

James City County
Oral History Project
Informant Data Report # 84-048

Full Name: Sam T. Jones Sr.
Nickname:
Fieldworker:

Date of interview:

Address and telephone number: 666-1783

Occupation: Retired

Additional skills, activities: Handy Man

Education: 7 grade

Religion/name of church: Baptist Chickanoria

Organizations: FPA Maswos Peninsula Baptist Decon Union

Date of Birth: 4-8-1905

Place of Birth: James City CO

City T. DAWO County

State VA

Travel and/or changes of residence:

Year

Place

Spouse's full name: Lucy Ellen Jones

Children's names and addresses:

LOUISE BASSETT NEWKENT VA
FLORENCE PICKOTT CROCKER
ELCIE LEWIS NEWPORT NEWS
SAMUEL T JONES JR NEWPORT NEWS VA
MARY SAUNDERS BUCHAM VA
MARION BROWN NEWPORT NEWS VA
JEAN JONS
DORIS BALEY))

DIACANIA BRAXTON HAMTON VA
HELEN BOMAN
WILLIE JONES

))
))

Family or ethnic heritage as provided as interviewee:

Father's name:

Place and date of birth:

Important event (date of immigration/migration to area, etc.):

Occupation:

Mother's name:

LUE JONES

Place and date of birth:

Important event/date:

Occupation:

JAMES CITY, CO

Paternal grandfather's name:

JESIE JONES

Place and date of birth:

Important event/date:

Occupation:

JAMES CITY, CO

Paternal grandmother's name:

MARY ETTER JONES

Place and date of birth:

Important event/date:

Occupation:

JAMES CITY, CO

Maternal grandfather's name:

Place and date of birth:

Important event/date:

Occupation:

Maternal grandmother's name:

Place/date of birth:

Important event/date:

Occupation:

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WORLD WAR I 14,33

Q: This is Robinette Fitzsimmons interviewing Mr. Sam T. Jones, on August 14, 1984. How long have you and your family lived in James City County, Mr. Jones?

A: All my life.

Q: All your life? You were born right here?

A: I was born right there in the field, over here.

Q: Really? Is the house still standing?

A: No, that's gone.

Q: Oh goodness! If you don't mind my asking, I know it's personal but what year were you born in?

A: Nineteen-five.

Q: Nineteen-oh-five.

A: April the 8th, 1905.

Q: Good heavens! April 8th?

A: Nineteen-five.

Q: Oh gracious! How long did the house stay there that you were born in?

A: That house has been down about 20 years now.

Q: Oh, did it burn down?

A: No, it just caved in.

Q: Just old, huh? And how long had your family lived in the house before you were born? Do you remember?

A: Oh, several years before I was born because we lived down the road further before they moved up here.

Q: So they had lived in James City County for a long time.

A: They lived in James City all their lives.

Q: Oh my goodness! Well how many generations back does your family go here?

A: Oh, I don't know exactly.

Q: Way back into the 1700s maybe?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Oh, that far?

A: Yeah, sure. I'm quite sure of that.

Q: Oh my goodness! Well, if you don't mind my asking, were the members of your family emancipated or before the Civil War how did they live?

A: Well, my grandparents, they were during the Civil War, yes.

Q: Were they slaves before the Civil War?

A: Yes, during the Civil War, yeah, they were during the Civil War.

Q: Oh my goodness. Were they still alive when you were born?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your grandparents were?

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you remember them?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh, so you were older before they died, then?

A: Oh yeah, my grandmother didn't die until 1934, and my grandfather died in 1930.

Q: My word! They must have been terribly old when they died, weren't they?

A: They were getting up in age pretty good when they died.

Q: I guess they were. Gracious. Well, what do you remember of the things that they told you about their young lives? Do you remember anything at all about things they would have told you, about their lives during and before the Civil War?

A: They didn't tell me much about that, they didn't tell me too much about the activities during that time.

Q: Uh huh. What was their life like after the Civil War?

A: They lived good lives after the Civil War, very productive, they were.

Q: Were they farmers?

A: Yes.

Q: They were?

A: My grandfather was a farmer.

Q: Oh. He got some land here on Chickahominy Road?

A: No, he _____, but he used to do a lot of sharecropping.

Q: Oh, he did sharecropping.

A: Uh huh. Where those pines are down there, you can't see it now, of course, that was a field one time. We used to farm that one time.

Q: Oh, well, how much property did he sharecrop then?

A: Oh, he used to sharecrop, I imagine about 30 or 40 acres, something like that.

Q: Did he? And that was enough food then to feed your family, I guess, feed his family, rather.

A: Oh yes. He used to raise hogs and things like that, you know.

Q: Oh, he had animals, too, to feed them.

A: Hogs and he had horses, cows.

Q: And that's the kind of work he did all of his life, then?

A: Yeah, mostly farming.

Q: Sharecropping. And did they live in this house neaby that you were talking about, where you were born, or did they live somewhere else?

A: They lived in the house over there, right at the bend. I was born in that house.

Q: Yeah.

A: I was born in that house.

Q: Oh gracious. And then your parents, were they also farmers here in James City County?

A: No, they did other kinds of work. My mother, she used to work for people, and, you know, housekeeping.

Q: In their houses? Uh huh, what about your dad?

A: He used to work on a farm.

Q: He was a farmer too? Was he a sharecropper?

A: Worked for farmers, he wasn't a sharecropper, worked for farmers.

Q: Worked for farmers. Well, when he worked for farmers, would he get a certain amount of the crop so he could feed his children?

A: Yeah, yeah, sure. He used to get a certain amount. They would give him some. Even in my time, since I've been raising a family, I used to work on a farm part-time, I used to work at a brickyard and I used to work part-time on a farm. I used to get stuff off the farm, you know.

Q: Would you?

A: To support my family.

Q: How many children were in your family that your parents had? How many did they have?

A: Weren't but two boys.

Q: Just two boys. And then you kind of changed the story when you had children, right, because you had how many?

A: Eleven.

Q: Eleven children.

A: Nine girls and two boys.

Q: Oh gracious!

A: Because my wife and I raised 13, we raised two of our grand-children. Raised 13.

Q: Well, how many grandchildren?

A: _____

Q: That's fantastic. How many grandchildren do you have?

A: Grandchildren? Thirty some.

Q: Thirty some, and then you said 30 some great-grandchildren too, right. Oh, that's wonderful. Well, you say you worked for the brickyard.

A: I worked at the brickyard.

Q: For how many years, all during your younger life?

A: No, no, I went to school, you see, I started school in 1913, and I went to school until 1922. I came out of school in '22, and I went to the brickyard and worked 'til '43. After '43 I went and worked for a contractor in '43 about four months. In '44 I went to work for the government at Cheatham Annex, about 19 years and 5 months, I worked there until '63, _____ and I got laid off in '63. I went down to the Coast Guard Center in Yorktown and worked down there about 4 months. And then that job was terminated, and I came to Camp Peary. I stayed there 10 years, and that's where I retired, at Camp Peary.

Q: Oh, so you've seen a lot of military life as a civilian, haven't you?

A: Yes, ma'am. At Camp Peary.

Q: Gracious.

A: I spent 10 years there.

Q: So you've been retired 10 years now.

A: Since '79. It wasn't '79, it was '73.

Q: Seventy-three, maybe. Yeah, well, by working, you say you did do some farming too, then?

A: Yeah. _____ the kids, you know. _____ I used to work on the farm then, you know. I have worked for 25¢ a day.

Q: Oh my word!

A: That's right.

Q: When was that, you would work for 25¢ a day?

A: Back in the '20's.

Q: Really?

A: That's right.

