

An Interview With

MRS. ELIZABETH BUCKNER

April 16, 1978

Interviewed by

Daisy Greene

Mississippi

Department of Archives and History

And the

Washington County Library System

Oral History Project:
Greenville and Vicinity

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Interviewee: Elizabeth Buckner
Interviewer: Daisy Greene

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interviewed by Daisy Greene

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Scope Note: The Washington County Library System, with assistance from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral history interviews with local citizens. The project interviews took place between 1976 and 1978. The interviewees included long-term residents of the Greenville-Washington County area in their late 50's and older.

GREENE: This is April 16, 1978. Daisy Greene interviewing Mrs. Elizabeth Buckner, whose address is 528 North Edison Street, Greenville, Mississippi.

Please give me the date and place of your birth.

BUCKNER: December 9, 1952, at Dunleith, Mississippi.

GREENE: Your mother's maiden name.

BUCKNER: Juanita Collers.

GREENE: Will you spell it?

BUCKNER: J-U-A-N-I-T-A C-O-L-L-E-R-S.

GREENE: And your father's name.

BUCKNER: Robert Procter. R-O-B-E-R-T P-R-O-C-T-E-R.

GREENE: Are you a registered voter, Mrs. Buckner?

BUCKNER: No, but I plan to be in the near future.

GREENE: Have you ever served on a jury?

BUCKNER: No, I haven't.

GREENE: Do you know of people who can give you hands?

BUCKNER: I had a friend. She would come out and tell me about different things that happened to her family. During the past years she was concerned about her brother. He was real sick one time and they didn't know what was wrong with him. So her mother had heard about a man from Clarksdale, I think, and they carried her brother up there to see this man -- and he would come home at night and he would be fighting and jumping on his mother. He put his Dad in the hospital, knocked two of his teeth out and did some other damage to him, then his mother

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carried him up to the man in Clarksdale. He looked inside her brother and said he saw a snake. He told him his wife was trying to kill him and run him crazy as long as he stayed with her. She was going to do things to him constantly. So at the same time, his wife brought a little paper bag over to their house. It had three dollars and a brush in it; and this girl knew her mother was real crazy about money, so she had the three dollars -- if her mother would have spent the three dollars, she would have went crazy, this man told her. If the girl would have brushed her hair with the brush, all her hair would have came out. So he told her to bring the money back and I think he told her to put it in a bag and throw it in her back yard and take the brush and bury it somewhere. He gave her some kind of little dust in some little paper, you know, to use to keep people from bothering her, and stuff like that.

GREENE: Did that do any good?

BUCKNER: Well, she said she had a lot of enemies. She'd be scared of a lot of people, people that she thought she knew meant her some good, but she would still be scared, you know. She would keep this little dust in her purse. If she had a headache or maybe her head start hurting, she'd say, "Somebody is trying to fix me." She'd go back and get her purse and get some of that dust and rub it in her hand, or something like that. She said that would keep people from bothering her.

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GREENE: She honestly believed that?

BUCKNER: Yes, she believes it today. She felt that a lot of people had tried to kill her or hurt her family and stuff like that. She believed that, and I really do believe she is going to die believing that.

GREENE: Do you remember any other incidents of this nature?

BUCKNER: Well, she used to tell me about her boy friend all the time, you know, - how he used to - well, they had been going together for a long time, and all at once he just stopped liking her. She said that some of the girls that he was liking had fixed her - had give him something to keep him from liking her, and so she went to see this man about him, and he told her -- I'm just going to tell you, Mrs. Greene, just like she told me.

GREENE: Yes.

BUCKNER: She said this man told her to take some of her period and cook it - you know - in his food - and he'd go crazy!

GREENE: Heavens!

BUCKNER: And to take a piece of her hair, and when he'd get ready to eat, just cut it up in his food, and he would love her. She said she tried that stuff several times, but it didn't work, and she went back to see the man and he told her to get some of her period and put it in each corners of the

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house where he'd come and sit, and that will run him crazy, and he will love her and they would get married, but she said she did it, but it never worked.

