee in 1955.

Jack Herring married Sara Jean Holiday, his high school sweetheart, in 1950. They have been married (at the time of the interview) for fifty-three years, have six children together, who, in turn, have given Herring eighteen grandchildren and a couple of great-grandchildren. After earning his MD, Herring did a one-year internship at Baptist Hospital in Jackson. He then spent a couple of years at the public health service hospital in New Orleans, LA. To repay his student loans, Herring served ten years at a sanatorium in Simpson County, focusing on tuberculosis. He joined a private practice in Magee and practiced medicine there for twenty-six and a half years before finally retiring.

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AN ORAL HISTORY  
with  
JACK LOCKE HERRING

*This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi Simpson County Project. The interview is with Jack Locke Herring and is taking place on June 21, 2003. The interviewer is Joe White.*

**White:** My name is Joe White. Today is Saturday, June 21, 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 Dr. Jack Locke Herring at his home in Magee, Mississippi. Dr. Herring, could you state your full name, please, sir?

**Herring:** Jack Locke Herring.

**White:** And you were born when and where?

**Herring:** I was born May the thirty-first, 1930, in Duck Hill, Mississippi.

**White:** Montgomery County.

**Herring:** Montgomery County is correct.

**White:** And could you name your parents and tell us a little bit about what they did?

**Herring:** My father was Maurice Francis Herring Sr. My mother was Dorothy Willie Locke Herring. My dad was in education. He traveled over Mississippi for about six or eight years here, there, and yonder, and then finally settled into the town of Utica in southern Hinds County where he taught for eight years and then in 1944 moved up to Hinds Junior College, which is now Hinds Community College, and spent some twenty-odd years there until he retired. My mother and father lived about a mile apart. They came from the soil of the Big Black River. They lived on opposite sides of the west branch of Lewis(?) Creek, which ran into the Big Black River about a mile down from where they lived. She was well educated, too. She had a degree from MSCW [Mississippi State College for Women].

**White:** Mississippi Normal? I believe that was the name at one time. No, it wasn't. I'm sorry.

**Herring:** It was MSCW.

**White:** At that time, huh?

**Herring:** Right. Mississippi State College for Women at that time, and she had a degree, but she was mostly a homemaker in her lifetime. She taught a little bit at times, and on one occasion was a substitute dietician at Hinds when they couldn't find anybody else to do it, but basically she was a homemaker. But they were both well educated. He first taught at Hinds before I was born, then moved to Duck Hill. And I was the fourth of four children who were born while he taught at Duck Hill, and then he went to Edwards in Hinds County for a couple of years and then to Oxford for a couple of years, and then finally back to Utica for eight years, and then on to Hinds. So he wandered all over the state.

**White:** What did he teach at Hinds?

**Herring:** He started out as dean of men, but he wasn't stern enough or mean enough to control (laughter) those boys, so he had to give up that job. He went into instruction. He kind of got to be the vice president.

**White:** I thought I remembered him. I did know him. He was at Hinds until the [19]60s. Wasn't that right?

**Herring:** Yes. He started in [19]44 and retired in [19]66.

**White:** Right. That's what I thought.

**Herring:** He was Jim McLenden's(?) right-hand man for all those years.

**White:** Yes. I went to Hinds [19]61 through [19]63. I thought I had met him.

**Herring:** He would have been there, yes.

**White:** What was it like growing up in Duck Hill?

**Herring:** Well, of course, I have no memory of Duck Hill. I was too young for that.

**White:** You were just born there then.

**Herring:** Right. I was born right in the middle of Depression, and I used to kid my mother after my daddy died that they were so poor that if they'd had the price of a picture show ticket, they would have gone to the picture show. (laughter) But since they didn't have the price of a ticket, they stayed home and entertained themselves, and I was their fourth child.

**White:** Well, we didn't ask your birth date.

**Herring:** I gave it to you, May 31, 1930, right in the middle of the Depression.

**White:** You have a better memory than I do, for sure, then. You were the fourth child?

**Herring:** I was the fourth child, and then when she was forty-four years old, and I was the baby for fourteen years, along came a little surprise, number five. (laughter)

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

**Herring:** Oh, sure. The oldest boy is Maurice Francis [Jr.], and then two years later there's a girl, Dorothy Jean Herring. And then two years later there's a girl, Nanny Joyce Herring, and then four years later, there's Jack Locke Herring. And then fourteen years later, there's Mary Judith. So sure, I can name them all. (laughter)

**White:** Are they pretty much scattered all around, or did they grow up and stay in the same area?

**Herring:** They're well scattered. My youngest sister lives in Jackson. My older brother became a doctor; spent his life in the public health service and retired and lives in South Carolina. Nobody knows why he chose South Carolina. I don't think even he knows, but that's where he lives. Oldest sister is in Gonzales, Louisiana, slightly south of Baton Rouge. Next sister lived all her life south of Houston, Texas, in Lake Jackson. And the youngest sister and I stayed in Mississippi.