Q: What would that 25¢ buy back then?

A: It would buy pretty good, I mean, you could get a whole bag of ginger snaps for about 5¢.

Q: A whole bag of what?

A: Ginger snaps.

Q: Oh, really?

A: That's right.

Q: A whole bag of ginger snaps for a 5¢.

A: For 5¢, you could go get a whole bag of ginger snaps.

Q: Oh my word, would you buy bread, or would your wife make that?

A: No, I was a kid then.

Q: Oh, you were a kid out buying cookies.

A: I wasn't nothing but a kid then.

Q: Oh, that's when _____

A: When I got married I was working at the brickyard then. I got married in 1928. I got married on the 3rd of June, 1928.

Been married 56 years last June.

Q: If you don't mind, when you went to work for the brickyard do you remember how much you made then?

A: Yeah, 10¢ an hour.

Q: Ten cents an hour?

A: Uh huh.

Q: Oh my word! And this was back . . .

A: I was making \$11 a week for five days and a half.

Q: Oh, was that enough to, once you got married, was that enough to support a family on?

A: No, I was making more than that when I got married. When I got married I was making \$16.50 a week.

Q: Sixteen and a half dollars a week?

A: Uh huh.

Q: Oh, my gracious.

A: That's right.

Q: Oh. Well, when your wife was working for people in their homes, how much would she make?

A: She hasn't worked for anybody but Mrs. Dozier since we've been married.

Q: Oh, just Mrs. Dozier?

A: Mrs. Dozier since we've been married. That's the only person she worked for.

Q: Oh, I thought maybe she worked for more than one person.

A: No, she used to work for Mrs. Dozier ever since we've been married. That's since we came up here. I lived up the road

11 years, up the road, further up the road towards the New Kent line, not quite in New Kent but in James City. I lived there 11 years and I moved down here in '44. I came down here and built my house in '44.

Q: Oh.

A: I didn't build this house, I built one right there, that burned down, and I built this one here. That one over there in '44, and that burned down in '49, and I moved in this one here in '50.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: I built this one in '50.

Q: Well you say you started to school in 1913.

A: That's right.

Q: And went until 1922.

A: That's right.

Q: Where was the school that you went to?

A: Down at St. John, that church you pass down the road, that brick church down the road here, ____, it's the old church sitting up there. Down there at the bottom there, there was a school, a little one room school right down there in the bottom.

Q: Was it called St. John's School?

A: St. John's School. That's right.

Q: And it was one room.

A: One room.

Q: How many grades did it have in it?

A: I went up to the seventh grade.

Q: Did it, in one room? One teacher?

A: One teacher.

Q: For all seven grades.

A: She had all of them, _____, one lady didn't pass by us and she was the highest one in the school, had to bring in the class by herself.

Q: Oh gosh! Well, how would the teacher teach so many different ages?

A: It wasn't much then like it is now, you know, because we didn't have nothing but spelling, reading and arithmetic, something like that. _____. But I went down there, I didn't go there all my time.

Q: Oh.

A: I went down there about four years, and I spent the rest of my time at Chickahominy down here at the church.

Q: At the church?

A: Yeah, they had a school there down at the church there.

Q: Oh, I didn't know they had a school down there.

A: Oh, yeah. Over there across the road where that recreation center used to be over there. There used to be a school there.

Q: Oh, how many grades were in there?

A: Well, they went up to the seventh grade.

Q: Oh, it also went to the seventh grade?

A: Yeah, that's about all the far the schools went up to, the seventh grade.

Q: Okay, was it also a one room school?

A: No, that was a three room school there.

Q: Wow, three rooms.

A: We had another, had two schools there at one time, had one coming down this road here, that also was Chickahominy School. And they had so many children that they couldn't teach them all in them two schools. And they had a Masonic Lodge Hall there, used to go to the Masonic Lodge Hall, I went to that Lodge Hall myself. All the higher grades went into the Lodge Hall, and the lower grades went down the other school where they was building the Rosenwall . . .

Q: Yeah, Rosenwall School.

A: Well, they built the Rosenwall School, that was a three room school.

Q: Uh huh, and you had three teachers in it then?

A: Yeah, they had three teachers in that school. That's where I left from, that place.

Q: In 1922, then?

A: Nineteen twenty-two.

Q: That's when you ended your formal education?

A: Yes, ma'am, I went to the seventh grade.

Q: Uh huh. Gracious.

A: And we didn't go to school but six months of the year, you know.

Q: Really? Was that because of the farming, they needed people to farm?

A: No, that's as long as the schools taught. It started in September and ended in April. That's right.

Q: Oh.

A: I never went to school over six months.

Q: Oh my gracious. Well, what did you think about school back

then? Do you think it was as hard as school is now, or you think it was harder?

A: I believe school now is real tough I believe. I believe that the children have it tougher. I believe _____, I believe it's a little tougher than what we had. I believe it is.

Q: Did you think your teachers were strict?

A: Oh, yeah, they were strict back during those times.

Q: Yeah, stricter than today, I'll bet.

A: Yeah, they'd make you stand in the corner, and get whipped, as far as that's concerned. They'd whip you.

Q: Really? For what, misbehaving?

A: Misbehaving, that's right.

Q: What if you didn't get your lessons? Would you get punished for that, too?

A: You'd get punished for not getting your lesson, you stayed in after school. Make them stay in after school.

Q: And do chores and things?

A: Ma'am?

Q: Would they have to do chores and things if they stayed in after school?

A: Yeah.

Q: To punish them?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh my. How did they heat those schools?

A: With wood. All the larger boys, we used to go down the woods and cut wood.

Q: You had to cut your own wood, huh?

A: We didn't cut all of it, we got ... some of the parents got

together and green wood, you know. But most of the wood, the children, we used to go in the woods and cut down great big old trees. And _____ and carry it on to the school, and chop it up.

Q: Gracious. Well, when you went to school for only six months, how long was the school day? How many hours a day would you go to school?

A: I went at 9:00 to 3:00, I believe it was. Nine to three.

Q: Was it?

A: Yeah, 9 to 3, that's right.

Q: Well, I was thinking of something else.

A: We had to walk too, you know.

Q: You say you walked to school?

A: Sure.

Q: Even in the bad weather?

A: In bad weather.

Q: Snow and rain and all that, you still had to walk, huh?

A: Still had to walk. I remember in 1917 when we had so much snow that we couldn't go to school.

Q: Really?

A: Yes, ma'am.

Q: Couldn't even walk through it?

A: Couldn't walk through the snow, it was ice, slick.

Q: Icy? Whew!! How long did that last?

A: It snowed before Christmas, it didn't get off the ground until around about April or something like that.

Q: In Virginia, here?

A: Right here in James City County, in 1917.

Q: Christmas of 1917?

A: It started before Christmas.

Q: And it snowed so hard . . .

A: That was the worst winter we ever had.

Q: Well, did you miss all of that time in school from December until April?

A: The sun was shining too bright to go to school, but there wasn't much school during that time, very little school.

Q: Well, did you just stay home and play in the snow, huh?

A: We played in the snow, sliding up and down the hills on the ice.

Q: Yeah. Well, I guess nobody could go much of anywhere, could they?

A: No, that's right, that's right.

Q: Well, what would people have done for food and to keep alive when, you didn't have cars and things, so if you had that bad weather --

A: Well, most people had all their meat and stuff, and hogs and things, you know, and most everybody raised hogs, you know, and they raised their beef. Even my grandfather, he used to raise corn and carry corn to the mill, and grind it for meal. I did the same thing.

Q: Uh huh, but during the winter, during a bad winter like that what would they have done for food? They couldn't go anywhere to get anything.

