

An Interview with

Charles Hartwell
August 10, 1977

Interviewed by
Evelyn Benham

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History Project
Monticello and Vicinity

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Interviewee: Charles Hartwell
Interviewer: Evelyn Benham

Title: An interview with Charles Hartwell, August 10, 1977 /
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Scope Note: The Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
System conducted oral history interviews with local
citizens. The interviewees included long-term residents
of the Lincoln, Lawrence and Franklin County areas.

BENHAM: This is an interview with Charles Hartwell, Route 1, Box 284, Silver Creek, Mississippi, August 10, 1977. Interviewed by Evelyn Benham. Mr. Hartwell, what is your full name?

HARTWELL: Full name? Charlie Hartwell.

BENHAM: When and where were you born?

HARTWELL: I was born as I knew, right down there about a mile from here.

BENHAM: Well, where is that?

HARTWELL: Ma'am?

BENHAM: Where is that? Is that in Monticello in Lawrence County?

HARTWELL: Yes.

BENHAM: All right. Do you remember when you were born?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am. I sure don't.

BENHAM: Well, how old are you?

HARTWELL: As near as I can get it... See the courthouse got burned out with our records in it and me and Mr. Roe Parkman's wife went to Jackson to try and get our records and Mr. Bob Thompson, and so we didn't get a way to put it down and that put me about eighty-one (81) years old.¹

BENHAM: When was that? How long ago was that?

HARTWELL: That was before he was married. When he was in the hospital.

BENHAM: But you don't know how old you are right now?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: Would you say you are about maybe eighty-five (85) or something? Would your daughter know how old you were?

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HARTWELL: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: She wouldn't know?

HARTWELL: That's my second wife's daughter.

BENHAM: Oh, all right. I could ask her; maybe she might remember.

What is your father's name?

HARTWELL: Louis Hartwell.

BENHAM: Where was he born?

HARTWELL: He was born in Lawrence County.

BENHAM: All right. Do you remember when he was born?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: How old was he when he died, do you remember that?

HARTWELL: I was...

BENHAM: No, how old was your father when he died?

HARTWELL: Oh, I don't know.

BENHAM: You don't know, all right. What is your mother's maiden name?

HARTWELL: Beth Hartwell.

BENHAM: Well, what was her name before she got married?

HARTWELL: Beth McClellan.

BENHAM: McClellan, all right. Do you know when she was born?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: Do you know how old she was when she died?

HARTWELL: She was about seventy-some years old.

BENHAM: When she died?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am, as near as I can get to it.

BENHAM: All right. Where was she born?

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HARTWELL: She was born in Lawrence County.

BENHAM: All right. Did your mother work outside of the home?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am.

BENHAM: Just stayed in the house.

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. She just farmed then.

BENHAM: Well, what kind of work did your father do?

HARTWELL: Just farmed.

BENHAM: All right. How many were there in your family?

HARTWELL: Me.

BENHAM: Just you? Your parents just had one (1) son?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am. There were - let's see, Coon, Sugar, Hike, the sons. Four (4) boys and two (2) girls.

BENHAM: All right. How old were you when you first went to school?

HARTWELL: I was eight (8) years old, I think. Ten (10) years old, that was it.

BENHAM: All right. What was the name of the school that you went to?

HARTWELL: China Lee, right up here.

BENHAM: All right. How far was it from your house?

HARTWELL: It was about a mile, because it was right down there.

BENHAM: All right. And how did you get to school?

HARTWELL: Walked.

BENHAM: Can you remember what your school looked like? What kind of a building was it?

HARTWELL: Just a plain building like this, a little house. It was ripped down and then they built that one that was up there and since then it got burned down.

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BENHAM: All right. Is that school still there? Is the school still there?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am. Just the schoolhouse is there. That white house right in front of the church over there.

BENHAM: I see. I'll look at it when I go back. Do you remember how many grades were in it? How far did it go, from the first grade to what grade?

HARTWELL: It went to the eighth grade, I think.

BENHAM: And how many rooms did they have in the school, can you remember that?

HARTWELL: Let's see, one (1), two (2), three (3) - about five (5) in that school up there. First one, we didn't have but one (1). It was small like this house.

BENHAM: Was it made out of wood?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am, planks.

BENHAM: All right. What did the children have to sit on when you first went to school?

HARTWELL: We sat on benches, homemade benches.