GREENE: Did this person charge her for his advice?

BUCKNER: I believe so. She said she paid him a little salary, but not that much. But I don't know - I think they had a little credit when something came up real bad, she said he would always go down there.

GREENE: And he would treat her on credit?

BUCKNER: Yes.

GREENE: Well, that's very interesting! Has anything like that ever occurred to you? Have you had occasion to seek this man's advice?

BUCKNER: No, but my mother was telling me - at least, my grandmother way back yonder - she said her daddy got fixed with some meal or something - made his stomach real big - and she said this lady he was going with he liked her very much, and she wanted him but she wanted somebody else, too. She was trying to kill him, and they said she fixed him a big dinner that day and he ate that meal, and his stomach kept swelling and swelling. It got real big. And I know before he died - I don't know - I was too young - but I heard my mother say he would still be sick from his stomach, and it still was big; just bigger and bigger and bigger.

And my sister's mother-in-law, from what I heard,

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she got sick through her underclothes. This lady hated her so, when she hung some clothes out that night, this lady, her so-called friend, put something in her clothes; and everybody who knew that lady said that she was real little and started swelling and getting big. Today the doctor can't find anything wrong with her. And she had a real bad odor and the doctor said it's a lot of cancers - he don't know what it is - but he knows that it is there and he can't cure it.

GREENE: Is this person who "fixed" her still living?

BUCKNER: Yes, she is; and from what I hear today, she is doing the same thing in California - fixing people still. I don't know how.

GREENE: No amount of money will induce her to relieve this person who is swollen? Has she ever tried to get herself "un-fixed"?

BUCKNER: No. I haven't heard her say she tried.

GREENE: Have you heard of home remedies that people used to off-set these spells or fixes?

BUCKNER: Well, I heard one lady who said she would hang something up side the door to keep people from coming in; and it was a lady that I knew - well, she's living today, but she's real holy and sanctified now. She admits she has fixed a lot of people, and they say you could go to her house and go out in the closet -- now, I never saw them -- but they say you could see little black, naked women, or something, and said she would have frogs and things hanging up outside her door.

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But she got real sick, and they said she confessed to God, you know, how she done fixed so many people; and I'm not sure if she is doing it any more.

GREENE: Does she have any reason for "fixing" people?

BUCKNER: She just said she had the power to do it, and if somebody did her wrong she would get them. And she really would get them. I had a lot of faith. I was really scared of her because I remember my sister and brother-in-law. He was kind of young, and one day he came by our house, and he had went by her house and got some matches. You see, he was married to her daughter and they had done broke up. And he just started going crazy. He was just jumping and foaming at the mouth like he was just mad, and a lot of people said that she did that. So down through the years she told off that she did fix him, because she didn't want to see him and his wife broke up and they couldn't raise those kids. But today he's still the same; he's still crazy. He don't act just normal. He just acts like he did.

GREENE: She used her power in the wrong way, didn't she?

BUCKNER: Yes.

GREENE: Where do you work, Mrs. Buckner?

BUCKNER: The Vlastic Pickle Plant.

GREENE: Will you spell that?

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BUCKNER: V-L-A-S-I-C. Is that the way you spell that?

GREENE: What do you actually do?

BUCKNER: We just pack on Line 2 - you know - packing pickles and peppers.

GREENE: Do you mean putting them in jars?

BUCKNER: Packing them in jars.

GREENE: Do you have good conditions under which to work?

BUCKNER: Yes, we have pretty good conditions so far.

GREENE: What about your lunch break? Is there food available for the workers?

BUCKNER: You know, yes, we have a little ten-minute break, and then we have a thirty-minute break, and a little cafeteria. Everybody goes and eats. Afterward, back to work.

GREENE: Are the prices reasonable?

BUCKNER: Sort of, yes.

GREENE: Is it a difficult job?