**White:** Where did you go to elementary school? When did you first start?

**Herring:** Went to elementary school primarily in the town of Utica except if you lived there, you didn't call it Utica. If you lived there it was [pronounced] Ya-tica.

**White:** Ya-tica?

**Herring:** Ya-tica, and I don't know when they changed the pronunciation, but when I lived there, everybody who lived there called it Ya-tica. I went through the eighth grade in Utica, and then I got hauled off, up to Raymond, and for about the first year I was in Raymond, people used to provoke me into saying the word because they couldn't believe how I pronounced, (laughter) so it took me about a year to get over calling it Ya-tica.

**White:** I don't think I ever heard it called that.

**Herring:** Well, you didn't live there.

**White:** That's right, just local folks, huh?

**Herring:** Yeah. Yeah, and even the football cheers, "Ya-tica! Ya-tica!" (laughter)

**White:** Did you graduate from high school in Raymond?

**Herring:** Graduated from high school in Hinds; went to Hinds Junior College a couple of years; wanted to be a doctor; went up to Ole Miss for a couple of years undergraduate, and then two years medical school there because the four-year school hadn't moved to Jackson yet.

**White:** It was still in Oxford then.

**Herring:** Right. And then went on to The University of Tennessee and received my MD [medical doctor] degree June the thirteenth, 1955, from The University of Tennessee.

**White:** Had you met the lady who was going to become your wife by that time?

**Herring:** Oh, she was my wife by that time.

**White:** We skipped over a lot of territory, I realize. I believe we need to name her.

**Herring:** When I moved into the ninth grade in Raymond, I made a lot of new friends, including the young lady Sara Jean Holiday, and we became high school sweethearts, and finally I talked her into marrying me. I bought a marriage license in August of 1950, but it took me two months to persuade her to marry me. (laughter) We didn't get married till October of 1950.

**White:** Well, you must have had pretty good faith that it was going to happen if you went ahead and invested in the marriage license.

**Herring:** Well, I was planning on it. We've been married fifty-three years, have six children, and seventeen, eighteen grandchildren, and a couple of great-grandchildren.

**White:** Well, I won't ask you to name all of them, but could you go ahead and name your—

**Herring:** I could.

**White:** I know you probably could. We'd be glad for you to if you'd like to, but if you could name your children, here, then we'll get back to earlier days.

**Herring:** OK. My oldest child is a son, Gene Talmadge(?), and next is a daughter Sara Janet(?), and next is a daughter Mary Beth(?), and next is a son Allen Maurice(?), and next is a daughter Marsha Lyn(?), and then the baby is Rebecca Lorene(?). And they're all healthy and well behaved and have their own families and lots of children and grandchildren.

**White:** Well, that's good. That's the way it should be, I think. And you just think everything's been perfect in life, and it just moved along pretty swiftly like that.



**Herring:** No, far from it, but in the light of the world today, we're successful. None of it's been easy, and none of it's been perfect. You know that. (laughter)

**White:** I would imagine that's the way most lives are these days. When you were at Ole Miss, you got your bachelor's. Did I understand that right? Did I understand you? Premed degree at Ole Miss and then went to Tennessee?

**Herring:** I took my undergraduate work at Ole Miss, and then I went to two years of medical school at Ole Miss at Oxford because Mississippi didn't have a four-year medical school. It had a two-year medical school.

**White:** Then you went and got the MD.

**Herring:** The Mississippi four-year medical school started July the first, 1955, at University Hospital in Jackson, Mississippi. That's when we had a four-year medical school, when University Hospital opened.

**White:** What was the name of the medical school in Tennessee?

**Herring:** University of Tennessee.

**White:** Was that the only medical school at that time in Tennessee?

**Herring:** I think so, but I think later on they added a branch at either Nashville or Knoxville, one or the other. But I think the branch at Memphis was the only medical school at that time.

