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An Interview with

WILL CLAXTON

July 22, 1977

Interviewed by

Katherine Branton

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Washington County Library System
Oral History Project:
Greenville and Vicinity

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Interviewee: Will Claxton
Interviewer: Katherine Branton

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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.

This is an interview of Will Claxton, 430 North Delta Street, Greenville, Mississippi. The date is July 22, 1977. The interviewer is Katherine Branton.

BRANTON: Will, when were you born?

CLAXTON: I was born in 1892, June 15th. I was born in Issaquena County, five miles south of Rolling Fork.

BRANTON: Where was your father born?

CLAXTON: My father was born in Tennessee.

BRANTON: And your mother?

CLAXTON: My mother was born in Issaquena County.

BRANTON: How long has it been since they were living?

CLAXTON: You mean how long has it been since they've been dead?

BRANTON: Yes.

CLAXTON: Wait now, let me tell it straight. Mother died in 1936 and my father died in 1932.

BRANTON: At what age, Will?

CLAXTON: 101 years old.

BRANTON: He was in the Civil War then, wasn't he?

CLAXTON: That's right. My father beat drums in the Civil War in Grant and Lee's army.

BRANTON: Is that right?

CLAXTON: That's right.

BRANTON: In what states did he serve, or do you

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remember?

CLAXTON: What states?

BRANTON: What states did he go into when he was in the Army?

CLAXTON: He was in Virginia.

BRANTON: In Virginia.

CLAXTON: That's right.

BRANTON: You were born in Issaquena County, so he came from Tennessee down here. When, or do you know?

CLAXTON: Well, now, as far as I understand it, my father said he was mustered out at Mobile, when he come out of the Army, and they got paid off.

BRANTON: What was his name?

CLAXTON: Name? Was Scott. White was my daddy's name. That was the name when he was a boy he said they give him, but his name was changed, after that, James Claxton. That's right.

BRANTON: Then would that be the name that he served under in the Army, James Claxton?

CLAXTON: No, ma'am. Scott White.

BRANTON: Scott White, and then he changed his name to James Claxton. Why did he do that?

CLAXTON: I don't know.

BRANTON: But when he came into Mississippi, he was a Claxton.

CLAXTON: That's right.

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BRANTON: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

CLAXTON: Three brothers and two sisters.

BRANTON: Did you all have the same mother?

CLAXTON: The same mother.

BRANTON: I'm particularly interested in your life when you were a little boy. Did you grow up down in Issaquena County?

CLAXTON: I grew up in part of Issaquena County and Sharkey County. I lived in Sharkey County the biggest of my life. I say I've lived in Sharkey County from 11 years old. I came to Sharkey County when I was 11 years old, and just say I've spent my life in Sharkey County and Washington County. I know I have.

BRANTON: When did you come to Washington County?

CLAXTON: I come to Washington County in 1925.

BRANTON: You were a young man by that time.

CLAXTON: That's right. I was.

BRANTON: Tell me where you got your education, Will, because I know you read and write.

CLAXTON: In Sharkey County, at Anguilla.

BRANTON: Was it a regular school or -- ?

CLAXTON: A regular school. C. R. Byrnes and S. M Daniels was my teachers. They lived at Rolling Fork, both of those teachers of mine lived at Rolling Fork.

BRANTON: Were there many of you in the school?

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CLAXTON: About 200. So, I lived south of Anguilla, just five miles out of Anguilla, on the river, 18 years. I come to be 21 years old on Mr. Mack McKinney's plantation -- at least it was Mr. Baggett's, his brother-in-law --- he was a conductor on a train.

BRANTON: Did you work for Mr. McKinney in the fields, Will?

CLAXTON: I certainly did.

BRANTON: Tell me something about the way, about the work that you did for Mr. McKinney.

CLAXTON: The work I did for Mr. McKinney was fourth rent. You see, my father rented the plantation. He worked labor, my daddy did.

BRANTON: How many acres did he work himself?

CLAXTON: Thirty, and we worked the rest of it with sharehands. Some of my daddy's sharehands, Miss Katherine, is living today. Now think about it. In Memphis, I was at their home when I was there last year. My daddy's sharehand - when I was a kid.

BRANTON: By sharehands you mean that someone came in by the day and helped work out the crops?

CLAXTON: No, worked the crops.

BRANTON: Worked the crops.

CLAXTON: Worked the crops. We furnished them a house to live in, teams to work the farm with.