A: Well, they didn't need nothing much, unless it was coffee or ___ something like that. They had everything else.

Q: You had everything else on hand.

A: They raised everything.

Q: Well, was that a hard winter where people were concerned? Do you remember a lot of people dying because of the --

A: That was in 1919 when the people died so much, that was 1919.

Q: Right. Did a lot of people around here get that flu?

A: A lot of people died.

Q: Young and old?

A: Young and old.

Q: Well --

A: See, I've never had influenza.

Q: Really?

A: Never have had it.

Q: Oh, you're lucky, you really are. Well, during the winter of 1917 when it snowed so much, did that cause a lot of hardships with a lot of people dying or being ill?

A: That had something to do with it too. A lot of people's houses weren't so good, you know, exposure. A lot of people died -- exposure was a cause of it.

Q: I would imagine a lot of animals probably died too?

A: A lot of them did die, sure.

Q: Yeah. But they wouldn't be accustomed to such terrible --

A: The Chickahominy River froze all the way across.

Q: Really?

A: That's right.

Q: Did it ice up enough for the kids to go ice skating on it or did they skate around and play on it?

A: We were too far from the river, they couldn't.

Q: Really? Oh.

A: Yeah, I lived about two miles and a half from it. The closest river was two miles and a half, before you got to the river. We stayed around here and played around on the bags and things down here.

Q: Uh huh. Well, what happened in the spring when it thawed after all that terrible snow?

A: It was terrible, mushy and everything, it was mushy.

Q: I'll bet.

A: Yes, it was.

Q: Did you have a lot of problems with the rivers being higher than they normally would be?

A: Yeah, sure, all that ice, you know.

Q: When it melted --

A: When it melted --

Q: Yeah, you had a lot of problems, I'll bet. Well, tell me when you were back in school, what sort of things did children do for fun and games, to play, entertain themselves?

A: At school?

Q: At school and at home.

A: Most of the things we did was play baseball, there wasn't no basketball.

Q: Uh huh.

A: We used to play baseball, and make an old ball, you know, buy some twine and make a ball out of it, and different stockings and so on on top for the cover. We used to make our balls.

Q: Oh.

A: And of course, some of the children were able to get some balls, they used to bring balls to school, but most everybody

around at home, we had handmade balls. We used to make our balls. We'd buy a little rubber ball like this here, you could buy them at the store, and they'd wrap them until they'd get the size you wanted, you'd take a stocking and put over top of it and sew it together like that, it would make a good ball.

Q: That makes a nice hard ball then for a ballgame?

A: Uh huh.

Q: And that was the main form of entertainment at school and at home?

A: And school and home, playing ball, and ring-around-the-rosie, and all that stuff, and rolling old wheels all day long. I'd roll that wheel all day long.

Q: Oh gracious. Did any of you have any horses or mules or anything that you could ride or play with?

A: No, we didn't bother playing with no animals.

Q: You didn't, didn't have any to play with?

A: Uh huh. And we'd just make most of them, we used to go down the woods and cut down trees, and cut the wheels off and make our own wagons. We probably got some at Christmastime, that Santa Claus would bring you. He'd bring you some old toy at Christmastime, but the main things we had to play with we made them ourselves.

Q: Rather than store bought toys, huh?

A: Yeah, we'd go down the woods and cut down a trees and cut the wheels off of it, and bore a hole in it, and put an axle in it and make up a handmade wagon. That's what we used to do. Only things we had to play with were handmade.

Q: Gracious. Well, that was probably, boys probably played a lot of baseball. What do you remember the girls playing back then?

A: Some of the girls used to play with the boys' baseballs. Most of the girls didn't, but some of them played ring-around-the-rosie, and drop a hat, and all that kind of stuff. That's all they done mostly. _____.

Q: Well, if you wanted to go somewhere, I guess that would have been down to Toano, right, if you wanted to go to a place to shop, Toano? How would you get there? Would you walk?

A: Yes, walk.

Q: Would you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Clear to Toano, huh?

A: Uh huh.

Q: Oh gracious!

A: Many hundreds, hundreds of times I walked.

Q: Would you walk on the roads or cut through the fields to save time?

A: Walked on down the road.

Q: Really?

A: There used to be a place, a railroad track used to be down here, come right by that place down here, we'd cut across Mr. _____ field. After they done away with the railroad track, we had a path we could walk down, walk down the railroad track after they took all the ties and things out. We had a shortcut behind Mr. Hammond Branch's house, and go to Toano that way. After we'd get down to St. John's Church. You know

where Mr. Hammond Branch's place used to be at?

Q: Yeah, uh huh.

A: Right there where they stayed, that's where we'd get off the highway and go out that way. We'd go to Toano that way.

Q: Gracious. What do you remember about Christmas when you were little? How did your family celebrate Christmas? How was it different from today?

A: I don't think the celebration was any different at all.

Q: Would you cut up a Christmas tree?

A: Yeah, put up a tree, uh huh. We didn't have no, you'd make your own decorations, crepe paper, you know, and hang it right on the tree.

Q: Would children get presents like they do today?

A: Yeah, they got presents.

Q: Uh huh. And you'd do a lot of eating and cooking of food, bring in the family, and this sort of thing?

A: That was the basic thing, the eating. You'd cook a lot of food during the Christmas time, for Christmas.

Q: Oh, I'll bet.

A: Decided to make them cakes and things a month before Christmas, I reckon.

Q: Uh huh. Well, you talked about your father and other people having food on hand, even when you had the big snows and everything. Would they smoke their meat, or how would they preserve it? Where would he keep it?

A: Yeah, they'd keep it in a smokehouse.

Q: He had a smokehouse out back?

A: Yes.

Q: And what would he have hanging in there? Hams?

A: Hang all the big cuts of meat up in there.

Q: Beef too?

A: The hams, and the shoulders, and all that stuff. All that's smoked. The only thing didn't smoke was like the spare ribs and things like that, they didn't smoke those.

Q: What about chickens and stuff like that?

A: Oh, they had chickens _____, they had coops, they'd take them out the henhouse and put them in the coop, and let them stay in there, _____ to kill them and eat them.

Q: Oh, you'd just kill them and eat them right away then?

A: No, no, they wouldn't go down there and take one off the yard and choke him. They'd put him in the coop and let him stay in there until they'd clean themselves out.

Q: Oh for heaven's sake.

A: That's the way they done.

Q: Well, what about beef, how would they keep beef?

A: They would put salt on that, on the beef.

Q: And keep that in the smokehouse, too?

A: A lot of times what they would do, they would kill a cow, and divide it up, you know, different people would get together and you take some, I take some, like that. Wouldn't no one person have a whole lot. They wouldn't be able to, it's apt to spoil on them, see, and they'd have so much, see. They would distribute it after they'd kill the beef, they'd distribute it, you know.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: And some of them would even take it around and sell it.

Q: Oh.

A: It wasn't like it is now, everything has to be government inspected beef. They used to kill a hog out there, want a little pocket change, run short of money, they always had plenty of hogs, you know. They used to kill a hog or something like that and shop it around, sell it to people.

Q: Well, what would your mother do to keep her vegetables through the winter? Would she can them?

A: She used to can them up.

Q: She would can them every summer?

A: Can them.

Q: From a big garden and she would --

A: Can through the summer for the wintertime. They didn't have too much stuff to buy, you know, tea and coffe and sugar and stuff like that.

Q: Uh huh.

A: The stuff they couldn't raise, that's the only thing they had to buy.

Q: Right.

A: But mostly, we had mostly everything we needed.

Q: Uh huh. Where would you go to get flour? Was there a mill here?

