

An Interview with

MISS CAROLINE WORTHINGTON

October 10, 1977

Interviewed by

Roberta Miller

Mississippi  
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and the  
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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.

October 10, 1977. This is Roberta Miller, an Oral History Interviewer with the Washington County Library System. I am interviewing Miss Caroline Worthington at her apartment in the Main Street Garden Apartments here in Greenville, Mississippi.

MILLER: Caroline, when were you born?

WORTHINGTON: I was born August 23, 1903.

MILLER: Where?

WORTHINGTON: I was born at Leota Landing, in my home.

MILLER: In your home and that was on your plantation, which was Leota Plantation.

Your family had owned that plantation for a long time. When did the Worthingtons first come?

WORTHINGTON: According to what I have read it was about 1825.

MILLER: Around 1825 and your ancestor was Isaac Worthington, isn't that correct? Who were your parents, Caroline?

WORTHINGTON: Amelie Henriette Deslandes Adams and Thomas Worthington.

MILLER: And Thomas Worthington. What was your father's middle name, did he have a middle name?

WORTHINGTON: He did not have a middle name.

MILLER: Did not have a middle name.

WORTHINGTON: And I think I told you, he spelled his first name, abbreviated, Tho. instead of Thos.

MILLER: When you were a child on Leota Plantation which was on Worthington Point, was it not?

WORTHINGTON: It is now called Worthington Point.

MILLER: Did they call it Worthington Point then?

WORTHINGTON: Not as I remember.

MILLER: You always called it Leota Plantation. Who were your neighbors down there - other people who owned plantations and who lived in the little village of Leota?

WORTHINGTON: My uncle and aunt by marriage, Leroy Valliant and Theodosia Worthington Valliant and their sons. The ones I remember were Leroy and Frank. They were right next door to us - part of the old Worthington Estate, and then there was the little village of Leota with the stores. Louis Elkas and his family, the Frankels, then cousins Mamie and Louise Buckner, and then later on E. W. Stone and his family. E. W. Stone managed for the Elkas family.

MILLER: Now in the early days your cousins, the Wards, had some property out there too, didn't they, that went into the river?

WORTHINGTON: I guess so. I believe Lake Washington was considered originally, a part of the Mississippi River.

MILLER: Right.

WORTHINGTON: And then the McGehees, who were cousins of the Wards.

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MILLER: And the Nutts?

WORTHINGTON: The Nutts were closer to Leota. Then Mary Worthington who married John Nutt. And there was property owned by Charlie Worthington and Samuels.

MILLER: Samuel Worthington.

WORTHINGTON: No, Samuels.

MILLER: Samuels?

WORTHINGTON: He lived there and I don't know, on the maternal side that was Worthington also. That's the way he was kin but then when he became a doctor he went to Dallas, Texas.

MILLER: Okay. When you were a child -- Oh, you were going to tell me about Palmetto Plantation, that was the Worthington's.

WORTHINGTON: That was T. P. Worthington.

MILLER: Thomas P. Worthington.

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: And that was part of the land that went outside the river, went outside of the levee when the ---

WORTHINGTON: No, there's still a plantation.

MILLER: Oh, Palmetto is still there. I see, it's on this side of the levee.

When you were a child-- I know you had a large family of brothers and sisters - did you have nurses and who were your playmates?

WORTHINGTON: Of course I was the fourth child of my mother and father and I was the only girl at that time but

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anyway around my age - I had half-brothers. My playmate was a black girl. She was reared by the one they called "Black Mammy" and her name was Rosa. Well, now, we played together until I got large.

MILLER: Did you have a nurse when you were a child? Do you remember a nurse-- ?

WORTHINGTON: Yes, and my nurse was an old nurse that we called Aunt Lou, but the others that I can remember-- we had two or three nurses, there were so many children.

MILLER: Now, there were two sets of children in your family.

WORTHINGTON: Yes, my father had married Rosine Adams, an older sister of my mother --

MILLER: Yes.

WORTHINGTON: And she died shortly after the birth of the seventh child.

MILLER: How many did they have by the first marriage?

WORTHINGTON: Seven.

MILLER: Seven by the first marriage and how many by the second?

WORTHINGTON: My mother had nine children and there were fourteen of us who grew up to be grown.

MILLER: Now one of them died from diphtheria --

WORTHINGTON: Yes, here in Greenville.

MILLER: And what happened to the other child?