BENHAM: And what did you write on?

HARTWELL: We had some little tables, desk tables, like that sitting up there. We wrote on that.

BENHAM: Did you write on paper? Did you write on a slate or something?

HARTWELL: Slate.

BENHAM: Yes, I remember those slates, I remember writing on them myself when I was going, didn't you?

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HARTWELL: Yes.

BENHAM: Let's see now. Did you ever have to write your lessons on the board?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. We had crayon and we'd write our lessons sometimes here on the board and sometimes we'd just have to spell it or read it out.

BENHAM: All right. How were the children punished if they were bad or did something wrong? How were the children punished?

HARTWELL: They whipped them. The school teachers had switches to whip the children.

BENHAM: What was your favorite game that you liked playing at school?

HARTWELL: I played ball.

BENHAM: Well, what kind of ball was that?

HARTWELL: They called it baseball then.

BENHAM: They did?

HARTWELL: A bunch of children would get out there, you know. They'd play ball like they do now.

BENHAM: How many children can play this game at the same time? Can you remember that?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. There would be just like you'd have nine (9) and I'd have nine (9). There are two (2) captains or two (2) parts of them playing against one another.

BENHAM: All right. What did you like best about going to school?

HARTWELL: I liked the ball-playing best. That's what we done.

BENHAM: What subject did you like the best?

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HARTWELL: Well, I liked, I think it was playing ball, I reckon.

BENHAM: No, no. I mean did you like to read the best? Did you like to spell?

HARTWELL: Yes, read.

BENHAM: You liked to read the best?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: What kind of stories did you like? I mean, did you ever come home and read? Did you ever read at school?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. We had to come home and study our lessons for the next day, you know.

BENHAM: Well, did you have any books at school, say like that you could take out? Read at the school? What kind of stories? Did you have stories that you liked? What kind of stories did you like?

HARTWELL: Well, let me think. We carried the books all the time home and studied them that night and then go back the next morning and mine was history, I think, or something or other. I just can't get it straight.

BENHAM: Well, that's all right. What did you do in the summertime?

HARTWELL: We picked cotton and worked in the fields and scraped cotton and all like that at home.

BENHAM: Did you ever go swimming?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Did you have an old swimming hole that you went swimming in?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am, at Cold Water Branch right below here.

BENHAM: Did you ever swing on a vine and jump into the water? Into the branch? Did you do something like that when you were little?

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HARTWELL: No, ma'am, we didn't. We had a little shallow place where we'd swim or wade out in.

BENHAM: All right. What kind of farm animals - you said you lived on a farm, Mr. Hartwell - what kind of farm animals did you have on your farm?

HARTWELL: Well, horses and mules.

BENHAM: Anything else?

HARTWELL: We had cows. We plowed them horses and mules that we had. We didn't have any tractors then. We'd have to plow with mules.

BENHAM: All right. What kind of crops did you grow?

HARTWELL: Cotton and corn, peas, potatoes, sweet potatoes and had a watermelon patch.

BENHAM: And what did you do with your peas and your corn? Did you can them? Did your wife can them?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am, and then you know, we carried some home, put up some, and dried them and put them up for next year.

BENHAM: I see. What do you mean about putting them up to dry? How do you...?

HARTWELL: Let them stay in the hull and hang them up in sacks, croaker sack, and hang them up.

BENHAM: And where did you hang these sacks?

HARTWELL: Up side of the corn in the crib. We kept the corn in the crib then.

BENHAM: All right. Did you have to help with the farm work when you were growing up? Did you have to help your father with the farm work?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. My father used to, just like you had a crop out

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there, well, we children had to hoe it, pick it, and gather it and all like that. Help him gather it.

BENHAM: All right. Is there anything else that you had to help him do?

HARTWELL: Well, we had to fix the fence then. The rail fence and I reckon we had to put up fences, you know, around and things.

BENHAM: What kind of rail fence is that? How did you do that?

HARTWELL: Pine. Just nailed crossways.

BENHAM: Now wait, you have to tell me what you did because to show me you must tell me exactly how it was done, because you see, this thing can't take a picture of what you are doing. You have to explain it to me. How did you make the rail fence?

HARTWELL: Well, just haul the rails with the wagon and go along there and nail it crossways all the way around the field.

BENHAM: You did what?