**White:** One reason I was curious is my grandfather who was a country doctor down in Pinola, got his degree in Tennessee—that's bound to have been that medical school—years and years before that. I'm just sort of curious about it. You graduated. Then where was your first practice, or where did you move after getting your MD?

**Herring:** I took a one-year internship at Baptist Hospital in Jackson, and at that time the doctor draft was still operating. If you had never been in service, you knew you were going to spend two years in service, and rather than establish a practice I waited to be drafted, and they never did draft me. So I finally joined the public health service and spent a couple of years at the public health service hospital in New Orleans on the medical service. I became interested in working with tuberculosis while I was there, and when I finished that service, I'd gone to school under a loan program, and I owed the State five years in an underserved area, and the man who headed up the sanatorium had a hard time getting good doctors. And he found out I was interested in tuberculosis, and he talked me into coming to the sanatorium in Simpson County to give them my five years of service. And that five years grew into ten years, and at the end of ten years, I realized two things: number one, the sanatorium was going to disappear long before I did because they were closing all the TB sanatoriums and

moving tuberculosis treatment into public hospitals and mainly home treatment. And the second thing was I had six kids who wanted to go to college, and the State didn't want to pay for their college education. So I decided I needed to quit loafing and go to work, and so I just moved three miles down the road to Magee and joined a practice in Magee and practiced medicine there twenty-six and a half years until I retired.

**White:** We had interviewed (inaudible) at an earlier date Kathleen Miller who was a nurse at Sanatorium, at the hospital down there. Was she a nurse—

**Herring:** Oh, yeah.

**White:** —during those years you were there?

**Herring:** Kathleen and I were good friends. She's a great nurse and great person.

**White:** Not much doubt about that. The hospital, just for historic purposes on the tape here, was a tuberculosis sanatorium, which is now just houses of Boswell Retardation Center, I believe, at Sanatorium.

**Herring:** Right. The hospital was started in about 1919, and it was closed in either [19]75 or [19]76, and the grounds stood vacant for a year or two. And then the mental health system took it over from the state health department, and they've had an intermediate care mental retardation center there ever since.

**White:** What was the treatment of the patients generally like at Sanatorium during those years? We talked a little bit with Kathleen about this, but we really never did get into it. How large a facility was it? How many patients were there?

**Herring:** Well, I arrived there in November of [19]58, and they had two separate hospitals. Segregation was still very much in effect, and they had a white hospital and a colored hospital. And all told, when I arrived there, they had about 600 patients in bed there. And I arrived at a time that tuberculosis had finally entered a treatment stage where they really had some control over the disease. We had about four or five drugs that were moderately effective in the treatment of tuberculosis. These drugs began to become available shortly after the end of World War II, late [19]40s and then early [19]50s, and it took about ten years to learn how to use them. And once they learned how to use these drugs, they realized that the old-fashioned treatment of bed rest and institutionalization and isolation was really no longer necessary, and they could do away with all of these sanatoriums and treat TB patients basically on an outpatient basis.

**White:** And that's when a lot of the people who had been hospitalized for years started returning home. Is that right?

**Herring:** Well, it wasn't hospitalized so much for years at that time. Now, in the early treatment of it back in, say, the [19]20s and the [19]30s and even the early

[19]40s, people would go there and stay two and three and four years, or some of the chronic patients would stay forever, until they died, just to keep them out of the community for infecting other people. But when the drug treatment became available, then you found out that you could sterilize these people pretty rapidly so they were not infectious and contagious even after just several weeks of treatment, and it was possible to return them to the communities. In the early days, bed rest was a great, important part of this treatment. Put a person on complete bed rest, and it put the lungs at rest. They didn't move very much, and they didn't keep this disease stirred up. And when we say complete bed rest, it was that. They would bring those people in the hospital and put them in bed, and their foot wouldn't touch the floor for six to twelve months. And they were actually kind of held virtual prisoners there, and they got to the point where they could get up and go to the bathroom once a day, that was a humongous victory. When they could stay out of bed an hour, it was a tremendous victory on their part.

**White:** I imagine they were pretty weak after lying in the bed all of that time, too.

**Herring:** I imagine they were. They also used to have their own dairy, and they fed them milk that was about 6 or 8 percent cream, butterfat in it. (laughter) I'm surprised they didn't kill more of them with coronary artery disease.

