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An Interview with

MR. JOHN W. JOHNSON

April 28, 1977

Interviewed by

Roberta Miller

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

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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 Roberta Miller an Oral History Interviewer with the Washington County Library System. I am interviewing Mr. John W. Johnson, of 521 Maple Street, Greenville, Mississippi. This is April 28, 1977.

Mr. Johnson, when were you born?

JOHNSON: 1902.

MILLER: What month?

JOHNSON: March 31st.

MILLER: March 31, 1902. And where were you born?

JOHNSON: 326 Muscadine.

MILLER: 326 Muscadine.

Who were your parents?

JOHNSON: Charles and Ann Johnson.

MILLER: What was your mother's maiden name?

JOHNSON: Ann Chase.

MILLER: Ann Chase.

And where did they come from?

JOHNSON: Port Gibson, Mississippi.

MILLER: When did they come to Greenville?

JOHNSON: Oh, they came in around, I think, 1900 --

MILLER: 1900.

JOHNSON: -- or a little earlier than that.

MILLER: And you were born in 1902.

JOHNSON: 1902.

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MILLER: 1902.

What was your father doing at the time of your birth?

JOHNSON: Carpentering.

MILLER: He was a carpenter. It seems to me that I have heard of him before.

JOHNSON: I imagine you have. There was a lot of prominent people, you know, he worked for, so naturally his name was pretty well known.

MILLER: Did he work on the First National Bank?

JOHNSON: He worked on the First National Bank when they was building it.

MILLER: And they started building that bank --

JOHNSON: I imagine they started building that bank around, close to -- I don't know how many years it taken them to build it. Evidently, it was around 1900 or 1901 or something like that.

MILLER: Right around there.

JOHNSON: It was finished in 1903. I was a year old then.

MILLER: Were you born on Muscadine Street?

JOHNSON: Yes, ma'am, I was born on Muscadine.

MILLER: Did doctors come then when you were born?

JOHNSON: No, they had midwives.

MILLER: Midwives. They tell me that around that period there were some very fine midwives.

JOHNSON: There was. There was an old lady, they

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called her, "Mother Lawrence" - old timey.

MILLER: Mother Lawrence?

JOHNSON: That's all I hear.

MILLER: Yes. Well, you know we're going back into that now. They've got these new midwife training programs all over the country.

JOHNSON: Oh, they have some pretty good ones here now.

MILLER: They think that it is very important, that it really worked.

JOHNSON: Yes. And no birth certificate or nothing back in those days.

MILLER: That's right. They didn't have any birth certificates until -- when was it, 1910?

JOHNSON: Might have but I never did have one. When I got my Social Security started Brooks took me over to the Educational Building over there at the Court House and they had the school records.

MILLER: Yes. Speaking of school -- where did you go to school?

JOHNSON: Well, I went to school at the -- When I first started I started going in a house with Mrs. E. D. McKay.

MILLER: Mrs. E. D. McKay.

JOHNSON: Archie McKay's wife. He worked for Leyser Company.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: She taught me a little while and when I was

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bigger I went to Number Two School, and Seventh Day Adventist.

MILLER: Are you a Seventh Day Adventist?

JOHNSON: No, my daddy was real religious and he wanted me to go to a kind of a Christian School, like.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: He thought the public school -- Well, he thought the people carried on too bad and everything, and then I went to School in New Orleans, so I didn't do too much schooling, I done my work.

MILLER: Yes. So, you went to school in New Orleans? How far did you go to school?

JOHNSON: I went to about the seventh or eighth grade.

MILLER: We keep talking about the Number Two School, what happened to the Number One School? Did you ever hear of a Number One School?

JOHNSON: I never heard of a Number One School, but Mrs. Lizzie Coleman, she was the principal of Number Two School, and that's how the Coleman School was named for her. She lived on Theobald Street down from the school.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And the Garretts, they got a name, had "Garrett Hall" out there on -- it was named for the Garretts.

MILLER: Yes. I know that.

What was it like on Muscadine Street when you were a child?