HARTWELL: Just like you go down at that field there and when you see your cows are over at the other place, you have to put a fence around it to keep your cows from eating it up or horses. Shove them in a pasture.

BENHAM: I see, and what?

HARTWELL: Kept them in a pasture.

BENHAM: I see, I see, all right. Is this what everybody had, rail fences, way back then?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. Before this net wire business came in, just nothing but rail fences.

BENHAM: All right. What did you make these rail fences out of? What kind of wood?

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HARTWELL: Pine trees. Split them, just like my fingers.

BENHAM: Now say that again. It was as big as your finger?

HARTWELL: It was big, but just have it split like my fingers are.

BENHAM: Oh.

HARTWELL: Made the rails out of them.

BENHAM: And why did you split it?

HARTWELL: Well, you see, it would be too big to take the whole thing. Sometimes they would take little ones, you know, small ones and put them up.

BENHAM: All right. What kind of social life did you all do? How did you entertain yourselves when you had a little time off? What did you all do?

HARTWELL: We just played. We had playhouses and things to play in.

BENHAM: Did you all go on a picnic or something?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am. We didn't have no picnics then like there is now.

BENHAM: Well, what did people do? Did they ever go and visit each other or something?

HARTWELL: Oh yes, ma'am. Just like you get sick, they would go there and stay there and work with you until you got up and then the old folks will go and chat with one another, you know, and talk and go on. They didn't allow children then to sit up and listen to the old folks talk. We had to be out playing. And they'd be in there talking.

BENHAM: I see. Well, what about the young people? I mean, when they got to be about seventeen (17) or eighteen (18), what did they do then? Did they ever have a dance or square dance or something?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. They had dances in different places. And some fellow would be calling a figure and they'd be dancing by it.

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BENHAM: And what kind of instrument did they play?

HARTWELL: Guitar.

BENHAM: All right. What holidays were celebrated a long time ago?

HARTWELL: Fourth of July and like when one of them would have a birthday, they'd have a holiday over here and all like that.

BENHAM: Well, what did you do on the Fourth of July?

HARTWELL: Play ball. Have a ball game, maybe play out here or go to Arm or somewhere and play a ball game. Have a good ball game. They'd have a little stand and they'd sell...

BENHAM: They'd sell what?

HARTWELL: They'd have a little stand there and they'd go there to that game where they were going to play ball. Look at them play ball.

BENHAM: All right. Mr. Hartwell, you were telling me about the Fourth of July and the things that you did. Tell me about the ice cream, how you made it.

HARTWELL: Just put the milk and sugar and stuff in it and have a freezer in there with a handle on it and they just stand there and turn it, you know, until it freezes and then they'd give you a little saucer or something to put it in and then you'd eat it. They passed it around.

BENHAM: Well, how did they get their ice? Where did they get their ice to put around it?

HARTWELL: They'd go to Columbia and first one place - I don't know where they got that ice. We had to make it then and put ice around it and turn that thing until it froze.

BENHAM: Okay. Do you remember when this was? What year this was?

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HARTWELL: That was 1909, I think. Something like that. Way on back.

BENHAM: All right. Which one of these holidays did you like the best?

HARTWELL: I liked the Fourth of July.

BENHAM: You did? Did you get a chance to shoot any firecrackers?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am, at Christmas.

BENHAM: Had a what?

HARTWELL: At Christmas Day - that's when we had the firecrackers.

Christmas Eve Day and Christmas Day. Them was holidays too.

BENHAM: That was a lot of fun, wasn't it?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Well, which one did you like the best?

HARTWELL: I liked Christmas, because Santa Claus came and bring us stuff.

BENHAM: Santa Claus? And how did you celebrate Christmas in your house?

Do you remember?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am, kindly. Just like, wouldn't let the children know what we were getting and putting in there for them, you know. Make them go to bed early and put out the Santa Claus stuff for them. Have them hang up their stockings and stuff things in there for each one.

BENHAM: Can you remember something that you really wanted at Christmas time that you got?

HARTWELL: Yes, I wanted some of these little old, used to have firecrackers, Roman Candles.

BENHAM: What?

HARTWELL: Roman Candles, you know. Those long ones you'd shoot.

BENHAM: Oh, Roman Candles, yes.

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HARTWELL: That's what I liked best, Roman Candles, We'd get them and go like we was hunting.

BENHAM: Oh, I see. Well, did you get what you wanted one Christmas?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: What did you want?