**White:** No exercise and complete butterfat, huh?

**Herring:** Yes, right. (laughter) Dr. Henry Boswell came to the sanatorium just a year or two after it was founded. The man who founded it died, and it was Dr. Henry Boswell, who had had tuberculosis, came there to run the place, and he came sometime in the early [19]20s, maybe [19]21, [19]22. And he ran this place until he died in December of 1957. Dr. Boswell was a remarkable person. And he was a genius, but he was also a great charlatan, too. He would do anything to keep a person under treatment. He would lie to them. (laughter) He would do anything it took to keep them in the hospital, taking treatment. And there are some—

**White:** Keep the patient population up, huh?

**Herring:** Well, keep them from losing what they'd gained. You can take a young man with his hormones raging, and he had been there eighteen months, (laughter) and sometimes it was hard to talk him into staying in the hospital, if you want to be frank and honest. Dr. Boswell had all sorts of charlatan ways to keep these people under treatment because it took a tremendous length of time with no drugs to heal some of these people. And a lot of them never healed. A lot of them died. It was a terrible disease.

**White:** If they got out in the community, they were simply exposing other people then.

**Herring:** Especially their families, especially their own families. There are some terrible tales about him, and the surprising thing was the people who worked there had a tendency not to believe any of these stories, but every one they could ever check out proved to be true. And I'll give you an example. He used to tell them that he had a bird dog, and in the [19]30s he sold this bird dog to a man in North Mississippi for a thousand dollars. And that was unheard of, and nobody believed it, but they developed these mobile x-ray units that would run all over the state of Mississippi, x-raying people just off the street. Anybody that walked by had a chest x-ray and be sure you don't have TB. Well, those units were housed and centered at Sanatorium, and they'd come in there late Friday and rest a while and go out Monday morning somewhere else. And one time one of these crews was up in Senatobia, Mississippi, and this gentleman wandered by, "How's my friend Henry Boswell?" "Well, he's great." "Well, would you believe that about a year ago he sold me a bird dog for a thousand dollars? And a week later the thing walked in front of a train and got run over and killed." (laughter) So they never could catch Dr. Boswell in a lie, though he told many of them.

**White:** His were only for the patients' goods, huh? You began private practice in Magee. Is that right?

**Herring:** Yes.

**White:** After you left Sanatorium.

**Herring:** Right. I came out here November the fourth of [19]68. I spent ten years to the day at the sanatorium and came here in [19]68.

**White:** What was it like? Who did you go in with, or did you set up a clinic on your own?

**Herring:** No. I did not come on my own. They had four well established physicians here. The older physicians were Dr. Charles Pruitt Jr.(?) and Dr. James Otis Stephens(?). Dr. Pruitt was a Texan who came over here, and Dr. Stephens was a native son, and Dr. Pruitt had been here first and needed help. Dr. Stephens came to help him, and later on they had Dr. Wayne Cockrell(?) and Dr. Frank Wade(?). Dr. Pruitt and Dr. Stephens always had the attitude that there never were enough rural doctors, and any good doctor they could come to get in practice with them, they would welcome him with open arms, and they did. And that wasn't the prevailing attitude in a lot of communities at that time. The prevailing attitude during the early part of the nineteenth century was that quite often the doctors in town were not only not friends; they were bitter enemies. But Dr. Pruitt and Stephens would have no part of that, and they fostered a climate of, "Come help us. We've got a lot more than we can do." And I was number five, and they died off, but over the years we managed to grow some of our own (laughter) and attract some, and we usually had four or five or six physicians practicing in Magee ever since Dr. Pruitt and Dr. Stephens established that legacy.

**White:** Well, I refer to him as young Dr. Pruitt even though he's not too young anymore, but Pruitt the third has been my physician down here for a number of years.

**Herring:** Frank Wade Jr. came and stayed with us a while; recently moved on to Jackson. We grew Rudy Runnels(?) out of Mize. Jim Stephens was like a father to Rudy Runnels. Pat Pasco(?) married Jim's first cousin, and moved into Magee, and he still practices here.

**White:** Well, you guys did grow your own. We haven't done that well in Mendenhall, unfortunately. (laughter)

**Herring:** Well, Blackledge(?) did some growing up here. We didn't succeed on Jim Holbrook(?). We put Jim in as an orderly and kind of brought him along, encouraged him to be a doctor, and he did, and he came and practiced a year or two and didn't like the climate, so he's now in Mendenhall, which is fine. I'm glad he stayed in the county. The county needed him.