WORTHINGTON: She had what they said they thought

was tonsillitis or sore throat or it could have been diphtheria way back there. She was the youngest of the oldest group.

MILLER: What about the medical situation? Did you all have many things wrong with you - that's a big family - did the doctors come very often?

WORTHINGTON: I don't remember too much illness, although we were doctored, little hurts and things like that. We did have malaria, one or two of us, and there was one case that one of us had - haematuria, and of course there was tonsillitis.

MILLER: What did you all do for malaria?

WORTHINGTON: Took quinine and calomel. In fact that aunt I was named for - she'd give me the beaten biscuits with something in it for me to take right after the capsule so I could get that lump out of my throat.

MILLER: Did you have to take it every day? You took it in the summer time?

WORTHINGTON: No, it was when we knew we had the chills and the fever, then you took it over a period of time.

MILLER: Yes, and you took it in capsule form?

WORTHINGTON: Capsule form.

MILLER: You never did take chocolate quinine? Cocoa quinine?

WORTHINGTON: I think that came later on.

MILLER: Were there any broken bones in that large family?

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WORTHINGTON: I recall myself getting a broken bone, by falling off of a horse. I was helping the woman who was milking and I was trying to drive a cow or calf or something there and the horse jumped a little ditch and off I fell and that was while she was milking. Of course, that was before dark but by the time the doctor got to me it was night and I had to have my arm set by lamplight.

MILLER: Was it successful?

WORTHINGTON: It was a bit crooked - my arm was - but of course it had swelled a good deal and when he put the cast on I imagine it was a little large with swelling at that time. Of course they didn't give me anything to alleviate the pain so I can well remember the torture I went through.

MILLER: Now, when the children were born, did the doctors come or did you have midwives on the plantation, or nurses to help? Do you remember?

WORTHINGTON: We had doctors. I cannot recall their names. I have a Diary that my mother wrote when her oldest boy, her first child was born. She spoke of the doctor.

MILLER: Oh, she has. Read that part to me.

WORTHINGTON: "Leroy Valliant, Worthington, born Tuesday, February 28, 1899 at a quarter of twelve p.m. in the presence of his father, nurse and doctor. His not being expected until the latter part of April, his grandmother was in New Orleans. She was telegraphed for and arrived March 2nd. Leroy is named after his uncle, Judge Leroy B. Valliant of Missouri, for whom

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his parents have the greatest admiration and love. Leroy was very delicate for months."

MILLER: That's fine. That's real interesting. I remember you reading that to me and it goes on to tell about who gave him presents and one of the presents was from his nurse, is that right?

WORTHINGTON: Yes, "He received presents from "the cook, Anna, and his nurse Bell".

MILLER: Were listed among the ones who --

WORTHINGTON: Yes, were listed among the ones who gave him presents, etc.

MILLER: Now, what did you all do about school? Of course you were out pretty far from any school.

WORTHINGTON: We had a little school right there at Leota, close to the Nutt place, and the teacher I remember stayed with us all the time she taught.

MILLER: Who was that?

WORTHINGTON: A Miss Nita Mitchell and, of course, in the evenings she read to us from the literature - novels.

MILLER: Did she teach you all music too?

WORTHINGTON: I don't recall any music but she could have.

MILLER: Now your mother was of French extraction and did you all speak French?

WORTHINGTON: The aunt for whom I'm named, Caroline Adams, and my mother spoke French, and then there was one black family on the place, Joe Gentile, who was from Louisiana

and he could speak French.

MILLER: How did he happen to be there? Did they bring him up from Louisiana?

WORTHINGTON: I guess that's how he came, I'm not sure.

MILLER: So, Miss Mitchell lived with you all and taught you all.

WORTHINGTON: And we'd ride in a buggy back and forth to school.

MILLER: How far was the little school house?

WORTHINGTON: I would say it was a mile and a quarter.

MILLER: It was on your place?

WORTHINGTON: No, it was on that = I guess it was on the Charlie P. Worthington place, right near the Nutt place.

MILLER: Did any other children, other than Worthingtons, go to school there?

WORTHINGTON: Yes, I think that's all the ones at the time that I went, in the family, but I know years before that the Elkas children and my older brothers and sisters went, and then if others came in. Now the Weathers came in about the time they started enlarging the levee, G. C. Weathers and his family. They lived in the camp there while they were building the levee, so all of those children came.

MILLER: Then as you became older, then they formed that school at Chatham, didn't they?

WORTHINGTON: Yes, the Consolidated School and that

was around 1920, I think. Of course, I finished in 1921.