JOHNSON: Well, on Muscadine Street they had no sidewalks --

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cinder walks and you could look from Muscadine over to the Southern Railroad, well, the C & G it is, the Southern - Southern Railway Company and we could look across from Muscadine and see the trains, kept looking out there to see the cars pass, so that's how it was was and the houses kind of scattery, and let's see, they had ---

MILLER: The street, I know, what was the street?

JOHNSON: It was dirt. It was a dirt street top ---

MILLER: Open ditches.

JOHNSON: Open ditches and no sewerage system or nothing.

MILLER: No water?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. They had water, we later on had hydrants, but when I was a small boy, about 2 years old, I always remember my mother would draw water in a barrel, you know, to wash with, because that pump water was hard.

MILLER: Did you have a pump in your yard?

JOHNSON: Certainly we had a pump and they had a barrel sitting beside the porch and my brother, you know, was running down to catch the water and I reckon I was about 3 years old, the reason I member that so well my brother fell in on his head, fell in the water. My mama pulled him out by his heels. I used to talk about it, and my mother said, "Boy how do you remember that, you weren't but 3 years old." I said, "I remember it."

MILLER: It scared you probably.

JOHNSON: No, it didn't scare me. I was just wondering what he was doing in the barrel? Some funny things happened back in them days, you know, of course everybody survived.

MILLER: Sure.

JOHNSON: People had horses and buggies. We didn't have a horse until, I think, it was 1917 or 1918, my brother went to the Army, and so my daddy bought a little old horse and wagon to haul his tools out and --

MILLER: Yes, he'd been carrying them in one of those --

JOHNSON: He carried them on his back.

MILLER: Carried them on his back.

JOHNSON: Carried them in - they called them "Shoulder Box".

MILLER: Yes, "Shoulder Box." Well, they didn't have so far to walk then, because Greenville was small.

JOHNSON: Well, it was small but if he had to go from Muscadine up town it wasn't short.

MILLER: That's right, that was a good little distance.

JOHNSON: Yes, ma'am. Of course, out on Starling Street they hadn't built too much out there because I think in 1918 or 1919 my daddy was building an old house. You know, Mr. Dan Shanahan, the old man, stayed -- that old two-story house --.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: I was a little old boy, trying to learn to carpenter, and it was a two-story house and we were up on top

of there putting tin shingles on the house and we'd have foot-rests to hold on and the foot-rest come aloose and I come off the house and there was a scaffold down there that caught me and I come on down. I didn't go back up.

MILLER: You didn't get hurt though?

JOHNSON: I didn't get hurt, You see, the scaffold was at the eave of the house, the scaffold that you go up on. I just got on the ladder and come on down to the ground. Daddy said, "Boy, what you doing on the ground? I said, "Well, I fell half way." I came the rest of the way on the ladder. So, that stopped me from carpentering. I might have been a carpenter. I got out of carpentering after that.

MILLER: They didn't have electricity on -- ?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, they had electricity. Ever since I know, we had lamps. We didn't have no electricity, because my daddy didn't get no electricity until way after the depression. I was gone, I wasn't staying with him then. He finally decided he would get electricity. Old people were scared of electricity.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And gas too, they would cook on a wood stove. Now you take back to when they used this old artificial gas, that coke gas, ohh, that was bad smelling stuff. I don't see how people lived with it but everybody had stoves. I remember Mrs. Bob Cannon's mother -- Mr. Bob Cannon, you remember him.

MILLER: Yes, down on South Broadway.

JOHNSON: The old man was Mayor when I was working for him, and Mrs. Cannon - she's Irish you know - had a great big old wood range and a big old reservoir tank - they had tanks on the stove, you know.

MILLER: Inside the stove.

JOHNSON: No, they had a reservoir built on the back where they'd get the hot water out of and then later on they put hot water tanks, just like they've got now only they were heated by the heat from the stove, had coils in it, you know.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And she used to do her cooking on it. She had an old colored woman, named Battice, she'd help her. I used to go out there every morning and make the fires and she'd call me, "John, don't you leave here until you eat some breakfast." Sometimes I'd be late coming back and Mr. Cannon would say, "How come you take so long?" and I'd say, "You know Mrs. Cannon always wants me to eat breakfast, she wouldn't let me leave there." He'd laugh and he'd say, "Mama likes to feed everybody." She was a good old lady too.

