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Interview

with

Janie Cameron Riley & Lottie Phillips

June 6, 1975

By George W. McDaniel

Transcribed by Patricia Crowley

For the Southern Oral History Program

George W. McDaniel: This is an oral interview with Mrs. Janie Cameron Riley at her house. The date is June 6, 1975. Also with us is Mrs. Lottie Phillips. We're going to be talking about life at Stagville, and Horton Grove and Farringtuck; that's what is known as the Cameron place.

Janie Cameron Riley: Yes.

GM: Now you were just telling me earlier, we'll just run back to some of those stories about your mother, Patty Holman. You were saying that when you were young, I guess, that she would go up to Orange Factory and get clothes. Would you describe that again?

Riley: Yes, and bring these clothes. She was washing for these white people. And she'd have one bundle on her head, two up under her arms, and walk back. She'd go early in the morning to get those clothes and wash them--which you had the washing board that you did that on. You rubbed them first on the board, and then you put them in a pot and boiled them. And then you had three tubs of water: another one for the wash, this one for the rinse, and this was the bluing water.

GM: What's the bluing water?

Riley: It's some stuff you buy at the store that you sprinkle in the water and it turns it blue, for the white clothes. It makes them pretty and white. Then you put them on the line. And she would iron those clothes and take them back.

GM: Would she use those cast iron irons that you heat on the fireplace?

Riley: Yes, what you put up to the fire; yes, use that. And you made your own ironing board out of a plank. And you'd take your cloth (an old sheet or something) and put it under there, and make your own ironing board.

You made your own starch out of your flour. You didn't know what it was to buy starch out of the store; this was made.

GM: How would they make the starch?

Riley: They'd put the water on and boil it, and stir this flour in some water in a bowl.

GM: Just regular flour?

Riley: Yes, yes. When this water started boiling, then you'd pour this over in this boiling water.

GM: Pour that mixture of flour and water into the boiling water?

Riley: Yes, and then let it come to a good boil, and then take it out. And then you strain it, because sometimes it has lumps in there. And iron those clothes so pretty, starch those shirts and down there in the cuffs. And iron those shirts with those irons. You'd make a fire (in the summertime, outside). You'd just have these long logs, and put you some rocks up there and make this fire, and put all these irons up there and heat them. And she'd go out and get a cedar (break some off a cedar tree). And while these irons are hot you rub this on the cedar to keep them smooth.

Lottie Phillips: It made them slick.

Riley: Yes.

GM: Rub what on it, the iron?

Riley: The iron over the cedar (break it off a cedar tree). And this kept this iron real slick and smooth.

GM: I see. Would any of the odor of the cedar get on the iron?

Phillips: Oh, it would smell so good!

GM: It would get on your clothes.

Riley: Yes, smelled so good, yes. But it wouldn't get on the clothes. You'd just smell it while you were rubbing it over this iron.

GM: I didn't know. You know, I love the smell of cedar.

Riley: Yes. But you should rub this when the iron is hot. And it smells so nice and sweet. And this kept this iron smooth.

Phillips: Kept it slick.

Riley: So it wouldn't get anything on those white shirts, because people wore these here (what kind of material was that?) that had to be ironed. They didn't have this material like they have now.

GM: It was cotton. Weren't they all cotton?

Riley: Yes. So she would sprinkle these clothes down, and roll them up, and put them in a tub so they would (what she called) "let them give," let them get real moist. And then get out there and iron those shirts. And they'd fold shirts at that particular time, like they are now when you buy them out of the store. You'd fold them. She would fold them; she knowed how to fold these shirts like that.

Phillips: Well, they had to, though. They didn't have much space back in them days.

Riley: And then she'd put them in a particular bag, these shirts and all the other clothes in the wash, and take these clothes back. Sometimes she would take two or three of the kids back with her, any of the kids over there that liked to go up there.

GM: And how far away was Orange Factory?

Riley: Oh, let's see: it was about four or five miles.

GM: So she would walk up there early?

Riley: Yes, had to walk up there and get those clothes and take them back up there. And she was doing this for fifty cents a load! And sometimes she would go maybe twice a week up there and do this, because there



were so many people. They had this mill at that particular time up there. It was a cotton mill that was running at that time, and the people wanted somebody to wash and iron for them. Of course they wasn't making all that much either up there at that mill, and they would get somebody to wash and iron for them.

GM: Were these people, the white people up there whose clothes she'd be washing, would they be white workers or would they be the superintendents and the foremen?

Riley: They would be white workers, because Minnie Johnson, I know her real good. She had three children, two boys and a girl; I know them. The girl died, Clara. I think one of them lives somewhere around up here on Roxboro highway somewhere, but I think the older boy died. We knowed them real good, and knowed a lot of them. Of course a lot of them are dead, and some of them moved from up there. This man that died one day this week is from up there, Duane Sullivan. He died; he was buried yesterday, I believe. Now he was from up there in Orange Factory. And how these people would hire to wash and iron for them. They didn't have transportation to bring the clothes, and they wanted somebody to do this. And so they would just get somebody to do this, and my mother was one of them that did. Of course she wasn't the only one; there were some more that did that.