A: No, there used to be a mill on the other side of West Point, used to go over there.

Q: Uh huh.

A: _____, that's where they used to go.

Q: And you'd get a great big bag of it, I'll bet, wouldn't you?

A: Yeah, uh huh.

Q: An enormous bag.

A: My grandfather and some of the other men around here used to raise wheat, and we'd take it and carry it over to the mill and grind it up, make your own flour.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh for heaven's sake.

A: They did that, uh huh.

Q: Uh huh. Well, do you know where your --

OFF THE TAPE

Q: When the Depression came in 1929 - 1930, did it really affect people living up here that badly? Do you think life became worse or did people just kind of keep on like they always had?

A: It was a hardship to some of the people, it was a great hardship to some of them.

Q: Did it affect your family very much?

A: Not too much, I was already married then.

Q: Yeah.

A: I was already married.

Q: And you were at the brickyard, right?

A: I was working at the brickyard during that time.

Q: And you didn't lose your job because of the Depression?

A: No, I didn't lose my job.

Q: They kept on making bricks?

A: See, the only thing that affected us at that brickyard was with John Lewis. Do you remember John Lewis, he was the head

of the Union?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, he had those big coal _____ up you know. That was _____ brickyard down but we burned the bricks with coal.

Q: Oh, uh huh.

A: And during that time, and they shut us down, we had to go out and find other employment.

Q: You had to go out and find other employment?

A: Yeah, because we couldn't work at the brickyard because we couldn't burn the bricks, couldn't get no coal.

Q: You couldn't fire the bricks because you couldn't get any coal to fire tt with, huh?

A: That's right, that's right. I went to work for different other people on the farms, like that.

Q: Oh, how long did that last?

A: It lasted, oh, '29, '30, around like that. Everytime John Lewis wanted some more money they would strike, you know, they would cut the coal down and we couldn't get it.

Q: Uhm.

A: I worked over Richmond for 10¢ an hour.

Q: You did? Doing what?

A: Couldn't make but, a nine hour day.

Q: Oooh. Doing what?

A: Loading railroad ties on the ships.

Q: Oh, down at the shipyard in Newport News or up in Richmond?

A: In Richmond on the docks.

Q: Oh, you loaded railroad ties to make money. But how would you

get back and forth up there?

A: Me and my brother-in-law, we used to ride on the man's truck what he worked for.

Q: Oh. He'd come down and pick everybody up and take them up there?

A: My brother-in-law used to drive the truck.

Q: Oh.

A: He used to drive the truck, and we used to ride back and forth in his truck.

Q: For 90¢ a day.

A: Ninety cents a day, that's right.

Q: Gracious.

A: Nine dollars was all we could make.

Q: Uhm. And that lasted for several years, and then the brickyard was just shut down during that time.

A: No, they didn't shut down, I would say, two or three months at a time, something like that.

Q: Uh huh.

A: They were vacation-like. We'd get a stock of coal in there, we'd use that up, then the next thing you know, John Lewis had done some of it, we couldn't get no more coal. Then we had to just go ahead and do something other work 'til they'd get some more coal, and then we'd come back and work again. That went on for about a couple of years or more, _____.

Q: Gracious. Well, what finally solved the problem?

A: After they stopped striking and then we'd get all the coal we wanted.

Q: Oh, oh. And then the brickyard continued in operation.

A: Continued operation.

Q: How long did the brickyard operate, until when?

A: What do you mean?

Q: Is the brickyard still in operation?

A: No, ma'am, it burned down. That's the reason I stopped working up there. It burned down in '43.

Q: Oh, and they never started it back up again.

A: That same company didn't start back up. Another company came in there and put it in operation, they operated for two or three years but it disbanded.

Q: Oh. And then it hasn't operated since then, huh?

A: No, Newport News, that shipyard has got that recreation center down there now.

Q: Yeah, well, where did the bricks go, most of them that you made? Were they going into construction or --

A: Yeah, into construction. We used to send a lot of, a lot of them to New York.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Most of our bricks went to New York and Quantico, Virginia.

Q: Oh. For building big buildings?

A: That's right.

Q: Oh.

A: Our bricks went to Wall Street.

Q: What portion of the brickmaking did you do?

A: I was making the brick, we had ten men in our gang. I had ten men, I was the head of the gang.

Q: You were the head of the gang of ten men?

A: I had ten men. I did that for 15 years, and we had to turn out 50,000 bricks a day.

Q: Good heavens.

A: Fifty thousand, otherwise 5,000 to a man. And we used to make 25,000 and set 25,000. When you set them you put them in the kiln and you put them through your burn, that's what you call that, setting them. You spaced them, _____, every brickhouse _____ like that, so the fire would go through them. That's the way we'd set them. See, we used to make 25,000 and set 25,000, or else make all day and make 50,000. When we'd set all day, we'd set 50,000.

Q: Well, how many hours a day would you be working down there?

A: Ten hours.

Q: Ten hours a day?

A: You'd start off at 10 hours, then they cut it back to eight hours and then we got all the cast work, we got all the cast work. Anytime we got through we could go home.

Q: Oh.

A: We'd go in there sometimes at 7:30 in the morning, and by 12:30 or 1:00, we'd go on home, had made our day.

Q: Oh gracious. Well, tell me, what was the way they made the brick back then? What did you start off with? What was the composition of the brick?

A: First you'd get your clay. Get your clay and bring in your clay and dump it in a bin. After you put the clay in the bin, you'd come on down and go through a little mill, something

like a, you've seen a food chopper?

A: Uh huh.

Q: Similar to that, made on the same order at the mill as a food chopper. And that dirt would go through there and come out in a mold the shape of a brick, same size of a brick. And after it would come through, and another machine they had had 16 wires, the size of a brick. And that thing turned over like that, every time it turned over it cut 16 bricks at a time. The foreman was just taking them off and putting them on a pile, on a track like a railroad car. You'd put them in a place to dry, put them in there to dry, and after they'd dry they put them in the kiln and burned them. _____. I did that for 21 years.

Q: Gracious. Well, you know, especially when they were having the strikes and the mill had to close down and you went up to Richmond to work, did you ever think about moving to Richmond?

A: No, ma'am. I couldn't afford that.

Q: Oh.

A: I wasn't making enough money to do that. I couldn't afford that. We had three children during that time. We had three children during that time.

Q: So it was less expensive to live down here than it was in Richmond?

A: Yeah, less expensive to live down here, yeah, that's right.

Q: Have you ever thought of living anywhere other than James City County?

A: No, never have.

Q: You love it too much?

A: That's right.

Q: This is where your family's been for years, and years, and years.

A: All of them.

Q: Right here. What about your wife's family, have they always lived here, too?

A: They always have lived here in James City County.

Q: Way far back, many years ago, just like your family too?

A: Yeah, uh huh.

Q: Uhm. That's remarkable.

A: Uh huh.

Q: I think my tape is about -- I'm going to have to flip it over here in a minute.

A: In James City County.

Q: And you've never wanted to live anywhere else?

A: Never have.

Q: Never occurred to you. Did you like Richmond back then? Was it a lot different with all the stores and the big buildings?

A: Yeah, I liked to go there, I had an uncle up there, I used to go up there and see him sometimes.

Q: Uh huh.

A: I'd go up there and see him once in a while, you know, ___ and come on back home. But I've been up there like permanently.

Q: Oh gosh.

A: _____.

Q: Did you ever use the train for transportation to get anywhere?

A: No, never used the train, yeah, I'd ride the train to Richmond, yeah.

Q: You took the train to Richmond sometimes?