MILLER: Yes, all that family --

JOHNSON: Yes, I come up around Mrs. Anne Cannon and Mrs. Allison, and all of them, you know, they were there also.

MILLER: Yes, and they lived next door to the --

JOHNSON: The Kimbles.

MILLER: To the Kimbles, across the street from the

Hanways.

JOHNSON: Across the street from the Hanways. Well, they were related to the Hanways.

MILLER: Yes, I know.

JOHNSON: And Miss Grasty, she worked down at the Service Station a while when she was a young woman, Miss Anne Grasty.

MILLER: Anne.

JOHNSON: And what was that other's name, Hutchinson -- stayed over on the other side of Mr. Cannon, I believe, across the street, you know, on Percy - no it wasn't Percy - McCutchen.

MILLER: Mrs. McCutchen. Yes.

JOHNSON: McCutchen, that's right.

MILLER: Yes, Mrs. McCutchen was a good friend of ours.

JOHNSON: She was. Well, she was a good friend of the Cannons too. I used to have to go over there --

MILLER: Then Mrs. Warren and Mrs. Pearce, Will Percy's aunts.

JOHNSON: Mrs. Warren and Mrs. Pearce. Mrs. Pearce stayed there too. Because when I worked at Sharkey Hardware I had to deliver my stuff to Mrs. Pearce and that was Mrs. Percy's sister, wasn't it?

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: I remember Mrs. Percy well.

MILLER: Jack Lowraine worked over there for the Hanways too.

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JOHNSON: Yes, he did, because Mrs. Hanway - was that her daughter that married Mr. Bert McKee?

MILLER: Yes. She's my age.

JOHNSON: Well, there's two people -- I hate to get away from your suggest - now Mrs. Louise Cannon - I hadn't seen her since she left here. Every time I go to Memphis -- I know I don't get a chance to see her and I was coming through Memphis from Chicago and I caught the bus in Memphis and I saw Miss Grasty but I didn't know who she was. When we got to Clarksdale she said, "Isn't that John?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Well didn't you get on the bus in Memphis?" I said, "I sure did, and I kind of recognized you." She said, "I've been up there visiting Mrs. McKee", and I told her -- I said, "That's some people I'd like to see, her and Mrs. Louise Cannon and Mr. Bert McKee." She said, "They all were at the bus station." I said, "Well, I declare." And the little boy, he was a little bit of a fellow when he left here, he wasn't quite two years old.

MILLER: Mrs. Cannon's son?

JOHNSON: Yes, her boy.

MILLER: I haven't seen them either. She taught me in school.

JOHNSON: Yes. She was at Greenville High School, its Bass now.

MILLER: We were crazy about her.

JOHNSON: She was a real nice person. I'll tell you

who else was a good friend of hers, Mrs. Rose Mary Virden.

MILLER: Right. Rose Mary and Dreda Hanway.

JOHNSON: Yes.

MILLER: Okay. Well now when you came back from New Orleans -- You went down there and went to school and you were in about the seventh or eighth grade. What did you do then?

JOHNSON: When I was in New Orleans?

MILLER: No, when you came back -- You went to school down there, didn't you?

JOHNSON: I went to school and worked too. I learned how to bartend.

MILLER: Oh, you did? Well, tell me about that.

JOHNSON: Well, I worked for Mrs. Abe Britton. She was a millionaire. They were big cotton brokers. I went to school at night. These people had -- they were real old people -- they had a daughter and they had four or five different maids, a cook and butler, and so the butler he taught me how to serve parties and things and that's where I learned it and I still bartend now and so I would just go to school at night and go to work in the day time.

MILLER: Well, now how old were you? Pretty young weren't you?

JOHNSON: Well, that was in 1919. I was 17 years old.

MILLER: You were seventeen.