BRANTON: He did the actual work or were you in charge

of the team? What did you do?

CLAXTON: I was in charge of the work. I worked and they worked. We had two families, worked 40 acres. We had 200 acres worked.

BRANTON: And how did you do this work? What tools did you use?

CLAXTON: We used mules, cultivators, turning plows and middle busters. That was the tools that we used.

BRANTON: Then you came up to Washington County when you were about twenty-one?

CLAXTON: I think. Let's see, I was more than that. I was 35 when I come to Washington County.

BRANTON: Did you already have a family?

CLAXTON: I already had a family.

BRANTON: Tell me about your family, Will.

CLAXTON: I come to Washington County in 1925 with a family of four - wife and three kids. The girl was 7 years old; Arthur 5, and James 4.

BRANTON: Things were real tough here in the thirties, how did you make a living?

CLAXTON: Well, I was farming. But I got along allright. I got food, raised the food. I got clothes. It was tough. And, like that, but after that in 1932, no before, after 1928, well I got a real regular job.

BRANTON: What were you doing?

CLAXTON: Dairying.

BRANTON: Dairying. Was that when you moved up to the Hoskin's Place?^{#1}

CLAXTON: That's right. I had made it there, at that time. In 1926 I was in the water there, you know.

BRANTON: Where were you during the flood, Will?

CLAXTON: At the Hoskins'.

BRANTON: You were up there then?

CLAXTON: I was living there. At the time of the flood I was in the big house there in the yard. I was in that house, myself, wife and two boys.

BRANTON: This is the house that's standing there now?

CLAXTON: Not that one, it was rebuilt - that one was tore down but it was a big house. Mrs. Hoskins and the doctor gave me the living room for my bedroom. I moved in there and left my things in my home.

BRANTON: This was during the flood?

CLAXTON: This was during the flood. They room was on one side over there and my room was over here on this side.

BRANTON: Was there anyone there but the three of you?

CLAXTON: They had the house boy and two maids.

BRANTON: Everybody moved in the big house.

CLAXTON: The house boy, the two maids and the cook, that's all.

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#1- One-half mile north of Wilmot, Mississippi, home of Dr. Ernest J. Hoskins and his wife, Flora Hoskins. They operated Sligo Dairy. He was an Osteopath.

BRANTON: Did the water get up into the house at all?

CLAXTON: It didn't get in the house at all. It didn't get in the yard. I had my automobile parked right at Mrs. Hoskins' steps.

BRANTON: What about the dairy cattle?

CLAXTON: We had them on that front, south of that house. They could run from there to, you know where the old Paxton line fence,^{#1} right over there, that old house in the corner? That was on the Paxton Place, before you get down to Mrs. Paxton's old house, there. Well us cows could run that far. They would go 200 yards back west in that pasture without being in the water.

BRANTON: Was it dry all the way to the railroad^{#2} tracks there, Will?

CLAXTON: All the way to, not quite, to the railroad track, because the water did come on this side of the railroad track. I was living in the house right behind Mrs. Hoskins' house, but water got in my house that deep ---

BRANTON: About 2 inches?

CLAXTON: About 2 inches, for two days and nights. I had the front room all scaffold up, took all my furniture and put it up on there, took my rugs up and put them up on that and Mrs. Hoskins let me move in the house with them. After the

#1 - The old Paxton Place ran from the Hoskins' line, south, and touched the village of Wilmot. The old house is still standing in 1977.

#2 - Illinois Centrail Railroad line, running from Memphis to New Orleans.

water went down I went there and cleant my house out, scrubbed my floors and put my rugs all back down on the floors and I had my sister-in-law birthed a kid there. I didn't stay in the house until water done left, before we moved out of the house and moved back home.

BRANTON: You said, your sister birthed a child there at your house.

CLAXTON: At my house. My sister-in-law. That was Georgia's sister. And her husband came and got her, his name was Quillie, in May and went to Arkansas and I haven't seen her or him since. My sister told me that she was dead. She had two children.

BRANTON: It was common then for the children to be born at home, wasn't it?

CLAXTON: It was normal. It was just what you might say a normal thing, because that was the majority of them - a midwife.

BRANTON: Explain what the midwife is, to me?

CLAXTON: Well, the midwife would cut the naval string and bathed and waked the baby.

BRANTON: She delivered the baby, like a doctor?