A: Sometimes to Richmond, I went on a train. Yeah, I'd catch the train in Toano go to Richmond.

Q: Yeah.

A: Catch another one back.

Q: Oh gracious.

END OF SIDE 1

Q: Let me get this started a little bit here. Okay, I think we're going. Okay. Now we're on there. You can remember when there weren't any automobiles at all?

A: Not around here. And this is just through James City and Toano.

Q: When was the first automobile you remember? How far back?

A: Oh, it must have been about around 1912 or something like that.

Q: Really? And what would that have been, a Model-T?

A: Model-T, that's right. Wasn't nothing but Model-T's mostly, Model-T's.

Q: I've always called them Model-T's, but everybody around here that's told me about them calls them T-Models.

A: T-Models cars, yes, ma'am. About 1912 or something like that.

Q: Yeah, how long was it before you owned a car, do you remember?

A: Oh yeah, I started driving Model-T's when I wasn't but 14 years old. My aunt's husband, he bought a car and he let me

drive it one time.

Q: He did?

A: And I wasn't but 14 years old. That's the first time I got under the wheel, I was, but the first car I bought, I didn't buy a car until 1932.

Q: Did you?

A: I bought a car in 1932.

Q: What would you have bought? What kind of car?

A: A Chevrolet.

Q: Was it? Do you remember how much it cost?

A: I think it was probably about \$275. It wasn't brand new.

Q: Two hundred and seventy-five dollars, gosh.

A: Uh huh, it wasn't brand new.

Q: What did gas cost then? Do you remember?

A: Gas was 9¢ or 10¢ a gallon, something like that.

Q: Is that all?

A: Uh huh.

Q: My gracious. But I'll bet the roads out here were dirt roads, weren't they?

A: All the roads were dirt roads.

Q: Yeah. What would happen when it got really rainy?

A: Them Model-T's used to go in up to the axle sometimes and you had to dig them out.

Q: Would you pull them out with horses?

A: No, didn't bother about the horses, people would get around and push them out, you know.

Q: Gracious.

A: Well, when I got married my wife's father had a car and her grandfather and grandmother had an automobile. I used to drive that all the time. And then finally, in 1932 I went on and _____.

Q: Uh huh.

OFF THE TAPE

Q: Why did you decide to stop school when you did?

A: Ma'am?

Q: I said why did you decide to stop school when you did? You needed to go to work to make some money?

A: Well, there wasn't nowhere to go, wasn't no school.

Q: Oh, there wasn't any high school?

A: There was no high school around this, nowhere to go. The closest that I know would have been either Hampton or Lawrenceville, Virginia. That's the closest school I know anything about.

Q: Oh, what about in Williamsburg?

A: Wasn't no high school in Williamsburg. I was a grown man when they built the high school in Williamsburg.

Q: Oh, so there just wasn't anyplace at all to go close by.

A: No, most of the people back in those times, if they went to the 7th grade they taught school.

Q: They taught school after the 7th grade?

A: After the 7th grade.

Q: Gracious.

A: That's right.

Q: Just turn right around after that point and teach the younger

ones.

A: Yes, ma'am, that's right.

Q: Uhm. Did you ever turn around and teach school at all?

A: No, ma'am. I didn't do that.

Q: How about your wife, did she?

A: No, she didn't do that either.

Q: Oh, neither of you did. When you were young, do you remember particular chores you had to perform, things you had to do?

A: Yeah, I had to feed the chickens, feed the hogs, something like that.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Sweep the yard, every Saturday I had to sweep the yard. Go down the woods and get a bush, cut down a bush, didn't use the broom, and sweep the yard. We didn't have no grass, didn't let the grass stay in the yard. They used to cut the grass out of the yard.

Q: They did?

A: And get the yard just as clean as a penny.

Q: Why wouldn't they want grass?

A: I don't know, they liked the yard to be nice and clean, they didn't have no grass.

Q: But wasn't it all dusty?

A: Well, they had dust, sure, that's the way they kept the yards. You didn't have no lawn mowers, nothing like that.

Q: Yeah.

A: They didn't cut no grass.

Q: So they'd keep all the grass out.

A: Took all the grass out, I've taken a hoe and chopped the grass out of the yard. And I _____.

Q: And then you had to sweep the yard and keep it nice and even.

A: Keep it nice and clean, that's right. Pick up all the paper and that stuff, anything that was on it.

Q: Did you have to do any chores inside?

A: No, not inside.

Q: Nothing inside, all outside.

A: All outside.

Q: Oh gracious.

A: Feed the hogs and chickens and things like that.

Q: Uh huh. Do you think your parents were stricter than you were with your children, or the way parents are today?

A: Yeah. Our parents were stricter than we are.

Q: In what way? Can you tell me?

A: I mean, they wouldn't, certain things you couldn't do, I mean, the way children do now, like you couldn't do back in those days.

Q: Uh huh, like what?

A: Like going out and staying out, and all that.

Q: Uh huh.

A: If you go out somewhere and I don't care how good a time you was having, at certain times I had to come back and feed them hogs. I don't care what a good time I was having I still had to come back and feed them hogs. See?

Q: Uh huh.

A: And you had to do that.

Q: You had your chores to do and you had to do them.

A: You had your chores to do and you had to do them. Yeah, they were much stricter. But I've given to my children a whole lot things, I mean, yeah, they were stricter back during those days than now. Yeah.

Q: Did you ever get anything like an allowance or did you have to earn your own money?

A: They give me a few pennies on the weekend for Sunday school or church, you know, put it in church, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: I didn't need no money anyway.

Q: Yeah, I guess not.

A: Didn't need any money, they'd buy the clothes and shoes and things. Didn't need no money.

Q: Well, when you left the brickyard in 1943, do you remember how much more money you were making then than you were back in the '20's?

A: Oh, yeah. Back in the '20's, I was making, like I told you, I was making 25¢ an hour, _____ during World War I was making 50¢ a day, I made 50¢ a day during World War I.

Q: Doing what?

A: You know, working on the farms _____, sweet potatoes and all that stuff.

Q: But by the time you left the brickyard in 1943 when it burned and changed hands, how much would you have been making by then? Do you remember?

A: You mean in 1943 when the brickyard burned down, we was making

45¢ an hour.

Q: Forty-five cents an hour?

A: Uh huh.

Q: And when you started working the brickyard in 1920, what year was it?

A: Twenty-two.

Q: Thirty-two?

A: Twenty-two.

Q: Twenty-two, when you started working there you were making 10¢ an hour, and when you left, 21 years later, you were making 45¢ an hour.

A: Forty-five cents an hour.

Q: Did you have any, what we call today, benefits? Did they have any insurance or retirement or anything like that?

A: Didn't have no retirement, we had good insurance, Metropolitan of New York insurance, we had good insurance but we didn't have no retirement or nothing like that. And didn't have no, when social security first came out we all signed up for the social security when it first came out. Never had no retirement.

Q: Uh huh, gracious.

A: I hate to say it, but it ain't but three of the brickyard men living that I know of.

Q: Really?

A: That worked at the brickyard.

Q: You and two other men?

A: Me and two more men, that's all.

Q: The only ones left.

A: The only ones left. One lives down in Chickahominy and one lives down Toano, and myself.

Q: Well, we had another brickyard down in Williamsburg at one time, too, didn't we?

A: That was Colonial Williamsburg, they had that. But that one was handmade, they'd make them by hand. Handmade brick, had an old mule go down there and grind the dirt with a horse, a mule or something.

Q: But you're speaking, yours were --

A: We had power and machinery, water, we had mudpuddles.

Q: Yeah, so it was a different method of making them.

A: Different method, yeah.