JOHNSON: Yes, Ma'am, and I stayed down there until about the last of 1920 or 1921, because I worked at Joe Gow Nue about

about six months after I come home and then I left there and went to Sharkey Hardware and stayed until they just about went out of business and I went on down to Goyer.

MILLER: Now, tell me about working in New Orleans? You didn't have to go to the War, did you? You were too young?

JOHNSON: Oh, no ma'am. I was too young for World War I. I tried to get in the Navy but they told me I was too young and so -- Of course, the War was over with in 1919.

MILLER: 1918. Right, and you would have been sixteen then so --

JOHNSON: No, eighteen.

MILLER: You were born in 1902.

JOHNSON: I was seventeen then. I just worked there at the house, you know.

MILLER: And just learned how to do all --

JOHNSON: Do all the table waiting and stuff like. Well, what they wanted me to do - the butler was getting old and they wanted me to take his place but I didn't have no mind to take it because I didn't like New Orleans.

MILLER: Yes. Why didn't you like New Orleans?

JOHNSON: I just didn't like those people down there. They talked so funny, you know, Cajuns and all.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Too much noise. I never did like a big city.

MILLER: It is noisy down there, but they sure do

have good food.

JOHNSON: Oh, they've got good food but in the first place, I didn't eat red beans and rice like in New Orleans. A lady told me - Mrs. Hodding Carter - Mr. Hollowell found out that I could make oyster loaves --

MILLER: Yes, I heard you made good oyster loaves.

JOHNSON: Who told you about it?

MILLER: Kenneth Haxton.

JOHNSON: So I made an oyster loaf there at Mrs. Hollowell's home and they said it was good, you know how Mr. Hollowell is. He said, "J. W."

They called me J.W. at the bank where I worked. My name is John Wesley Johnson, and the other man, Johnny Pigg, working at the bank and so Mr. Wright said I'm going to call you J.W. and call him Jimmy, because he got here a little ahead of you, so you'll know when we call one you'll know who we are calling and, but if I was to forget it he would say, "Where the hell you gone to?" I said, "Well! I used to have a girl I used to go to see and I'd take her an oyster loaf from an old Greek restuarant right there on Steele's Lane and Washington. He made oyster loaves and he made good ones. They didn't have no sliced bread in there, they had unsliced bread. I'd set there and watch him. Every time I'd go to buy one of those oyster loaves. He charged 75¢ for them, so I said, "I can make them things," so I decided to make me one at home. I went and made one and carried it to

the girl, so she couldn't tell the difference, so from then on I just made my own oyster loaf. So Mrs. Hollowell said, "I sure do miss Franks." You know Frank's Cafe.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: "I can't get any good oyster loaves."

I said, "I'll make you one." She said, "Can you make oyster loaves?" I went out to Kroger's and got me some unsliced bread. I cut the top out of it, you know, and hulled it out, buttered it inside and out and put it in the stove and toasted it while the oysters were cooking. When the oysters got ready to take up, I put in a layer of pickle in the bottom of the bread, then a layer of oysters and the Lea & Perrin sauce and lemon juice, squeezed lemon juice over it, and put some strips of celery lying up and down it. When I got that layer in there, then I put another layer of pickle on top, and I'd put my catsup in there, lemon juice and Lea & Perrin sauce, and it was all filled up, and then I put this plug back in it, and wrapped it up with foil and put it in the oven and baked it. (C. & G. train whistle ---, nostalgic). That's all it took and the Perrin sauce simmered through the bread. It makes a good taste.

MILLER: And you learned that from a Greek Restaurant?

JOHNSON: A Greek Restaurant. They called it "Little Jim's - Jim Victor's."

MILLER: Jim Victor, yes.

JOHNSON: He had a place there on Washington, right

there close to -- right where Condon's, close to Condon's Drug Store.

MILLER: Yes, when I was a child he had a fruit market.

JOHNSON: One of them Victors had a fruit stand. A lot of Greeks had fruitstands then up there.

MILLER: Yes.

So, when you came home from New Orleans you went to work for Joe Gow Nue.