**White:** Well, we're glad he's in Mendenhall, too. (laughter)

**Herring:** Right. I understand. It's great.

**White:** How big an impact did you guys make as a group on the hospital here, which has grown to be a big community mainstay in Magee?

**Herring:** Well, the reason the hospital is there is because the doctors have always supported it and pushed it. When I came to Magee we had a very small hospital, and it was not modern at all. I even considered leaving several times because the hospital wasn't what I thought it ought to be and what I wanted it to be, but I finally made up my mind, "No. I'm going to stay, and I'm going to see it better." In 1974 we borrowed a million dollars and built a huge, new addition onto the hospital, and it took us fifteen years to pay that off, and when we paid it off, we turned right around and borrowed three million dollars and did another addition. And we also learned what it takes to have a successful rural hospital. To have a successful rural hospital, the first thing you've got to have, you've got to have a group of competent doctors who are willing to work and support a hospital. Now, if you don't have that, then you can stick a fork in it and call it done. You're not going anywhere if you don't have the basic group of doctors. Number two, you got to make the patient the most important person in the hospital. He's got to be more important than the administrator or the doctor or anybody in the hospital. Number three, it didn't matter how much money somebody offered you to take care of each patient, you got to be thrifty and frugal in what you do. Medicare started out on a cost-plus basis, and a lot of people went crazy and hire, hire, build, build, spend, spend. And then the government realized, "We can't do that." And they put the squeeze on everybody, and if you weren't thrifty and frugal through all of that, then you in terrible trouble. And then finally, number four has been added lately. If you don't pursue outpatient revenue, you're not going to be

successful because now they making you do more and more and more things outpatient. Our local hospital, now about 45 percent of our revenue in the last three or four years is outpatient. So those are the four things that you have to have, to have a successful rural hospital, and we kind of grew into that over the years. And we don't have a perfect hospital, but we have about as good a little, country hospital as the government will let you have in their reimbursement programs.

**White:** Well, it has a very good reputation. I know that. I've visited on several occasions, myself, down there. (Inaudible) family members. When did you retire? I realize I'm jumping the gun here on a lot of stuff, but we're going to go back and fill in a lot of gaps here in just a little bit.

**Herring:** All right. When I started practicing medicine I made a choice. I could spend my time with the patients, or I could spend my time with paperwork. And I chose to spend my time with patients, and the latter part of my practice, the government through the Medicare, Medicaid programs, the tort lawyers and the insurance companies required more and more and more and more of your time on paperwork, and it got to the point where they wanted you to spend five minutes with a patient and twenty-five minutes writing about it. Those were not my priorities. My priorities were twenty-five minutes with the patient and five minutes writing about it. I got so aggravated and disgusted with it, I worked my sixty-fifth birthday, and the next day I shut the doors and went to the house. (laughter)

**White:** Right on sixty-five, huh?

**Herring:** Yeah, exactly. I practiced medicine from June the thirteenth of [19]55 until June the first of [19]95. I lacked twelve days of being of being forty years.

**White:** Well, you sign on that government paperwork and stuff about like my friend Dr. Billy Munn(?) up there, who at times is a little bit acerbic about how much paperwork he has to fill out for the government, Medicare and Medicaid.

**White:** Bill needs to retire, too. (laughter) (Inaudible).

**White:** Well, he's working that way, I think.

**Herring:** People say, "Don't you miss it?" And I say, "I miss helping people, but the red tape, the paperwork, and the third-party interference of people telling you what you can do, and what you can't do, and how you got to do it, I miss all of that like I miss the pain of a rectal abscess." (laughter)

**White:** Oh, me. (laughter) Well, what do you predict is going to happen with this new group coming into medicine right now? Are we going to see any sea changes any time in the next five or ten years, or are they just going to get completely bogged down with bureaucracy?

**Herring:** It's gotten so complicated, and nobody has any control over it. It's just like our government. You and I have absolutely no control or no say in our government, nor the people we elect and send to Congress don't. Bureaucrats run the United States.

**White:** Where does health care fit into that?

**Herring:** It's in a terrible mess. I think it's gotten so big, so complex that nobody can do a whole lot about it, and our representatives have been pretty much bought off by the drug companies. That's one reason drug prices are so high, and they can't or won't do anything about them because they are bought and sold by the drug companies.