Q: Oh, well you probably made a lot more in quantity, didn't you?

A: Oh yeah, they were just making them their own use anyway.

Q: Yeah.

A: See they were only making them for to sell.

Q: Yeah, and you were making them to send out strictly.

A: We use to lower the bricks on a barge, three barges, to send them to New York, one million.

Q: Well, would that barge come right up back in here?

A: Right up to the dock, right up beside the dock.

Q: And that was right here on the Chickahominy, right?

A: On the Chickahominy, right down at the brickyard.

Q: That water was deep enough then to take those boats?

A: It used to be 60 ft. of water right there at that dock.

Q: Well, it's not that deep now, is it?

A: No, I don't think it's quite that deep now because I think a whole lot of stuff has been put in it.

Q: Yeah, well they don't bring much of anything in anymore.

A: No, don't need to be anymore now. But we had got them great big sea barges long as from here to the other side of that house yonder. We put one million bricks on it.

Q: Gracious.

A: And send them to New York.

Q: Well, did the brickyard pretty well employ most of the men around here?

A: Oh, at the brickyard, and Mr. Branch, Mr. Hammond Branch's father were the two main things around here where people worked at. Mr. Branch, he hired a lot of people, I worked for Mr. Branch when I was a kid too. Mr. Branch hired a lot of men, and the same thing at the brickyard, the brickyard had a lot of men.

Q: So that kept people alive.

A: They were the two main things. Mr. Branch even had a barrel factory, he made barrels.

Q: Yeah, yeah, I've heard about that.

A: And he made barrels, yeah.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Potatoes, all over there farming, Dozier's Farm over there _____. Used to farm all that farm and a whole lot more besides that.

Q: Well, when the brickyard finally closed up where did all those people go to find work?

A: They went to different places, some of them went to different places.

Q: Uh huh. Because there weren't any more brickyards for them work in, were there?

A: That's right, they went different places.

Q: They had to go to other kinds of work.

A: That's right.

Q: Well, when the brickyard closed did that stop the shipping coming up the Chickahominy? Nothing else came up here, the barges and what have you?

A: No, they didn't have no need. That's the only thing that they came for, were those bricks.

Q: Oh, that was the only reason for them to come up here. Were those the barges that, you know, Newport News used to own the shipyard down here, was that part of that, where the brickyard was?

A: What do you mean? Down here where the Newport News Shipyard and Recreation?

Q: Uh huh.

A: That's the same place.

Q: Yeah.

A: That's the same place.

Q: That's where the barges used to come?

A: Yes, ma'am. That's the same place.

Q: Oh.

A: Out there where all that green grass is, that's where all them kilns used to be, all that machinery that I used to work with.

Yes, ma'am.

Q: How long had that brickyard been here before you went to work?

A: Before I can remember anything about it.

Q: Really? Back into the 1800's?

A: Way back yonder, when I was a small kid I used to hear people talking about that brickyard.

Q: Oh, so it must go back at least a century.

A: Back in the 1800's and something, oh, yeah.

Q: Oh.

A: My uncles and things worked there. Yeah, they worked there. 1800's, yeah, back in the 1800's.

Q: When you were little, can you remember your mother or your grandmother having any special remedies, special medicines or things they'd put on you if you were sick?

A: Yes, Lord! I reckon I do.

Q: What do you remember?

A: I remember a whole lot. I remember the herbs and things, I done forgot the name of them, I'll tell you the truth.

Q: Herbs that you had to drink?

A: Yeah, they'd make medicine out of them.

Q: Did it taste good?

A: No, I remember I used to have trouble with my stomach when I was a kid. And they'd get some stuff we called wormseed. Old bush, there's some out there now. _____. See get them things, and take them out like that and carry them out and put some sugar in them and boil them down, and make syrup out of them and give me that syrup.

Q: Oh, did it help?

A: Yeah it helped, sure.

Q: Made your stomach feel better?

A: Those people knew exactly what to do.

Q: They did?

A: I'll tell you the truth, they knew exactly what to do.

Q: What other remedies can you remember her doing? Was this your grandmother or your mother?

A: My grandmother.

Q: Your grandmother? What other kind of remedies do you remember?

A: If you had a fever or something like that, they'd get a cabbage, one of those old big cabbage leaves or something and wrap around your head like that, carry the fever away.

Q: Really? Cabbage leaves would take the fever away?

A: Yeah, cabbage leaves, yeah.

Q: What other kinds of things?

A: We had some old stuff we called planten, growed flat to the ground like that. That stuff was good for anything _____, mixed it with something spicy or something like, some of the spice you use?

Q: Uh huh.

A: You could take some of that stuff and rub it, until you get it soft, and apply it to where something would bite you, you know, if something would sting you or something like that, it would take the poison out.

Q: It would?

A: Yeah.

Q: And that was called planten?

A: Planten leaves, yeah, we used to call it planten leaves. I see some around here now. They say frogs will eat that stuff, sometimes a snake will bite a frog, a frog will go up there and eat some of that stuff and go back and fight the snake again.

Q: Oh!!

A: That's right. That stuff was good for poison.

Q: Well, do you remember any of the kinds of poultices or anything they would put on you if you had something wrong with you, like a bad cold?

A: Mustard plaster, get some mustard to make a mustard plaster and put it on your chest.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: I've done that my ownself since I've been grown, that's good. I've made a many mustard plaster and put it on. But you can't make it too strong because it'll burn you.

Q: Uh huh.

A: It'll take the skin off you if you make it too strong.

Q: Oh gracious.

A: Put some meal with it, you know, mix it with some meal, and apply to that. Yeah, break up a cold.

Q: Gracious. When was your grandmother born, roughly? Do you remember?

A: No, I really don't know. It's too far back, I couldn't tell.

Q: Would you say at least by the time of the Civil War?

A: They was born during the wartime.

Q: During the War?

A: Back in the 1800's, because our church was established down there in 1865, and they was going to that church then, you know. They were members of that church then, you see.

Q: Oh. Did your grandmother live with you until she died? Both of your grandparents live in your home with you and your parents?

A: No, they died up at the house there.

Q: They had their own house?

A: Uh huh. That was up near New Kent where they died.

Q: How did your father happen to decide to move up closer to New Kent? Was there farming work for him up there?

A: No, I moved up there myself, that was me.

Q: Oh, you moved?

A: That was me.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: I was married, that was me, that was me.

Q: Uh huh. Do you remember any tales or legends or anything about people or things that happened in this area? Any stories that people used to tell, or your grandmother used to tell, maybe, or your grandfather?

A: I'm not sure of anything I can recall, let me see. I don't think I can remember nothing, you know, nothing outstanding that they talked about.

Q: What about superstitions? Can you remember any superstitions your grandmother might have had?

- A: Well, they used to talk about ghosts and things like that.
- Q: Had what?
- A: Talk about ghosts.
- Q: Talk about ghosts?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: She really believed in them, huh?
- A: I did when I was a kid, but I don't believe in that stuff now. When I was a kid I believed in anything, sure I did.
- Q: Uh huh. Because big folks had told you that they were real, huh?
- A: They were real, but I found out it wasn't.
- Q: Uh huh. Do you remember any other superstitions she might have had?
- A: Only thing, if a black cat crosses and all that stuff, if you walk under a ladder and all that, they told me all that. They studied all that then.
- Q: Well, tell me, when you were little did you think, or as you've grown up, do you think your life was particularly tough when you were a young child, or did you have enough to eat and to wear and this sort of thing?
- A: No, I had a plenty of everything, I mean, had plenty to eat and plenty to wear and everything. I didn't suffer for anything when I was coming up as a kid. I didn't suffer for anything at all.
- Q: Do you think most kids around here were equally lucky, that they didn't suffer from lack of things?
- A: Yeah, one thing about the old people, they took care of the family.