MILLER: So you just went to school there two years?

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: Now, there were a good many more children going to that school.

WORTHINGTON: A great many more, because a good many whites came in from what we said were the hills --

MILLER: That came after World War I?

WORTHINGTON: Yes. We had no roads, so we either rode horses or had a wagon, drawn by mules or horses - covered with a tarpaulin.

MILLER: So, in bad weather you were protected by the tarpaulin?

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: But you often rode your horse, didn't you?

WORTHINGTON: That was after I started teaching there.

MILLER: Oh, I see, but when you were going to school you all went in the wagon.

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: And who would drive?

WORTHINGTON: Now, in a letter I have here from my father to his sons, he spoke of my older brother, Leroy, who took over the running of the place after my father died.

MILLER: Now, we'll have to go back a little bit. This was after your father had been sheriff of Washington County

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and moved back.

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: All right. Now let's hear about what he has to say about the schools. Does it have a date on the letter?

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: And he's writing to his sons who are in college somewhere, isn't he?

WORTHINGTON: Yes, they are away and I take it to be: "This is Tuesday, November 29, 1921. Dear Sons: --

MILLER: He's also telling us about the plantation too--

WORTHINGTON: Yes. He spoke of them returning home and he says: "Mr. Lowry was here yesterday" meaning in our home. "We will let Leroy take the contract for the school transportation. He will pay drivers \$8.00 a month, and returning to the school fund the balance of the money to pay teachers. Hatch wants it that way to save his skirts." (I imagine he means his teachers.) Then he speaks of what's going on around house and home; "I hear the saw driving away on our winter wood. Several negroes are working with the wood. Clem has turned much land with the 4-horse plow. They are hauling pea hay from cabins and putting it in barns so that Jim Carter can have the cabins. Henry Beale and Charlie Smith will occupy the other double cabin. Will and Clem Smith will occupy Killebrew cabin. Monday they have contracted a family from Hatcher's place, who will take Grace's cabin. A family from Metcalfe will take Ann Beale's cabin.

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A woman and daughter will occupy corner cabin, and cook for us, and Mary will nurse. Mary Cook will crop with Henry Cook, so it seems that we have every cabin full. None of our hands will move from us.

Leroy Valliant's hands are stirred up and are threatening to leave. It could be they are just maneuvering merely to get money. Redmonds here and says he wants to stay. They are all packed in Serilda's house, Ed is carpentering in Greenville. Tim Greene is sure to move on California, so they say. Your little brother John is sure he can kill a goose any time now that he sees one. He has killed one and that gives him confidence. The geese are coming into our island corn field." -- Your loving and devoted papa."

MILLER: Caroline, I know your father was a good friend of Mr. Harvey Miller, who was the sheriff of Washington County, and was related to him too, wasn't he?

WORTHINGTON: Yes, as well as to my mother. Cousin Harvey was my grandfather's nephew.

MILLER: That was --

WORTHINGTON: Robert Adams.

MILLER: Yes, and he was related on his -- Was his mother a Valliant? Well, anyway, I know you all were related through the Adams and the Valliants too.

WORTHINGTON: That's right, because Aunt Tenie Worthington, or Theodosia Worthington, married Leroy Valliant, brother of Frank Valliant. His wife was named Marian Valliant.

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the grandmother of the Miller children.

MILLER: Right. Mr. Miller, Harvey Miller, became ill and he wanted your father to succeed him, didn't he?

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: That was in 1908?

WORTHINGTON: These letters begin in 1908 --

MILLER: Those letters in the Democrat?

WORTHINGTON: Were published in the Democrat and now I'll read some of them to you. The following letters written, the first one begins September 5, 1908: "Daily Democrat: "The following letters written by Mr. Harvey Miller on the eve of his departure for Minnesota, are published for the information of the public. They were witnessed by Mr. McCarley and Miss Trigg at Mr. Miller's request. They tell in simple yet pathetic language what the thoughts of this good man were in the last hours of his life. In response to Mr. Miller's request, Mr. Worthington has taken charge of the office and has consented to make the race for sheriff at the special election that will be called at once, and if elected, will turn over all of the proceeds of the office, except the salary of \$2,500.00, to the four little children of Mr. Miller. There is no better man in Washington County than Thomas Worthington. He is a large planter, a man of affairs, and while he is in no sense a politician, he is a most courteous and affable gentleman and exactly the character of a man you would expect Harvey Miller to select out of all the host of his friends as the

guardian and protector of his little children."