JOHNSON: I went to work for Joe Goe Nue.

MILLER: What was that like?

JOHNSON: Working in a grocery store, you know, you've got to deliver groceries, and I had two big old black horses that I had to drive, and I'd load the wagon up on Saturday, and all through the week, so far as that was concerned, but Saturday was my big day. I worked until twelve o'clock at night.

MILLER: This was an open wagon?

JOHNSON: No, it was a closed wagon, like a van, but it had two doors at the back.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: You know, you ever see these old laundry wagons they used to have?

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, it was made something like that.

MILLER: Who did you deliver to?

JOHNSON: Everybody.

MILLER: You delivered to just houses?

JOHNSON: Houses, different people who ordered groceries, white and colored. He had more white - there were a lot of white people back in there. The neighborhood bought groceries, they'd go in there and buy their groceries and we'd deliver them. Now, they didn't have meats at the grocery store. They had to go to the meat market. We had Hirsch Meat Market and we had Loeb's.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: There wasn't but two meat markets here then, later years - after the flood - along about that, Mr. Atlas had a market. It was on Washington.

MILLER: Mr. Atlas.

JOHNSON: Mr. Atlas.

MILLER: Oh, Mr. Atlas. Yes. I forgot about him. How much did you make working for Joe Goe Nue?

JOHNSON: I made \$12.00 a week.

MILLER: \$12.00 a week, and you worked how long?

JOHNSON: Oh, I'd go to work at seven and get off around eight or nine on weekdays and on Saturday it would be about twelve or one o'clock. I used to do the same thing when I was a boy with Jake Jackson. We used to deliver. We had a grocery wagon too ---

MILLER: Now, Jake Jackson is the family that you lived with?

JOHNSON: Yes. After my mother died.

MILLER: After your mother died. Where did they live?

JOHNSON: They lived on Edison, the house was right off of Nelson on Edison, behind the store. The store was on the corner of Edison, where Watson's Liquor Store is now. All that belonged to Jake Jackson, but he lost it to Mr. Hafter. He lost a half a block of property to Mr. Jerome Hafter.

MILLER: Was that during the depression?

JOHNSON: Well, it was along about the depression. I think he foreclosed it. He was trying to farm and buy a plantation then.

MILLER: Jack Jackson was trying to farm?

JOHNSON: Yes, he had a pretty crop for a while.

MILLER: Where was it?

JOHNSON: Well, he had one at Wayside, and I think it was 150 or 160 acres of land there. He lost that and later up in the depression (Now that was in 1919 that he had a place down there, and that was the year that cotton was a dollar a pound. He made a lot of money that year, and he just tried to go over big with it, had had crop years, and so he couldn't.)

MILLER: And then it went down to 10¢. Very soon.

JOHNSON: That's right. But what happened he mortgaged his property in town to Lawyer Hafter to try to buy the place and he lost it all, and he didn't have nothing but that one house left that he was living in, but, you know, during World War II he regained all that - not that particular

place, but the place out there now, close to 170 acres out on Wilcox road and the boy in St. Louis, a doctor, he wouldn't let the rest of the kids sell it. He wanted to keep it in the family, so he rents it out, but he bought it in himself. He didn't want to throw away what his daddy had bought. Of course, this boy now, he's a millionaire. He said he was going to come out of school and he went into the Army and he made so much until he told me he was worth over a million dollars. He' a doctor.

MILLER: Now, he's a doctor in -- ?

JOHNSON: St. Louis.

MILLER: In St. Louis He had been trying in Meridian but at that time they wasn't going to let any colored surgeons operate in the south, so soon as he got his time what he was supposed to put in, he left and went to St. Louis and now he's --

MILLER: Why did he have to practice over in Meridian?

JOHNSON: Well, you know, I don't know whether it was the state or the government --

MILLER: The state probably educated him, didn't they?

JOHNSON: He was educated - finished his schooling after he come out of the service.

MILLER: The government did.

JOHNSON: Well, you have to serve some time to spend in the state.

MILLER: Three years. I know. I had some friends to do that.