**White:** Do you think any of that was reflected during this latest legislative debate this last year on—

**Herring:** Tort reform.

**White:** —tort reform?

**Herring:** Oh, sure. Sure. There was no middle ground, no in between. You had two sharply divided sides. (End of tape one, side one; interview continues on tape one, side two)

**White:** —present right now Dr. Herring. Let's kind of go back and recap life so far a little bit, on a personal angle.

**Herring:** Well, let me go back to Ya-tica. I was six years old when we moved there, and I was fourteen when we moved to Hinds. This was a very rural community, and they were a truck-growing, farming community. In the spring, first along came the cabbage, and then a little later and on into the summer came the tomatoes. Then World War II came along. I was eleven years old when World War II started, and I was fifteen when it ended, so I was not able to participate as one of the fighters, which probably was much to my benefit. But in this truck farming area all the young men left, and all you had was kids and women and old men, and the truck farming went right on, and we were expected to do it. They had packing sheds, and I worked at the packing shed, doing this, that, and the other, particularly handling boxes. And I remember one week when I was probably twelve or thirteen years old, they obviously either didn't have any child labor laws, or they didn't pay any attention to it. We didn't work on Sunday, but I worked six days that week. I worked sixteen hours a day for six days. I worked ninety-six hours that week. I was paid thirty cents an hour. I got a check of almost thirty dollars, which was a fabulous amount of money for a kid that age. I took my check and went uptown. Because of the war, the stores were empty. There wasn't a thing up there that I wanted to buy (laughter) with that marvelous thirty dollars that I had. So I took it and bought a (inaudible) with it.

**White:** Well, I don't imagine your parents probably really wanted you to spend all that money uptown, either, did they?

**Herring:** No, of course they didn't.

**White:** Was the Utica Junior College there then, the black junior college?

**Herring:** Yes. It was about six or eight miles south of Utica, except it was a private school then. It was started by a gentleman named Holtzblau(?). I can't tell you his first name, but he was a lot like—

**White:** Was it Ernest? I read a book by him one time. I'm not sure—

**Herring:** *The Black Man's Burden.*

**White:** Right. I'm not sure about that first name, but I—

**Herring:** Well, he was kind of like Dr. Lawrence Jones at Piney Woods. He came into Utica and started this school that prospered for a good, long while and then began to lose its luster as public education became more and more readily available to the blacks, and finally Hinds Community College took it as a branch, and it's still a very active branch of Hinds Community College. But this was private then, by the black gentleman named Holzblau(?).

**White:** I think they referred to themselves as sister colleges back during the 1960s when I went to Hinds. That's what Dr. McLendon(?) referred to it as, and I don't know whether that was an official designation or not.

**Herring:** Well, it's become an integral part of the college now.

**White:** Yeah, it became a branch later, in the late 1960s, maybe around 1970. I'm not sure exactly when it was.

**Herring:** They have an agricultural high school there now, Utica Agricultural High School, and then the branch of Hinds Community College.

**White:** When you say you worked in the packing house of that facility—

**Herring:** Packing shed.

**White:** Was that for shipping out vegetables?

**Herring:** They would bring the cabbage in, and we'd pack them in boxes initially, and then later on, fifty-pound sacks. And they'd bring the tomatoes in, and they would go in wooden boxes. People would have to unload those things. And they would grade them into different grades and sizes of tomatoes. Ladies would wrap



them in wax paper, one by one, and pack them in boxes, and then you'd nail the tops on the boxes and haul them into these refrigerated cars. And you had to fit them in tight, tight, tight, tight, tight because there couldn't be any movement. And then when they finally got the cars filled, completely filled, they had big compartments that they'd put two or three hundred-pound blocks of ice. And then they'd take an ice crusher and cover the top of those things with ice, and the car had about six-inch walls filled with cork, and they'd seal those doors, and they'd ship them to wherever, Chicago.

**White:** Train cars you're talking about?

**Herring:** Yeah, railroad cars. Ship them to Chicago, New York, and wherever, the cabbages and the tomatoes.

**White:** Was that a cooperative, or was it privately owned?

**Herring:** No, it was private. Everything was private. Now, I think they may have had a cooperative in Crystal Springs, but what we had in Utica was just strictly a private thing.

**White:** What was it like growing up in Utica? I know you didn't spend all of your years there, but some of them.

**Herring:** Well, it was a small community. It was a lot of good people, and a few old soreheads, and it was life in rural Mississippi. Everything was perfectly normal. There wasn't anything unusual (laughter) that we had to accept. We were all poor as a church mouse, but we didn't know it, so we didn't consider ourselves poor.