MILLER: So he was elected?

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: Then, after that term, he ran for re-election and was also elected, was he not, for the second term?

WORTHINGTON: I believe that's right.

MILLER: Then, didn't the guardians of the Miller children put a letter in the paper?

WORTHINGTON: Yes. I believe this one is signed by M. R. Valliant and Louise V. Eskrigge, guardians, and it's headed "Are grateful to Mr. Worthington, Greenville, Mississippi, April 1911. To the people of Washington County: We are ever grateful to you for responding to Harvey Miller's dying request to elect Thomas Worthington, sheriff for his unexpired term. Thomas Worthington yielded nobly to the request. His skillful management of the affairs of the office has resulted in placing about \$20,000 in the hands of the children's guardians, invested in good security which are yielding more than \$1,300.00 per annum. We are more than satisfied with all that he has done and fully realize that he has made a great sacrifice for them. It is due to the public to know these facts and it is incumbent upon us, as grandmother and co-guardian, to present them. Furthermore, we feel that we should add our strength toward adding Thomas Worthington to obtain the sheriff's office for a full term for himself and we ask all our friends to support him. He has magnanimously fulfilled his promise to

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Harvey Miller. He has made a faithful and an efficient sheriff and we sincerely hope that he will be elected.

(sgd.) M. R. Valliant and Louise V. Eskrigge, Guardians."

MILLER: And he was re-elected, was he not?

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: And so you all moved up to Greenville for that period, for those two periods that he was sheriff of Washington County? Where did you all live when you lived in Greenville?

WORTHINGTON: In a little house on Main Street right next to the railroad.

MILLER: Where the Thompson Battery and Electric Company is now, isn't it?

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: What happened to the plantation while you all were up here? That was about seven years, wasn't it?

WORTHINGTON: I think different members of the family went back and forth all the time and it was still run as a plantation.

MILLER: And your father probably could --

WORTHINGTON: He'd go down there and then he had able blacks to take care of it for him.

MILLER: Yes. And then the boys in the family I imagine did a good many things too, didn't they?

WORTHINGTON: Yes. They enjoyed it - going back and forth.

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MILLER: Now let's get back to the school situation. The boys in the family had a contract to drive the -- the transportation -- ?

WORTHINGTON: Yes. I believe in my father's letter, Leroy, who, as I told you later on, managed the place.

MILLER: Yes. And then when you graduated in 1921, wasn't it?

WORTHINGTON: Yes, in 1921.

MILLER: What did you do after that, Caroline, after you graduated from high school?

WORTHINGTON: Well, after graduation I had planned to go to college and also, the brother who had finished just ahead of me, but then my father became ill. I did not go to college but I took a teacher's examination at the Court House and got a Teacher's Certificate to teach and taught at Chatham School. I finished in May and I began the first of September in teaching the primary grades.

MILLER: Now, how big was the school then? How many teachers did they have, do you remember?

WORTHINGTON: I don't remember the teachers they had.

MILLER: Who all were teaching down there?

WORTHINGTON: A teacher for each grade up through the -- you finished the eleventh grade, I believe. It might have been twelve grades.

MILLER: Who were the teachers down there? Were any of them from down on the Lake? Dorothy Miller taught there.

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WORTHINGTON:

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Of course, I taught there and then a Mr. and Mrs. Lowry. He was the principal.

Yes, and Mr. and Mrs. Lowry stayed in the Teacherage as well as these other teachers who came stayed there.

MILLER: Now, you lived at home when you were teaching and --

WORTHINGTON: Yes, and Leota was about four miles from Chatham, and I remember most of the time, of course, when the weather was bad I probably rode in the wagon, in the Transportation, but otherwise I rode horseback, back and forth to school all the time, but the brothers, the younger brothers, drove the Transportation.

MILLER: Was it still a horsedrawn behicle then or was it an automobile in 1921?

WORTHINGTON: No, I don't think -- I know there were automobiles aaround but the roads would not permit that you'd ride in a car because they were not graveled.

MILLER: Yes. So, how long did you teach at Chatham?

WORTHINGTON: Nine or ten years, and in between time I went to summer school and got college credits.

MILLER: Yes. But you taught about ten years down at Chatham?

WORTHINGTON: Yes.

MILLER: What changes did you see in those ten years? That would be from 1921 to about 1931?

WORTHINGTON: Well, then, of course, we had transportation