CLAXTON: She delivered the baby just like a doctor does, that's right.

BRANTON: How long did she usually stay at the house after the baby was born?

CLAXTON: Well, they'd stay, sometimes a half a day.

Sometimes a whole day before they'd go home.

BRANTON: After the flood how long did it take for you all to get back into the field?

CLAXTON: You mean after the water started to falling and get out from around the fields? It took three weeks.

BRANTON: Did you make a crop that year?

CLAXTON: We made a crop but had to fight worms to keep them from eating up all the corn.

BRANTON: You raised the corn for the dairy cows?

CLAXTON: We raised feed for the dairy cows, such as sorghum (say?) grain, peas - we didn't have alfalfa that year, it was too late that year - the water killed the alfalfa - peas, sorghum (sayre?) grain for the cows. That year we put up a lot of that stuff, in the silo, for the cows.

BRANTON: And the name of this dairy was Sligo Dairy, even then?

CLAXTON: That's right. It was Sligo Dairy.

BRANTON: At what time, Will, did you leave the Sligo Dairy and go about a mile north of there and go to work for Mrs. Wilkins?^{#1}

CLAXTON: Let's see. I left Sligo Dairy in 1930. I was where you're living at, two years before my father died.

BRANTON: Was he staying in Issaquena County?

CLAXTON: That's right. I went down there and got him. At that time he was living in Sharkey County, at Anguilla.

#1 - Mrs. Dan T. Wilkins, formerly Mrs. Peter R. Branton.

I brought him home to me.

BRANTON: And he died there with you?

CLAXTON: He died there with me.

BRANTON: And he was 101?

CLAXTON: He was 101 years old. Miss Katherine, I'm telling you these things because you know where the place is at. You know the little house I stayed in there. You know where Ely and Carrie stayed?^{#1} Well, it was a log house sot right where Ely and Carrie's house sot - was took down - it was put up 70 years ago. Mr. Branton had it put up "klyn dried"^{#2} You know what "klyn dried" is? That's dry in the shed. It was all cut a certain time in the fall when the sap's down and dried in the shed. Oak or cottonwood, either one, and he'd cut it in October and "klyn dry" it. It would last 50 years without rotting, but those logs - that log house was took down - and I can remember something else about the logs. Those logs were brought to Mrs. Wilkins' place. You remember when you and Mr. Harry married (1947), we had a potato house in the back there, a log house? Well, that house was made out of some of those logs. We had a fellow that knew how to carve them logs, how to tie and retie them logs, well he recut them and built that house out of them. You couldn't hardly saw it, couldn't hardly cut it. It took a real good electric saw for him to recut them logs. They had been up 70 years.

#1 - Ely and Carrie Adams. Ely was chauffeur and Carrie, house maid, at the Wilkins.

#2 - A possible reference to kiln dried.

BRANTON: That potato house you're talking about, it was out there in the back of the chicken yard?

CLAXTON: The chicken yard, is right.

BRANTON: I remember when we moved that thing and we could hardly believe the way those beams were, in the bottom of it.

CLAXTON: In the bottom of it, Well, them logs were sho' 70 years old - kiln dried.

BRANTON: Well, tell me how it was when you would raise everything you'd eat and how would you store these things? Tell me about it.

CLAXTON: Well, now look. You know how it is. These times is a whole lot different. Now I have to use a few words about the present. Now you take the present day food now, just like last week we said we'd have to go shopping, to go shopping and buy food to eat, meat and different things. The first thing we'd have to do? We'd have to hurry it home so we could put it on a cold spot. It would all spoil, except beans and different things. Milk would spoil right away. When you're talking about the food --- Now, back in those days you could raise food or else buy it, it wouldn't spoil. You could buy meat and throw it outdoors there and it wouldn't stink. You can buy a piece of salt meat, this evening, and put it out - no you don't have to put it out doors - just set it out on the porch so nothing won't bother it, and it'll go to stinking. I raised meat and cured it, put it anywhere and it wouldn't smell, and

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then another thing, see, I've been studying it for the last five years, what I'm talking about right now. What we raise now and eat is all poisoned. Raised with different kinds of chemicals. Is raised with things, with stuff that'll make you grow, make vegetables grow, anything, that will make it grow and develop fast, but its poison to human flesh.

BRANTON: You really believe that, don't you?

CLAXTON: I believe it. Don't you? What do you think about it?