**White:** Everybody else was, too, weren't they?

**Herring:** Yeah. I never went hungry, and I never lived in a house where I was cold or the roof leaked or anything like that, so I was well cared for, and all the people I knew were the same.

**White:** Was that the only early type job that you had or hobbies that you had while you were [growing up]?

**Herring:** I delivered papers. There was no employment for kids other than just summer work with the packing shed. Now, the rural children who lived on farms, they used to start school sometimes late so they could help with the cotton harvesting. Sometimes they'd let them out early to help with these other things. They kind of tailored the school program to the agriculture programs. And farm kids missed a lot more school than I did because they had to stay home and work.

**White:** School was basically a nine-month session back then.

**Herring:** Yeah, well, nine months at the time. Had it ended early, it'd been eight months, but they had enlarged to nine, but there were some of the families wouldn't let their kids go to school till they'd finished the harvest. So school was whatever length the agricultural family made for that one student. Some of them were penalized. They were made to stay home, working.

**White:** Well, the lady who set up this interview with you mentioned to me something about a canoe—

**Herring:** Oh, yeah.

**White:** —you built one time. I wanted to mention that and get you to explain—

**Herring:** Well, this was after I'd moved on up to Raymond. I was a teenager, and there wasn't a lot—and I wanted a part-time job, and there wasn't a lot to be had, but I did get a job in a woodworking shop. We made windows and doors and cabinets and all of that. And when I got to be about fifteen, sixteen years old, I had a couple of cousins who still lived in Montgomery County, Winona, and they were more like brothers to me than they were like cousins. One summer we wanted to take a canoe trip. That was before they had all these canoes. The only canoes you had then were wooden canoes. There weren't any metal and fiberglass and all these other things. Most of them were old-time, wooden canoes. The first summer we were able to borrow a canoe from one of the Boy Scout camps, and we set sail on the Big Black River Sunday after lunch, and Saturday about noon we were way down the river, and we called them to come get us, and they hauled us out. Well, the next year we wanted to do the same thing, but we couldn't find anybody who'd loan us a canoe. So I got brave, and I decided I'd build a canoe, and I did, the whole ball of wax. I made the frame and (inaudible) the ribs with plastic and covered it with canvas. I had me a canoe eighteen feet long and three feet wide, and we made another—

**White:** Full scale.

**Herring:** We made another week-long trip down the Big Black River.

**White:** You left Duck Hill and went down the river from there? Is that in that area?

**Herring:** Well, the Big Black River starts north of Eupora, and it comes west of Eupora down through Kilmichael and then wanders over and parallels Old Highway 51, Vaiden and West and Durant and finally crossed [Highway] 51 at Pickens. The first year we started it west and went to Highway 49 between Flora and Bentonia. The second year we started at Pickens where Old [Highway] 51 crossed the river. We made it almost to Port Gibson.

**White:** Oh, you went a long way down the river then.

**Herring:** Yeah. That second year we got into two afternoon thunderstorms, the very first day, and then the second day about one o'clock in the afternoon, it started raining and lightning and thundering, and it didn't quit. And all afternoon long we were in the rain, and the lightning would strike the trees on each side of the river, so we just paddled on till we could find a bridge to spend the night under. So we made real good time those first two days, going down that river on that second trip.

**White:** Did you have to portage any of the areas?

**Herring:** No.

**White:** It was all water, huh?

**Herring:** Yeah. And all pretty much the same, sand bars and mud banks, so I don't know why we didn't get to the Strong or the Pearl where they had a pretty river. The Big Black is one of the ugliest rivers you'll ever lay eyes on, but it was our river.

**White:** Well, I guess right now the biggest activity going on on the Big Black is the argument over whether they can make a casino on part of it over there closer to Vicksburg.

**Herring:** Yeah. And that's interesting. Right where they want to put that casino, there is some unusual scenery there. There are some soapstone banks for several hundred yards along there, and they're filled with old fossils, sea shells and worm tubes and all of that, and if you would read carefully about this controversy, one of the objections is because of all those rich beds of fossils there in that river.

**White:** Archeologists want to protect it.

**Herring:** Yeah. The geologists don't want any part of that being disturbed.

**White:** Wasn't there also some Civil War connection? I know you don't remember the connections with the Big Black. Wasn't there a boat or two sunk in the Big Black up there (inaudible)?