HARTWELL: That's what I wanted, Roman Candles. And we'd get some candy and apples and first one thing and another, That's all we wanted. We'd go off in the woods, like we were going hunting.

BENHAM: Oh, I see.

HARTWELL: And we'd eat that, sit out over there and eat that stuff up.

BENHAM: What would you eat?

HARTWELL: Apples and oranges.

BENHAM: Oh, I see. You ate the things you got in your stocking.

HARTWELL: Yes.

BENHAM: Oh yes, I understand. All right, what church do you belong to, Mr. Hartwell?

HARTWELL: China Lee Church. Right up here.

BENHAM: Is that a Baptist church?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. Baptist, China Lee Church.

BENHAM: How old is that church? Do you know?

HARTWELL: That church is about ten (10) years old, I reckon. Yes, about eight (8) or ten (10). I'm trying to remember now. The church used to be on the other side and then they had church where the school was awhile and then they turned it into a schoolhouse and built that church over there. Mr. Sebe Nelson, they bought that land from him and built the church on it.

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BENHAM: Who is that?

HARTWELL: Mr. Sebe Nelson used to be supervisor and stayed at Silver Creek.

BENHAM: Was that church, before you built it, was there another church there?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am. Not over there, It was over on that side of the road.

BENHAM: Was it there when you were a little boy?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am. I was grown when they built that church.

BENHAM: I see.

HARTWELL: And old church used to stand right before that house near about it up there and Mr. Sesier Gain and them Busters owned that place then, and so that's how come they bought that from Mr. Sebe Nelson.

BENHAM: How do you spell that, Sesier Gain? Do you know how to spell it? Is it S-E-S-I-E-R?

HARTWELL: Yes.

BENHAM: Gain - G-A-I-N? All right. Did they ever baptize anyone in a creek?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am, up there at the creek and then they moved and they had a pool right there from that old...

BENHAM: Wait. Say that again because the tape didn't hear it with the car passing by.

HARTWELL: They used to baptize at the creek.

BENHAM: What creek was that?

HARTWELL: Silver Creek up there.

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BENHAM: Oh, yes.

HARTWELL: And then they moved it and built a pool over there when the church was on that side, right over there from that schoolhouse now. And then after they built this church over here, they got the pool inside the church.

BENHAM: Oh yes, yes. Do you remember how they baptized them out in the creek? How did they do that? Wait, here comes another car. Let's wait until it goes by. Mr. Hartwell, how did they baptize the people at the creek?

HARTWELL: They had two (2) - the deacon and the preacher to go out there and just lead them out there. The deacon would lead them out there to the preacher.

BENHAM: Well, were the people, did they have their clothes on?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. They were baptized in a suit. There would be a lot of people on the bank. Of course the children, you know, they weren't baptized. And the preacher'd take them out there and they'd have some kind of cloth up there and they would carry them in there and come out and baptize them so they could change clothes.

BENHAM: I see. Well, did they sprinkle the water on them or did they make them go down into the water?

HARTWELL: Baptized them, baptized them.

BENHAM: I see. All right. Why isn't this done anymore? Why don't they keep on baptizing them in the creek?

HARTWELL: I just don't know. They just build them in the church now.

BENHAM: I see.

HARTWELL: And if you want to be baptized you go to the church house.

BENHAM: In a way that's kind of sad, isn't it? Because it's nice to be

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baptized in a creek, I would imagine. Because that's the way Christ had been baptized, wasn't he, in a river?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: All right. Did the people ever come and eat supper at the church like they do now?

HARTWELL: Yes, yes. Drink wine and eat supper.

BENHAM: Oh, that was good. That was an nice way for people to all come and get together, wasn't it?

HARTWELL: Yes, sir.

BENHAM: Well, did they ever go outside and do this?

HARTWELL: No, ma'am. They'd do that in the church. Give that wine and such in the church.

BENHAM: All right. Well, when the church service was going on, what did they do with the children?

HARTWELL: They'd have a place for the children. Seats there for all the children, all the children. Right in front of the pulpit.

BENHAM: How were the children baptized in the church?

HARTWELL: Just take them out there, lead them out there and the preacher take them and baptize them.

BENHAM: Oh, they'd do the same thing.

HARTWELL: Yes.

BENHAM: Oh, I see, I understand. How long did you go to school?