BRANTON: I don't know that I believe it poisons us but I think it probably makes it develop so that it would ripen faster, like you said.

CLAXTON: But you don't, still don't, believe it poisons human flesh. Let me tell you one thing, Miss Katherine, maybe you've never been around it and never seen how it worked out. Now a man comes through here selling chickens or eggs - study selling chickens. Now you know we used to raise chickens. You used to raise some too, didn't you? Now you take those chickens off in March - well those chickens wouldn't be big enough to kill until around May, or June. You know that. It wouldn't be a fryer large enough to kill. If a man takes 500 baby chicks a day out the hatcher and put in the incubator and raises them there, if they don't be big enough in 30 days for him to put them on the market he says he won't make no money out of that. The stuff what he feeds those chickens with makes them grow fast, develop great big knee bones and grow fast, the ones

they carry them to retailers who notice them, see one develop a cancer on the hip. They throw him in to burn.

BRANTON: Well, that's because they can't sell them.

Let me ask you about something else, now. I remember your telling me about your marriage to Clara.^{#1} I want you to tell me how it came about and where it was, you remember about that, the wedding?

CLAXTON: The wedding. Let me see, I was with Mrs. Hoskins then and I got in touch with Clara^{#1} by Joe and them bringing her back and forwards from up there. You know, she loved to dance, and so me and Clara got to liking one another. You know, like folks do, backward and forward, just like that. Well, I was a widow. I was lonely. Of course, I was divorced from my wife, so - let me see, I done forgot what year we married in.

BRANTON: That's not important. It's all right.

CLAXTON: That's all right? So me and Clara married. I come up there one morning after Clara had gone to work, come up to Mrs. Wilkins'. I come to the back door and knocked on the door and Mrs. Wilkins and Mr. Wilkins come to the door. He said, "What is it, Will?" I said, "I just want to talk to Clara." He said, "You got to work?" I said, "Yes, suh, I've got to work." He said, "Well, you'd better go back up there to Doc's and work 'til 12 o'clock. Clara will be off then.

#1 - Clara was a young crippled girl Mrs. Wilkins had brought from Memphis, and she cooked for the Branton family for years.

What time do you get off? " I said, "Sometimes I get off at two." He looked around "You know what time Clara gets off?" She say, "About three o'clock." "Well, you come back this evening, Will." Well, me and Clara started to courting up there. Me and Clara married in Mrs. Wilkin's living room. I think near all the Branton folks were there, her daughter and her folks were there the night we got married. We had the wedding at night time. Reverend Chapman - you know him - reckon he's dead now. Reverend Chapman married us right there in Mrs. Wilkins' house. Me and Clara lived together 15 years, but there's one thing that you did know, that Clara would drink whiskey. You know that yourself, Miss Katherine. She would get drunk, but she'd be sober, I couldn't see how she'd do it ---, she would be sober when time to go to work the next morning. Well, we lived together 15 years and people used to tell me: "Will, I don't see how you stay with your wife, she stays drunk all the time." I said, "Well, now listen, this is the plan of God. I'm going to stay until he separates us." And I did do it.

BRANTON: Weren't you together longer than 15 years?

CLAXTON: I think we was, much longer than that.

BRANTON: You'd been married a long time when I came.

CLAXTON: When you came there and, you know, I worked for you and Mr. Harry a long time. I sure did.

BRANTON: Will, let me ask you about something else. About in the twenties or thirties or somewhere in there, or maybe even earlier, the Ku Klux Klan was roaming around through

the country.

CLAXTON: That's right.

BRANTON: Were you ever harassed or feel threatened by that group?

CLAXTON: I did. I felt threatened about it several times. When I would read it and hear people talking about it.

BRANTON: You personally never had any contact with them?

CLAXTON: No contact with them at all.

BRANTON: If you wanted to go to town from out at Mrs. Hoskins or down to Brantons' how would you go?

CLAXTON: I'd always go in the car, because you know I had a car. I'd load up my kids. Sometimes, when Mrs. Hoskins would get through with me in the Dairy, take a bath right in there and put on my clothes and call my kids and get in the car and sometimes go to Wilmot, sometimes go to Arcola and buy them something and go on out and get on that Arcola road and go on to Tribbett, Trail Lake, Bourbon and then work my way all the way back in Leland and get home sometimes 12 o'clock at night. Nobody but just me and the kids. Clara would be runned off. I mean Georgia would be done runned off.