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JOHNSON: And he was a real good doctor and he was a surgeon. He took his interne time under Doctor Howard, who was at Mound Bayou, and he was a real good surgeon.

MILLER: That's good.

JOHNSON: He's practicing and works for a hospital out in East St. Louis and has a Clinic in St. Louis, so he has made about a million dollars since he went to St. Louis.

MILLER: That's real fine.

JOHNSON: It sure is.

MILLER: But Jake Jackson had the biggest --

JOHNSON: Biggest drugstore out on Nelson Street.

MILLER: Yes, and there weren't too many black people that had grocery stores, were there?

JOHNSON: Well, just a few, one old fellow named Hunter, right in that place where the Universal Life Insurance is, and then there was Claud Garrett across the street. He had a little old store there about as wide as this room.

MILLER: But there were a good many Chinese groceries.

JOHNSON: No. It wasn't any Chinese, to my way of thinking -- The Chinese were up town. They started drifting in here, about the depression time, I would say.

MILLER: Now, Joe Gow Nue was up there on Washington --

JOHNSON: Washington and Walnut.

MILLER: And across the street was Wong Brothers?

JOHNSON: Across the street from Joe Gow Nue, where Frank Hall is, was Wong Brothers.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And then a Jewish grocery store, by the name of Schwab, they all left out of here about --- Well, Joe Gow Nue stayed there longer than any of them but when they split up, when all the young Chinese come in, one had a store on Nelson Street, that was Joe Gow Nue Number Two, from Joe Gow Nue Number Two, a young boy started one on Theobald, Lucky Number Two and Lucky Number One.

MILLER: And Thrifty.

JOHNSON: Well, Thrifty, they came in here since those Chinese.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: But, this Ting up on Broadway and Union. Now that's a branch of Joe Gow Nue.

MILLER: Right.

JOHNSON: They they've got one up there on Airdale road, you know, toward where the Airbase is --

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: That's one of the Joe Gow Nue Chinese.

MILLER: What's the name of that?

JOHNSON: I can't think of the name.

MILLER: Yes, I know the place, it's on the road to the Airbase.

JOHNSON: Yes. And, well, Lucky and this other Chinese grocery on Theobald, they all come out of Joe Gow Nue's. Now, Thrifty, I don't know where they came from, but it seems

to be a pretty nice Chinese and Ming Sang up there on the corner ---

MILLER: They came in late too.

JOHNSON: They came in late. Now that store used to belong to Della Craig, a colored woman - so it was an old frame store. Mr. Kitchens was in there after she left out there. He was a policeman.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Then old man Foules run it after Kitchens come out of it, and then Foules come across the street and built on the back of his house. One of the Foules boys is still running it now. They came from New Orleans, the Foules did. They came here around 1918 or 1919 or somewhere in there.

MILLER: Now, up there on Walnut Street close to the Schwab Grocery was a Chinese Laundry, wasn't it?

JOHNSON: No. The Chinese Laundry was across the street from the Schwab grocery, right behind -- close there to Wong Brothers, on that side of the street.

MILLER: Oh, I see.

JOHNSON: The Chinese Laundry, then the Police Station was up there next to the levee.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, you go right out around the corner there from the Chinese Laundry and go to the Police Station, Ham's Furniture Store on the corner of Main, and Mr. Wetherbee had his Hardware, and I can't think what was in that place where

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that Service Station is but I know Gardner had his laundry down there. Bernie Brill had a real fancy men's clothing store, in there, too.

MILLER: He did.

JOHNSON: Right down from Mr. Wetherbee and then they had a pool room in there.

MILLER: I see, yes:

JOHNSON: Where they played.

MILLER: I've heard that some of the fixtures are still down there.

What was the name of the Chinese Laundry?

JOHNSON: Hop Lee's.

MILLER: Hop Lee and didn't you tell me that another Chinese owned Jow Gow Nue?

JOHNSON: Y T Chung. That was before Joe Gow Nue had it.

MILLER: And he went back to China.

JOHNSON: He went back to China.

MILLER: Now you worked for Sharkey Hardware Store?