BUCKNER: It's not as good as the job I had. I admit that. It pays more, but it's not as good. I worked at a cafeteria for about four and a half years. It would have been five years on February 15th. And down through the years all the managers that came liked me and this other girl, Lucille, because they said we were real good workers. And I was elected

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for Head Waitress under one manager, and when the other one came, he liked me real good, too, so everybody that he would hire, he would tell them to take after me and Lucille because we knew the job real well.

The last manager liked me real good, but then he started getting on my back about little things - I guess because I used to talk back to him and he didn't like that. He didn't like for people to get pregnant either. He would say that was nothing but a cold, especially people that had been there a long time. People who had been there a long time, he said, could find something better to do than to get pregnant. I'm not sure, but I really do believe - I heard a lot of people talking, too, because he, at first, liked me, and a lot of black people who see a white man like you they are going to try to do something to try to get rid of it. So I had heard that some of my so-called friends had been going and telling him little things, but still it didn't bother me. I said, "I'm going to go on and do my job." So I went and talked to a lawyer way before he fired me, because I knew he was going to fire me one way or the other, because he just kept constantly getting on my back. And I was pregnant and I asked him to put me on part-time. He said, "No, I can't put you on part-time. You've got to work straight time. I said, "Well, my kidneys are real bad and I'm going to have to go to the bathroom." So he called me into the office one day and said,

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"Elizabeth, I saw you went to the bathroom eight times." I said, "The doctor told me if you didn't believe my kidneys are bad for you to call him." He said, "I don't see no use of calling him."

So one morning I had a roller in my hair. We usually clocked in about five minutes to eleven, and I just came out of the bathroom. It was about 25 minutes to eleven, and I was going to the time clock to stand and wait on the time. So he called me into the office, and he said, "Well, I'm tired of you going in the bathroom and I'm tired of you dragging around. I'm going to have to terminate you until you can get yourself together." So he went in the office and he had my time card on the desk, and he was telling me. So I said, "Look, I had to be a good worker to be here this long, and you are the only manager that has been here that I don't get along with good. All the rest of the managers I got along well with them." He said, "I admit you were a good worker once, but now you seem like you want to work on your own time, and I'm just going to have to terminate you." I told him, "It's fine with me!" He told me to "Shut up!" - like that. You see, it made him mad when I said it was fine with me.

When he told me to shut up, I got up and walked out the door and I kept straight on to my lawyer and I asked him what I should have done about it. He said, "Elizabeth, as long as you have been there, he had no use to fire you for nothing that little; if he was going to fire you it could have been something more important than that." And I asked him if he was in my

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position would he file a charge against him, and he told me yes he would do it right away; so he sent this lady to my house. She is from Jackson, and I talked to her about it. She said, "Yes, you've got about one of the best cases there is; we've been getting a lot of complaints about that cafeteria, and it is real prejudice." And he don't like Afro, and one day he told me my hair looked like a mop because I had an Afro - a wet mop - so he told me to go and get my hair fixed. So I took off that evening and went and got my hair fixed. When I came back, he said, "Oh, your hair looks nice!" But he would still be on my back.

GREENE: Did you file suit?

BUCKNER: Yes, ma'am.

GREENE: Did you get anything out of it?

BUCKNER: They're working on it now.

GREENE: Do you suppose some of your friends gave you a "fix"?

BUCKNER: Well, I had one I would say. This girl, every time I would meet her, she hugged and kissed me. And I remember my husband and I went out to her house one Sunday. I didn't know -- I just had so much confidence in her, I just couldn't believe she would do nothing. My husband said, "It seems strange for a woman running up and kissing a woman; that seems weird." And from what I was told about people talking she was one of the main ones who wanted him to get rid of me because he was going to train me for the checking machine, and

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she didn't want that. And she would constantly go and tell him,
"Liz don't need to work there."

So, whatever she did, that is her's and God's worry.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Alice C. Nagel)

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June 13, 1978
Alice C. Nagel

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