BRANTON: You remember the passenger train that used to stop there when it was Quay?^{#1}

CLAXTON: I sure do. It liked to have run over me there one day. I was across there and the passenger train was

#1 - Quay, Mississippi, appears on early maps, about 2 miles north of Wilmot on old Highway 61. NOTICE

coming. I was driving a car. I'd just driven from the back of the house, to go to the railroad and cross and get on the other side to go to Wilmot. That's where my daddy was at. He was living right at Wilmot in that single house, right there at that time, and just as the back wheel hit the west side, the train went by and the folks who was behind was hollering and gwinin' on, and I didn't hear it, my mind was on my daddy. He was sick.

BRANTON: You liked to have been sick! (Laughter).

CLAXTON: I liked to have been gone! (Laughter).

When the back end of my car turned that-a-way and I's able to turn and go on toward Wilmot, the train shot by. I didn't even see it coming, with my mind on my daddy, and my wife and all those folks back up there at the Dairy, and at my house, was behind the house hollering and I didn't even hear it. My heart didn't go to beating until the train was out of sight.

BRANTON: Let me ask you something about your religious life, Will. You are a member of what church?

CLAXTON: Mt. Carmel.

BRANTON: And had been for how long?

CLAXTON: 40 years. Now, I've been a member of Mt. Carmel 40 years. I was converted in 1910. Now when you get to talking about religion, Miss Katherine, you just turning my trumps, 'cause I can tell you about religion, about being born again, being regenerated and born again. Religion ain't nothing. You read. I want to ask you a question, while we're

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talking 'bout this. Will religion save you? Just think.

BRANTON: Religion is just a word.

CLAXTON: Religion is only a duty. Anybody can have religion. Listen! It's just a society thing these days, to have religion. Anybody can have religion, doing Christian work, doing what borned again do. They know how, they can sing, they can pray, they can do any kind of church work they want to do, easy. You see, the sinners not jining the church, Miss Katherine, but won't none of that save you, won't a bit of that.

(Turned tape)

This is side 2 of the Interview with Will Claxton, 22 July, 1977.

BRANTON: Will, I want you to tell me about your baptizing.

CLAXTON: I guess I'd better just start all over again, then.

BRANTON: Just go on and tell me about your baptizing.

CLAXTON: I was baptized in Sunflower River in 1910. I confessed religion, was converted in September, baptized the third Sunday in October in 1910, and lived as a Christian in the church in Sharkey County 10 years. Then in 1937 or 1935, I come to Washington County. I spent the biggest of my life in Washington County. From Washington County to Memphis and back just like that.

BRANTON: I'm particularly interested in some more

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information about your father, Will. Was he a slave?

CLAXTON: My father come to this country. He wasn't a slave, at the time, when he come to this country a young man, because my father was born in 1833.

BRANTON: Where?

CLAXTON: At Nine Corners. My father was in Memphis. Where Memphis is now there were just three houses there. A Indian hut, Penney's Store and the Log Cabin, that statue's there today. When one log go bad, they take it out and put another one in. Well, my daddy was there when that log cabin was built.

BRANTON: Where was he born?

CLAXTON: At Nine Corners, right there in Memphis. That's where he was borned at.

BRANTON: And he never was a slave?

CLAXTON: No, ma'am. He was borned there. That's right.

BRANTON: Well, he was a free man, and his father before him was free?

CLAXTON: My daddy was in Memphis and jined the Army when Grant and Lee fought on the ground where Memphis is.

BRANTON: Which side did he fight for, Will?

CLAXTON: On Lee's side, I think. Lee's side.

BRANTON: Did your daddy ever speak of his experiences in the Army?

CLAXTON: He used to tell about the time he lay down

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flat on his stomach just like a crawling snake. He couldn't even hit at a bug, if a mosquito lit on you and bit you until they fell off, you couldn't move, until they got orders to move, and the men down this way'd, shoot, right over you. This was in training school. It was tough. All of it was tough.

BRANTON: What stands out in your mind as a young boy down there out from Anguilla, as one of the most important things that happened to you as a child?

CLAXTON: Let's see. Well, one important thing happened to me as a child down there. I wanted to go to school. I went to school until I got big enough to have to go back to the field. It wasn't like it is these days. Kids have to go to school now, but in them times a certain part of the school session you could go, but if you was big enough to work you'd have to go to work, and that's what I had to do. When I got 18 years old I had to take the farm over for my daddy.