(Turned tape)

(Omission on tape here?)

JOHNSON: Yes, they had a sign in the window for a porter.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: So Miss Ida Robb was bookkeeper there, and their porter had left and went to California. I went in and

taken his place, so I filled the purpose and I could do most anything. I was pretty talented about catching on how to do mechanic work.

MILLER: And you knew all about tools from your father?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: I had to set up plows, cultivators, you know.

MILLER: That was a big business.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, it was a big business. Me and old man Bailey, who worked for Geise-Mann, he showed me a whole lot too about that.

MILLER: And that's Miss Florence Bailey's husband.

JOHNSON: Florence Bailey's husband.

MILLER: The one that had Bailey's Eat Shop.

JOHNSON: He was very nice about helping me, you know, because I was young. He knew me and knew my daddy. He did all he could helping folks, and after that Mr. Bill Taylor, he took a liking to me and he wanted me to come down to work for him at the Goyer and so I went to the Goyer.

MILLER: How much did you make when you worked for Geise-Mann Hardware?

JOHNSON: I didn't work for Geise-Mann, I worked for Sharkey.

MILLER: Sharkey.

JOHNSON: Well, they all paid around the same, around \$12.00 or \$12.50 a week, or something like that.

MILLER: A week.

JOHNSON: A week.

MILLER: Did you have better hours there than you did at Joe Gow Nue?

JOHNSON: Well, about the same. We went to work at seven and got off at six.

MILLER: You'd come to work about seven in the morning and work until about six.

JOHNSON: Until about six or six-thirty.

MILLER: And then you worked late on Saturday, didn't you?

JOHNSON: No, no. Mr. Sharkey didn't care about nobody but when it was time to go he would go. I used to go fishing with him and paddle the boat for him too. We'd go down to Beaver Lake and I was a good paddler, him and Doctor Powers were good friends and they would always go fishing together. I used to pull the traps for the skeet shooters, you know, and ---

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: -- at the Country Club over there by that Episcopal Church?

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: I used to pull that thing when I worked at Sharkey Hardware. I think he was the head of that thing, and

Mr. Charlie P. Williams and Mr. Joe Wills, all of those old sports, they loved to shoot - do did the women too. What tickled me, I was nothing but a little old youngster, and we had a boy loading the clay pigeons and I pulled the traps - pulling the trigger up there, so you know how they all liked to drink when they'd go down to the Club, and you remember they's all on that old high porch, standing up there drinking so they didn't care about me fooling with the guns. They had a lot of guns out there, so I wanted to shoot three of them pigeons. I told the boy to load me a tripple trap and I'd pull the lever and I'd pick the gun up and shoot. I couldn't hit but two of them to save my life and I said, "I'm going to hit that three pigeons", so they started to looking at me, so finally I said I'm going to shoot the lead pigeon - one goes straight, you know, and two go that way - and I shot that lead pigeon and, swing this way and that way, I shot all three of them. Mr. Charlie P. threwed his hat down and stamped it and said, "Look-a-yonder." "We standing up there telling when to pull and got the gun and pointed at it and he took it and pulled the trigger, then took up his gun and got all three." I never will forget that.

MILLER: Well, that was really unusual. You pulled your own --

JOHNSON: I pulled my own. Well, I was just fast, you know, and Miss Broom, she wanted me to tell you about the time I made a tubeless tire. I hear B. F. Goodrich said they

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made the first tubeless tire. Every time they said when they first made the tubeless tire, I said, "I was the first man that made a tubeless tire." So right after the 1927 flood -- We used to like to go out in the country, you know, country "juke" houses. We went up to Metcalfe and I had an old T-model Ford but it had wire wheels, the late models come out in 1927, but that was after the flood and all the water was gone; we went out there so I had three or four boys went with me, and after a while they found out I had a flat. It bust my tube, didn't have no tube. It tore that tube all to pieces, the tire was good, almost a brand new tire, so they all caught them a ride home. One boy stayed with me, I said I'm going home too, I'm going to fix this tire. I was working at a service station, anyhow, and I had these valve stems. You know, they used to put valve stems in tubes. I said, "Well, I'll take this tire, I had some shellac in the car, and I'll shellac this rim and shellac this and put it on the rim, and I'm going to put this stem in the wheel, and I had some general jamb nuts and rubber washers and I shellacked them real good and I tightened it down and I got my hand pump and I started pumping. It started to coming up and the boy said, "Man, I believe it's going to come up", and so, sure 'nough we got that tire up and it was just as tight as I don'w know what. I said, "Well, it ought to stay up until we get home." So I went to the service station and Mr. Chuty Payne and Mr. Bob Cannon were standing up there. I said, "You know there