**Herring:** I read about that. I'm not familiar with it. They're supposedly not too far below Edwards there. There were a couple of places where in low water you could see the remnants of the wheels of the gun caissons and other things they tried to take across the river, and that didn't all make it.

**White:** That must have been—

**Herring:** No. You're right. There's a boat in there. There was an article in the paper not long ago about this boat they sunk in the river, one end on one bank, and the one end on the other bank, and they made a bridge out of it to take things across. And (inaudible).

**White:** That's what it was that I remember reading.

**Herring:** I'm not familiar with where that is.

**White:** What other than medicine and children—you obviously love children, too—has filled your life, hobbies and activities and travels? You ever done any traveling, or have you been (inaudible)?

**Herring:** Well, a little bit, not a whole lot. My wife's the traveler in the family, and she has been all over the place, mostly with one of her friends. Now, when our children were younger we used to take summer vacations. We had a camping trailer, and we made some trips to Virginia and Kentucky and one long trip to California, back through Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, and one year we took them to Yellowstone, spent ten days in Yellowstone, camping out, and people to see Yellowstone; they drive from one end to the other in six hours and think they've seen some of it. We spent ten days up there and thought we'd seen none of it. But more recently we took a Hawaiian vacation. But I have enjoyed woodworking since I did it as a teenager. And—

**White:** You kept it up, then.

**Herring:** It's a pleasure. I particularly like to use a woodturning lathe. You can put a block of wood in there, and it's almost like sculpture. You can make whatever you want appear out of it.

**White:** I have a friend who makes bowls out of burls and spends an inordinate amount of time doing it, but he can make some beautiful, beautiful bowls.

**Herring:** Right. I have a cousin who bears the same name, and he's a woodworker, and he makes all those old dough bowls out of the Tupelo Gum wood, and he also carves things. I've got several leaves that he carved out of a redbud tree that came off the old family homestead.

**White:** Do you still have any of the family homestead together? Some of those (inaudible) family.

**Herring:** It's still in the family on both sides. The land is still owned by family members (inaudible).

**White:** Well, that's good. A lot of people have lost connection with their home place (inaudible).

**Herring:** And we have the old homestead cemetery, which nobody will ever be buried in. The last person who was buried in there was a very eccentric, old-maid aunt who went to Millsaps College about 1920, one of the few females who ever went

there. She never married. She lived her life working for the State of Mississippi, and she has a most unusual epitaph on her tombstone that you've ever seen in this old homestead cemetery. Let's see if I can remember it. The epitaph on her cemetery says, "Here lies the body of Lorene Herring. She lived her life without fear or terror. Born an old maid; died an old maid. No hits, no runs, no errors." (laughter)

**White:** And that's in Montgomery County.

**Herring:** That's carved on her tombstone in the homestead cemetery in Montgomery County. She was very proud of the fact that she was an old maid and still a virgin. (laughter)

**White:** Can you think of anything else that you'd like to add to this oral interview that we—

**Herring:** Well, I've spent forty years of my life in Simpson County, and it's a great place with great people. When I lived just ten years at the sanatorium it was a lot like living on a college campus. It was a wonderful place to live. We had our own electrical system and everything else, generated our own electricity, had our own farm, our own dairy and all of that and living in Magee, been just a lot of great people, a great community. I don't have any regrets of the forty years I've spent here. I don't think I could have ever found a better place to live, and I always felt like that I made a significant contribution to the community and to the life of the people, and that was always important to me. I never made a whole lot of money. I have very little money right now, but I have a great sense of satisfaction in what I've been able to contribute. I guess that would sum it up.

**White:** Well, you've invested a lot of time and energy, I know, into that hospital. I've heard that from too many people to know that you haven't, and that's a pretty good legacy to leave.

**Herring:** Well, hopefully. I'm proud of it. As I say, it's not perfect, but it's about as good a little community hospital as you can have, and I'm proud of it for that reason. And I hope we can continue. I do not know how long it can succeed. A lot of hospitals have had to close because of lack of support, lack of funds, this type of thing, and I don't know whether Magee Hospital is going to succeed forever, but we certainly try.

**White:** A lot of the rural hospitals are really in trouble. Well, I thank you very much, Dr. Herring, for giving us this interview. Thank you, sir.

**Herring:** Well, you're more than welcome.

(end of interview)