Q: They did?

A: Yeah, they took care of the family.

Q: Would you say there was less poverty then when you were a youngster than there is now? Less people having a hard time, you drive up and down the roads now and you can see a lot of people that are obviously having a hard time in their lives.

A: Yeah, I think there's more poverty now than it was back then during that time.

Q: Really?

A: Because most everybody had something. I mean, I have never known a time in my 79 years since I've been born that I couldn't find something to eat. I've never seen the time yet, since I've been married, I ain't never seen a time that we couldn't go in the kitchen and get something to eat. There's more poverty, people back in those times was better kept than they are now. A lot of people now don't know how to go and get anything. That's the trouble with some of the people now.

Q: Plus a lot of the people don't farm or raise their animals now like they used to. Most people did back then.

A: Yeah, but they couldn't afford to do that now anyway because it costs too much now for to take care of those animals and things now.

Q: That's true.

A: They couldn't afford it. I couldn't afford to raise hogs and chickens and things like I did. When I had my family and all the children were around, we used to raise hogs and chickens and things like that, but I couldn't afford that now because they cost too much to take care of.

Q: Yeah.

A: Back in those times you could pick up a lot of stuff, you know, but now you've got to buy everything from them.

Q: Uh huh. Well, since you've retired you're still a very active member of the Chickahominy Baptist Church, right?

A: Yes, ma'am.

Q: Aren't you an elder and a deacon in the church?

A: Yes, ma'am, chairman.

Q: Chairman of the deacons?

A: Yes, ma'am. Been singing in the choir sixty some . . .

Q: Sixty some years?

A: Every since 1922, a young man, joined the choir, I'm the oldest member living in the church, charter member of the choir. Every since 1922, I was 17 years old, been there ever since.

Q: Well, what other things have you been doing these last ten years to keep busy?

A: Oh, I cut grass, I cut grass for people.

Q: Do you?

A: Yes, ma'am.

Q: That's right, I remember your wife telling me, you're gone during the earlier day because you're cutting grass. Do you go on a riding mower or do you work --

A: Yeah, I've got a riding mower.

Q: Do you?

A: I've got that truck right there.

Q: And you transport your riding mower around?

A: Transport it, I go as far as Williamsburg, around Penniman

Road.

Q: Really? That's a long ways to go.

A: I cut down there. And up to Toano up on the church hill there, that house up on the hill right by the church and all that, I've got the whole church in Toano, I take care of the Methodist Church in Toano.

Q: So you've got all those yards to do during the summer. What about in the winter?

A: In the wintertime I just sit back and take it easy, and take my gun and go down to the woods and try to get a squirrel.

Q: Oh gosh.

A: I like to hunt and fish too, you know. In my spare time if I get a chance I go fishing, too.

Q: Uhm, where do you go? On the Chickahominy?

A: Most of the time I go down there where I used to work at around Camp Peary, where I used to work at. That's a fresh water pond, I go down there.

Q: What do you catch down there?

A: I catch bass, brim, something like that.

Q: Well, when you were a boy I suppose you probably liked to fish just as much, huh?

A: No, ma'am, I didn't. I just took up fishing after I retired.

Q: Oh, for heaven's sake.

A: Just took up fishing after I retired. I didn't never like to fish, I always have been frightened of water, I never learned how to swim or nothing like that. I was frightened of water.

Q: Well, when you were a boy did a lot of people try to get fish out of the Chickahominy, would a lot of people catch --

A: Oh, a lot of people fished, yeah.

Q: What would they catch in there?

A: Catfish and perch and all that. That's freshwater fishing, you know.

Q: Yeah, would you say that fish would have been a major part of their diet? I mean, they would eat a lot of those fish?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: I would have been important.

A: _____.

Q: What about selling them? Did anybody sell them as a business?

A: Yeah, Mr. Vincent was down here, you know.

Q: Oh, yeah.

A: Mr. Vincent's father, that's down there now, he used to be a fishman every since I was a kid. He used to come by here on Saturday mornings and holler, "Fish!" We used to buy fish, my grandmother used to buy fish every Saturday morning. I used to go out and play with them boys down there, the Vincent boys.

Q: Did you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh.

A: We used to go out and play together.

Q: Oh, for heaven's sake. Well, this has been really interesting. You're the first person that I've had to tell me about the brickyard. I didn't know a thing about it.

A: Well, you know, there used to be a shipyard down there too, you know.

Q: Yeah, tell me about the shipyard.

- A: That's where the Windsors live at.
- Q: Yeah, the Windsors.
- A: There's nothing there where you can see now, but it was there. That's where they built ships there during the Civil War.
- Q: During the Civil War they built ships?
- A: Yes, ma'am. They built ships down there.
- Q: Well, how long did it last? When did they quit operating it?
- A: They stopped after the war was over, I imagine.
- Q: After the Civil War?
- A: Yes, ma'am.
- Q: My goodness. You wonder why they probably did it so far inland to hide it as they were making them or keeping them safe?
- A: I imagine so. Back in that place, because it's insulated, you know. Didn't nobody hardly know it was back there.
- Q: Yeah, yeah.
- A: It's a dead end, and as you go down that road there about two miles and you run right into the river.
- Q: Oh.
- A: Uh huh. There used to be a shipyard down there, a big plantation, there's an old plantation down there.
- Q: Well, I'll be darned.
- A: My aunt used to live in that house one time, and I stayed there a while with her. Used to be a great, big three-story house, and they had places in there where people used to fight during the war, you know.
- Q: Uh huh.
- A: And had these little old cells and things like that, little

peepholes where people used to put their guns and things through, you know, and shoot at the enemy.

Q: Oh gosh!

A: There's a big plantation right down there.

Q: Well, do you know who owned the shipyard and the plantation?

A: I know Mr. Warren owned it during that time, he bought it after, I don't know who owned it before then.

Q: During the Civil War you don't know who owned?

A: I don't know who owned it before then, no.

Q: Oh gracious. Do you remember your grandparents ever talking about it, about the shipyard? Do you remember anything that they told you because that would have been operating when they were little?

A: No, I never heard them say anything about that part of it, no.

Q: And that's where the Menzells are now?

A: Where the Menzells are now.

Q: Oh.

A: But they tell me, I don't know, I couldn't say anything, but they tell me that some of the old piers there now where they had the dock there when they built the shipyard, built ships there.

Q: Some of those piers are still there, over a hundred years old.

A: Uh huh, yeah.

Q: Gracious. Well, down where the Newport News Shipbuilding has their park now, that's on the land where the brickyard was.

A: Yeah, that's right. It's on the land where the brickyard was.

Q: Separate piece of property from where the old shipbuilding place was, the old shipyard.

- A: The old shipyard, that's about five miles from that place, down here. See, the brickyard is over here and the shipyard is over here.
- Q: Two separate spots.
- A: Two separate spots, that's right.
- Q: Oh, I see. You've never really heard anybody much talk about that old shipyard and how it operated?
- A: No, never did.
- Q: Because it was all torn down and gone by the time you were born?
- A: No, the house was there. My aunt stayed in it.
- Q: The house was there but not the shipyard.
- A: Not the shipyard. My aunt used to stay in that old house. Great big old house, it's three stories.
- Q: Did she own it or --
- A: No, her husband used to farm down there.
- Q: Oh.
- A: He was a farmer, he raised watermelons and things like that.
- Q: Oh, I see.
- A: When I was a little teenager I used to drive the horses and carry the watermelons out there to the ships, you know. The ships couldn't come to the dock so I had to go out to them, too shallow. So I'd take the watermelons and put them in the wagon and drive the horses out in the river.
- Q: Really?
- A: Up to their stomachs, you know. Then I'd put the watermelons on the boat.
- Q: What kind of ships were these?