BRANTON: Why, Will?

CLAXTON: Well, daddy wanted me to stay on the farm, and go to school some days.

BRANTON: What was your pay on the farm at that time?

CLAXTON: Nothing! Real nothing! Not from my father. He give you something when Sunday come, or Saturday come, but I wasn't getting nothing. I didn't start to getting money out of mankind until I was 19 years old. That's the truth.

BRANTON: Nobody had money at that time, really, but your father was working on the share crop system, was that right?

CLAXTON: That's right. Working sharecroppers.

BRANTON: And so his money came in at the end of the year.

CLAXTON: Yes, at the end of the year. That's the way it was, and money wasn't circulating all through the year. You'd get it at the end of the year if you made it. You got it at the end of the year, so that's the way that thing went.

BRANTON: Your mules and seed, etc. belonged to Mr. McKinney?

CLAXTON: Look, we fourth rent, that was for cash, when we'd pick out enough cotton we thought that would pay us rent, we ginned, excepting that we'd pick out five or six bales of cotton before we'd ever go to settle, then probably we'd pay the fourth rent and would pay the store account. It wasn't really like it was in some parts of Washington County. We could get pretty good fair deal. It was real, that's the truth. At the same time, with the same man, when we got through paying the fourth rent and got through paying the store account, then we can go to gin every two weeks and I'd load that cotton on the wagon and go to town, and want to know what the price of cotton is today. Mr. McKinney would say, "Go get the paper, let's see what cotton's selling for today."

BRANTON: What was it usually, do you remember what it was selling for?

CLAXTON: 18¢. Now they was planting different kinds of cotton at the time, Weber, Green Seed, Big Boll, Black

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Rattler (that was long staple). Black Rattler was selling for 32¢; "Weber 49" was selling for 55¢. Miss Katherine, I sold "Weber" for 55¢ a pound, and Weber at the same time, I'm going to call a place where you wouldn't think it was selling for that, over at Midnight^{#1} was selling for a dollar and a dime a pound. "Weber 49".

BRANTON: What do you think the difference was?

CLAXTON: The difference? Well, now in which?

BRANTON: One was selling in one town at 55¢ and one right across over there for a dollar and something.

CLAXTON: I don't know what was the difference, what made it, because we were selling it at Anguilla for 55¢ a pound and it was selling over at Midnight for a dollar and a dime.

BRANTON: Did you think about hauling yours over to Midnight?

CLAXTON: I stopped raising "Weber 49" that same year, because I couldn't get the price for it, and I didn't want to leave from where I was at, Mr. McKinney's place.

BRANTON: He was a good man.

CLAXTON: He was a real good man. God knows he was. He was in the same war that my daddy was in. You could see him coming down the street walking and every now and then when he'd get to a corner he'd step to it, just like that, just like men in training service, the way he turned that corner.

BRANTON: Explain what you mean because the tape

#1 - Midnight, Mississippi, About 15 or 20 miles East of Sunflower River.

recorder can't see your hand moving.

CLAXTON: I just got to explain what I'm talking about. Yes, sir, Mr. McKinney would walk right on by his store and turn the corner to go up the creek and going back to his house like a soldier. We worked for Mr. McKinney 11 years. We got a fair deal, bought stock, much as 6 mules, 2 horses, James & Grim wagon, buggies. On a Sunday, Miss Katherine, I'd hitch up a buggy. I had an animal to put to the buggy that looked too good to lay a whip on, that's the truth, and go to church.

BRANTON: Where was your church?

CLAXTON: Rose Hill and Locust Grove. You done passed by Locust Grove. Locust Grove sets on the Straight Bayou Road east of Sunflower River, gwine on straight by to Midnight. Our church set over on that side of the road, right there. That was my mother and father's church, but I belonged to Rose Hill at Holly Landing, just as you cross Holly Landing and turn back up about half a mile.

BRANTON: Somebody asked me the other day if there was any significance in the fact that some of your churches had one steeple and some had two towers. Do you know why they built them like that?

CLAXTON: No.

BRANTON: I thought you might know.

CLAXTON: I don't know. Now, that's the way of style. Now some had two towers on each front bow of the church instead of sitting in the middle, right straight up, you know, through

the roof.

BRANTON: You don't know why?