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ain't no tube in that tire." He said, "Aw, what are you talking about?" I said, "It ain't." He said, "I don't believe it." I said, "Well, there sure ain't." I said, "I had to get home the other night and I had to figure a way to get home, so I put this tire on here and shellacked it and then pumped it up." He said, "How you going to make a tire stay up without a tube?" It was just something they thought was impossible. I said, "Well, when it wears out I'm going to take it off, or whenever it goes flat." I run that thing until it wore out and then when I did get ready to get it off I had to cut it off, it's stuck so tight. They said, "Well, I declare, I never would have believed it." There wasn't no tube in it. It was just a tubeless tire.

MILLER: Well, that's remarkable.

JOHNSON: And I said, "If I had have known that they were going to have tubeless tires - when did they come out back in the 1930s or 1940s?"

MILLER: Tubeless tires?

JOHNSON: But finally they came out with tubeless tires. I said, "I could have gotten a patent on that thing", but I wasn't looking for no patent, I was just looking for a way to get home. That was a necessity.

MILLER: That's very interesting.

JOHNSON: Onliest reason I tell about that --- Well, there's nobody here to witness it, because all the old-timers and the boy with me are dead, but I'll tell you really I did

make a tubeless tire. I didn't call it a tubeless tire -- I was just going to shellac it on there to get back to town.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: All I was interested in was getting back to town, and I made that tubeless tire and I've told a many a person about it. I was telling Miss Broom about it. She said, "Well, that's remarkable." "You ought to tell them about that." I said, "Why, that ain't nothing."

MILLER: But it is. It's really interesting. It's interesting what people can do when they have to.

JOHNSON: I had to do it or walk.

MILLER: And you didn't want to leave your car.

JOHNSON: No, I didn't want to go off and leave it and so I went out and made this tubeless tire. I didn't know that the thing would be worth money.

MILLER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Because I wasn't thinking about if there would ever be a tubeless tire.

MILLER: If this had happened -- If you'd been a little older, you might have thought about it. When you are young you don't think about things like that.

JOHNSON: Well, I wasn't too old because I was 25 years old in 1927.

MILLER: Yes, but we didn't know then what we know now.

JOHNSON: All we were thinking about was a good time.

MILLER: Good times. Having a good time.

JOHNSON: Just like when I used to run around with Mr. Bill Taylor and George Crittenden and all of them, and we would go to Memphis and stay a week or so and come back home. They'd have a good time and spend a lot of money.

MILLER: And you had a good time too?

JOHNSON: Oh, I had as good a time as they did because I would go out and have a great big time. They'd give me money the whole time I was up there and they'd pay me my salary when I got back home. I never will forget that time when we went to Memphis and they got broke and I had to buy their lunches and some cigarettes. Mr. Bill Taylor said, "Where did you get money from?" and I said, "Well, I just got in a crap game." I was saving money because they gave me \$10.00 a piece. I put it in my pocket there and they thought I was staying at the hotel and I was staying at my aunts. I had got close to a hundred dollars when I come home. They was out of money when they filled up at Clarksdale and going down the road they said, "You got any cigarettes?" I said, "No, I ain't got none." We stopped at a drug store and there was a cafe there. I said, "Take this \$10.00 bill and y'all go in there and get you some cigarettes. I expect you are hungry too." They were real nice to me. They gave me double what I'd give them. I had the best time of my life back in those days. They are making money now but where does it go? You can't do nothing with it.

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