A: I drove them my own self. I drove horses out there with the watermelons in the wagon. Go out to the river and drop them onboard, _____.

Q: What kind of boats were these?

A: Sailboats, they were sailboats, schooners, we used to call them.

Q: Where were they coming from? Do you know?

A: Coming from Norfolk.

Q: Oh really?

A: Portsmouth and things like that.

Q: And they'd come up here to buy their watermelons, huh?

A: That's right, that's right.

Q: Were they just pleasure crafts that people owned?

A: No, people owned them, commercial.

Q: Oh, they were commercial ships coming up to buy goods to take back to resell?

A: That's right, that's right.

Q: Oh, I see. They'd probably come up here and get fish and other things too, huh?

A: I don't know about the fish, but they came up every summer to get their watermelons. My aunt's husband used to raise plenty of watermelons, and I wasn't nothing but a little small kid, and I used to drive the horses out there. Carry the watermelons out in the river.

Q: Take a whole load of watermelons back with them then, huh?

A: Yes, ma'am, they'd load the ships down with watermelons.

Q: Uhm. Gracious.

A: Just about this time of the year I'd start loading.

Q: Uh huh. Well, was that the only crop your uncle raised then, was just watermelons?

A: No, he raised corn too.

Q: Did he?

A: Uh huh. Mostly corn and watermelons, that was all he mostly raised was corn and watermelons.

Q: Were there any other particular, besides the brickyard and the farming back in this area, were there any other occupations that people were involved in?

A: Well, some of the people cut cordwood, you know.

Q: They did? To make a living?

A: Yeah, a lot of them used to do that. Wasn't cutting no pulpwood during that time, pulpmill wasn't even running then. But after the pulpmill started, then they started cutting pulpwood, you know. Railroad ties, used to cut railroad ties.

Q: Oh, back in here they cut those ties?

A: Yeah, they cut railroad ties.

Q: Oh. And people would do that for a living, working for the railroad?

A: People would do that for a living, that's right. _____, make them smooth as they can.

Q: Well, when they were cutting cordwood, were they cutting that for people around here, or would they cut it to send out to other people?

A: They would ship it out. They cut the cordwood and carried it up to the railroad, and loaded it on the cars and carried it to different places, you know.

Q: Oh, for other people who needed wood.

A: For other people, yeah.

Q: Oh, oh, I see.

A: They loaded some on boats too.

Q: Really? It would come right up here on the Chickahominy?

A: At one of the creeks up there, yeah.

Q: So there were really a number of different occupations that people could take up back in here to keep alive and to make money to live on, right?

A: Back in that time.

Q: Back in that time, there were a number of things that people could do.

A: Yes, ma'am, _____.

Q: And there were probably things for children to do during the summer to earn money, to help their families?

A: Yeah, children could go out and pull grass for somebody or a potato patch or something like that, pick corn. People _____, but back during that time you had to thin it out, you know. I've thinned corn a many a day. We used to have potatoes, drop potato plants, _____.

Q: So there were a lot of opportunities in this area for people to, back in that time, take care of themselves whereas the rest of the nation, a lot of people starved to death during the Depression. They didn't have any way to earn money, or feed themselves or their children.

A: Yes, I remember when, so after I got married I lived up there at Toano at the railroad track, at the house right there _____ across the bridge. You know where Owen's Glass Place is?

Q: Uh huh.

A: Right across the road from Owen's Glass, I lived there when I first got married.

Q: Oh.

A: Right there by the railroad tracks. And I don't know how many times people, them tramps, they call them, ride the railroad cars and come there to the house, my wife would give them food.

Q: Really?

A: Yes, ma'am, back during the Depression time.

Q: And they would just bum a meal from her?

A: We done gave a many a one food.

Q: Really?

A: Ride those freight trains, you know, and they'd get off and come there, my wife would give them food.

Q: And she'd give them a meal and then send them on their way?

A: Yes, ma'am. I have given them money.

Q: Really?

A: Yes, ma'am.

Q: Were they looking for work or they were just coming through?

A: Just coming through. Yes, ma'am.

Q: And then catch the next train, huh, and keep on going?

A: Keep on going, that's right.

Q: Did you see a lot of them over the years?

A: A lot of them, yes, ma'am, a lot of them.

Q: Were they going towards Richmond, or towards Newport News, or both ways?

A: Both ways, sometimes they're going this way, sometimes they're going that way. Yes, ma'am.

Q: Just people who were out of work and didn't hav anything to support them?

A: Pitiful, I'll tell you, to be drifting like that. I've been on my way to work and met a man on the road up there by Anderson's Service Station one day, and he wanted some food, and I opened my lunch box and give him some of my food on the way to work. That's right.

Q: And that was back in the Depression?

A: No, that was back in the '40's.

Q: Oh.

A: I was working for the government then, that was back in the '40's.

Q: You just felt sorry for him because he was hungry?

A: Just felt sorry for him, that's right, that's right.

Q: Well, how would you get back and forth when you worked for the government?

A: We used to ride the bus.

Q: Oh. They sent a bus down in here?

A: Yeah, when they first started out the Navy, they'd ride a Navy bus, you know. The person that lived the furthest, they used to drive the bus and pick up all the rest of the people along the way. Then later on, we had to furnish our own transportation. I had a car, I used to drive my car sometimes, and some others would drive their cars sometimes. We used to switch about, you know. _____, and worked at Cheatham Annex, same thing at Camp Peary. Uh huh.

Q: Well, it really has been fascinating talking to you. Like I say, I've learned several different things.

A: I don't know if I've helped or not.

Q: Oh, you have, you really have. I had never heard anything about the shipyard. I'd never heard anything about the brickyard. That's new. Well, you say there are only three of you left who worked in the brickyard, so there aren't that many people to tell us about it.

A: There was one more in Toano there, and another one at Chickahominy, and myself.

Q: Uh huh. I'll bet that was hot, dirty work, wasn't it?

A: Yes, Lord have mercy, it'd get so hot sometimes we'd get in there, I used to go home sometimes, my wife didn't know how in the world I looked that dirty. Black like this coal.

Q: Yeah.

A: Coal dust.

Q: In the middle of the summer, it had to be terrible in the heat!

A: Yes, ma'am, terrible, terrible!

Q: Were the people you worked for nice there or were they hard?

A: Yeah, oh, yeah, they were nice people.

Q: They were, they were kind to everybody?

A: The man that owned the place, he was the president of the bank in Hampton, Hampton National Bank.

Q: Oh.

A: He was the president of Hampton National Bank.

Q: And his name was --

A: He used to own that brickyard, see.

Q: And what was his name?

A: Robertson, Jesse Robertson.

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Q: Jesse Robertson.

A: Jesse Robertson.

Q: Were most of the people who worked in the brickyard black?

A: Yeah, most of them of were black, yeah, most of them were black.

Q: Most of them were?

A: Yeah. There were whites, but most of them were black.

END OF TAPE

LITERARY RELEASE

I, Sam T. Jones, hereby transfer to James City County all my rights and those of my heirs and assigns, to the tape recordings and any resulting video recordings and transcripts made of interviews with me for the Oral History Project of James City County, Va. This is done with the understanding that transcripts prepared from the tapes will be submitted to me for review for clarity and accuracy.

Samuel T. Jones
Donor

Robert F. Jones
Interviewer

8/14/84
Date