CLAXTON: I don't know why because, you know, we had that on our church right up there. When have you been down to it, Miss Katherine, and see it on the inside? It looks nice in there, we've got it fixed up nice and repairing some more. We want to redo it inside and buy some more new benches. We've raised some collections.

BRANTON: Were you one of the first ones in that church, Will?

CLAXTON: I've been in there 40 years. The church, they said, the birth of the church was around 96 years old.

BRANTON: Tell where the land came from that the church is on.

CLAXTON: The church house land come from Mr. Harry Branton's place.

BRANTON: Mr. Pete^{#1} gave it to you.

CLAXTON: Mr. Peter gave it to the church. He deeded that for a church spot, in his life time, Mr. Harry's grandfather, give that for the church. The highway road used to be behind the church.^{#2}

BRANTON: Behind the church is right?

CLAXTON: Look. We're burying there in the road now, right down there behind the church. You see, we've done spread those beds right straight down so you drive up to the highway going in, well straight on down there. We started burying there

#1 - Mr. Pete Royal Branton.

#2 - This description would place the highway between the church and Deer Creek.

last year. I'll tell you one, three you know are buried there. Kate, who else? Michell and two more that you know of. That's right in the road.

BRANTON: There was also a railroad right along in there too, wasn't it?

CLAXTON: Right to the front yard of my church. The railroad come right along by the steps of my church.

BRANTON: When was that put in there, do you know?

CLAXTON: In 1917.

BRANTON: When was that big one put across, #1 when did they move it?

CLAXTON: They never did move it. They tore it up.

BRANTON: That was a different railroad?

CLAXTON: The one that's up there now is a different railroad. It was always there. They didn't move it, they tore it up, all the way, they couldn't get it to go across the river. They got as far as Ritchey and started to putting down piles they was driving. After a while, they had about a hundred or so right in the middle of the river but for some cause the railroad never did go across, and that's why it was done, but what did you call that road? I've forgotten. They called it the Jake -- something, but anyway that's where they got it, so here it is directly in and back out. That's right. Now let's see, it went right along through, what? You know the house behind Mrs. Hoskins' house? That railroad was right along about there and right straight on. It went right along by Mt. Zion church there. That's

#1 - I. C. Railroad.

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why I said the church is right on the old railroad.

BRANTON: I remember Mrs. Bennett talking about the train stopping and all of them getting on it to go to Greenville.

CLAXTON: That's right.

BRANTON: Well where would it stop there, Will?
Do you remember?

CLAXTON: It stopped right at my church. It stopped right there, and they'd get on there. It was funny. It sure was, but I reckon the company wasn't able to do it, wasn't able to put the bridge across, the state wouldn't fund it and so they cut it out right there. That's the reason it didn't go across. Now it was going on to Midnight, that railroad, on out there to the other little towns.

BRANTON: When you worked for Mr. Wilkins down there, you all had a small dairy on the side and you did that and you did all the yard work and churning, everything.

CLAXTON: And everything. I worked in the Dairy, I worked the flowers, I worked at the garden. We made a garden, we made vegetables enough for 50 people.

BRANTON: How many cows?

CLAXTON: How many cows? We had from thirty to a hundred and from a hundred to a hundred and fifty.^{#1} We were milking from 40, 50 and 60 cows. I took 4 people, I can name them, and in five months, or a little longer than that, to make the Grade A, Bringing the bacteria count from 250,000 down to 40,000. It took seven months to do it. We milked with the

#1 - Will has shifted back to Sligo Dairy here in his description.

units. They made me stop doing that. We milked with our hands, milked with dry hands, and we made it. We didn't get it until we went to milking with dry hands. Every Thursday at 2 o'clock the Board of Health was over there, on us, right under you. Them doctors come over there, checking. They come in when the unit was on. They'd make me take it off and look at it and say, "put it back on", and I'd put it back, go to the next one and do him the same way. Sometimes a cow was coming in that door and sprayed before we got in and went to her place, and all of them cows were trained. They knowed their own names.

BRANTON: The cows?

CLAXTON: Them cows knowed their names. Listen! You know how I used to tell you how I used to work, milked one named Lenora, half Holstein and Jersey, but looked like a holstein - black and white, tall as a mule, give 7 gallons of milk a day.

BRANTON: What was her name?

CLAXTON: Lenora. (Laughter).

That was her name and she give 7 gallons of milk a day. I put in some hard days.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Vivian Broom)

FINAL by V.B.

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