HARTWELL: Oh, I went about, I don't know, about ten (10), fifteen (15) or twenty (20) years.

BENHAM: Until you were about how old?

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HARTWELL: Ma'am?

BENHAM: How old were you when you quit school?

HARTWELL: I was twenty-six (26), I think.

BENHAM: Well, how many months did you all go to school?

HARTWELL: We had school nine (9) months.

BENHAM: Nine (9) months, a long time ago, they had school nine (9) months?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: All right. Well, what was the first job that you had when you stopped going to school?

HARTWELL: I went to work for the county.

BENHAM: And what did you do?

HARTWELL: I worked on the road. They were putting Forty-nine (49) from Mendenhall to Maxie. The first highway we put up, me and two (2) more boys would along and wouldn't let anything that big be in the road when they were putting that blacktop. We walked sometimes eight (8), nine (9), or ten (10) miles a day. And then the supervisor would pick us up and bring us back here to the county.

BENHAM: All right. Was it at this time when you stopped school, that you got married? That you met your future wife?

HARTWELL: I dropped school a long time before I married.

BENHAM: All right. How old were you when you got married?

HARTWELL: I was about forty (40). I think it was forty-six (46).

BENHAM: Oh my goodness, right. You were a real bachelor, weren't you?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. I was just staying in these camps, you know,

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working on these things.

BENHAM: What was that?

HARTWELL: I was just working on these grading camps, you know.

BENHAM: Yes.

HARTWELL: First one place and put the dummy line and railroad track and then I worked on the section a long time.

BENHAM: What was the name of this dummy line?

HARTWELL: Denkman.

BENHAM: Oh, yes, the Denkman Lumber Company, wasn't it?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Yes, yes. All right. Let's see, what was your wife's maiden name?

HARTWELL: My first one?

BENHAM: Oh, yes, your first wife, that's the one.

HARTWELL: Rose Terriel.

BENHAM: Terriel?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: All right. How many children did you and your first wife have?

HARTWELL: Had two (2).

BENHAM: Tell me what their names are.

HARTWELL: Eddie Dee and Leydon.

BENHAM: What was that?

HARTWELL: Eddie Dee.

BENHAM: How do you spell that?

HARTWELL: E-D-D-I-E.

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BENHAM: Oh, Eddie Dee, what?

HARTWELL: Eddie Dee Hartwell.

BENHAM: All right. And what was the other?

HARTWELL: Leydon.

BENHAM: How do you spell that?

HARTWELL: L-E-Y... She's dead, but the other one is in Starkville now.

BENHAM: All right, I'll ask someone. And then your second wife, what was her name?

HARTWELL: Anna.

BENHAM: Anna what?

HARTWELL: Anna Hartwell, of course she was a Williams before she married and got... Roe, Roe. (Calling to daughter.)

ROE: Sir?

HARTWELL: How many children were with you all?

ROE: Sir?

HARTWELL: How many children with you all are living?

ROE: How many children there are?

HARTWELL: Yes.

ROE: Let me see. It's one (1) boy and five (5) girls.

BENHAM: All right. Can you give me their names? Tell him. Do you know their names?

ROE & HARTWELL: L. H., Charlie Ree.

BENHAM: All right, you have to come over here so we can pick it up on the tape. Okay. Just tell me.

ROE: L. H., Charlie Ree, Mary Lee, Anna Mae, Lee and Et Marie.

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BENHAM: All right. Thank you. Well, what were your duties as, you know, you said you worked on the road, what were your duties when you worked up and down this road? What did you do?

HARTWELL: I ran the road machine, Drove road machine and then I used the road wheeler.

BENHAM: A what?

HARTWELL: Road wheeler, the road wheelers that you had horses to pull then, rode them. And then I used to dump and make fill and all of that. All that stuff.

BENHAM: All right. Can you remember how much you were paid for a day's work?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am. The highest we got then was a dollar-and-a-half.

BENHAM: A day?

HARTWELL: Yes, ma'am.

BENHAM: Now, how long did you stay on this job?

HARTWELL: I stayed on that six (6) years.

BENHAM: And then what did you do?

HARTWELL: I went to a section out here on the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad.

BENHAM: And what did you do there?

HARTWELL: I worked on the section there for four (4) years, four (4) or five (5).

BENHAM: All right. Let's see, can you describe your wedding day?

HARTWELL: What?

BENHAM: Do you remember when you first got married?

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