They would go home every day for lunch. And I remember this lady Minnie Johnson, we would get up there sometimes and she'd want us to stay. And she would give us butter biscuits. And another lady (she's still alive), Clayton Tilley, lives up here on the Bahama road. She used to live over here at Stagville. Her husband was Don Tilley; he had one arm. And she used to

give us butter biscuits too. Oh, I loved her, and I'd go to see her. I haven't been to see her in about four or five years, but I'd go to see her once in a while. She'd at me because she was getting old and she can't hear real good. And this here Monroe Ladd was another one. And his daughter Eunice live up here at Orange Factory, and we used to play together. Her mother, Mrs. Ella Ladd, would do the same thing, give us butter biscuits because she knowed my mother so good. And sometimes when we would fight, you know, we would tell each others parents, 'cause we would get a whipping 'cause they didn't allow us to fight. We could play together, but we wasn't allowed to fight each other. But we would fight sometimes, like kids do. We used to go down to this spring. . . .

GM: Excuse me, before you go on. Where did your mother learn to do the ironing and making the starch?

Riley: Ever since I've known her.

GM: Did she learn from her mother? Did her mother take in washing?

Riley: It must have been. I don't know; I never did hear her say. But she always did this, ever since I have known her.

Phillips: Well, I have made it.

GM: Oh you have?

Riley: Yes, I have made it too. I know how.

Phillips: I would put a little piece of sweet soap in it, and that would make the clothes have a gloss to it.

Riley: Yes, it'd make it just shine. And sometimes I know my mother would drop a few drops of kerosene in there, and it'd make it just as slick. It wouldn't stick; that iron wouldn't stick to those clothes.

And they would be just shined; it would just shine real beautiful. We used to have to go down to this spring and get this water and bring it up there, if it didn't rain. They had barrels on the sides of the house to catch this rain water. And if it didn't rain so you could catch this water you had to bring this water from the spring, enough to wash all these clothes.

Phillips: Well, sometimes they would go to the banks, if they had a good shady place near the spring, and carry the wash pots down there. And they would wash.

Riley: We never did. We had ours always under there, 'cause we lived there under this grove right out from there. And that's where we washed.

GM: You'd wash the clothes out in front of the house, out in the grove?

Riley: Yes.

GM: Down a little way from where Green Henderson lives?

Riley: No, down towards the spring, that's where we were. We were in this last house here, and it was a grove out there. And this is how we did it. And we had this great long, oh two or three clotheslines out there where you hang these clothes. You always hang the white clothes like the sheets and the white shirts and things out there in the sun, 'cause the sun helped keep the white clothes bleached. And the colored clothes, we had them under the shade trees so the sun wouldn't get to them. Then when these clothes were dry I used to get them in.

GM: And would your mother make her own soap?

Riley: Yes, make that soap.

GM: How would she make that?

Riley: This was lye soap. You'd save up your grease from cooking. Of course these people up here where she got these clothes from was always saving it for her, 'cause they knowed she knowed how to make it. You got lye; you buy lye out of the store.

GM: Did she ever make lye? You know, you can take ashes like hickory ashes and drip water through it.

Phillips: Yes, they would drip. . . . They would take their ashes and they would put it in a big container. And when those ashes would get real wet, you see, the lye would drip down in this bucket, and that's the way they made all the lye.

GM: Did your mother ever do that?

Riley: My mother didn't do that. She'd always get the lye.

GM: Go and buy that Red Devil lye?

Riley: Yes, that Red Devil lye; she would buy that. And this was how she made her soap.

GM: So then what would she do? She would save the grease and buy the lye. And then what would you do?

Phillips: Then you put it in the pot. You put about two gallons of water in the pot. And then you pour your lye in there; then you pour your grease. Then you let it cook. You'd have to keep it stirred.

Riley: Keep it stirred in this iron pot.

Phillips: Slowly stirred, 'cause if you don't it will boil over, if you don't watch it. You've got to watch it, 'cause the foam will come up and it will spill out.

Riley: She knew when it was done.



GM: How do you know when it is done?

Riley: I don't know, but she did.

Phillips: Well, I'll tell you how I knew when it get done, 'cause I made it. [laughter]

Riley: I never have; I can't stand it.

Phillips; Well, you stir it. And the way you can tell it's done: you take you a little bit of water with a cup, and you take you a little stick and let the drippings drip into the cup. And it'll go to the bottom. It gets cold and you can see it down there. You can see if there's no grease on your water. If you see grease coming on top of your water it would be still greasy and you wouldn't have enough lye in it; you'd have to add some more lye. But if it didn't it would be fine, because you could just take it and put it on your hand and it would lather.

Riley: Then she would set it off and let it get cool.

Phillips: Let your fire . . . but it takes a little bit of coals up under the pot. You can't have much fire.

Riley: No, because it would have to cook very slow.

Phillips: It's got to cook real slow.

Riley: And then after it get done, they'd cook it enough, then she'd set it off and let it get cold. Then she would get a knife and cut it out in blocks. And it would be just as hard. . . . You know, I had some out there, and I think I throwed it away. Mrs. Adams who lived next door, she was over, and she used to make it before she died. And I had some.

Phillips: I've got some that I made years ago. I've got a cake or two down there.

Riley: I throwed mine away, because I don't like it. I never have



liked it. I always said when I get grown I wasn't going to use that, and I haven't 'cause I can't stand it.

GM: Why didn't you like it?

Riley: I didn't like the odor of it. And then, I knowed what was in it: you know, the lye and that grease and all that stuff. And I just didn't like it, and I never have. But I had to use it when we was home.

Phillips: Well, it made overalls and things real black.

Riley: Oh, it could clean clothes!

Phillips: And that's why I used it, 'cause I work in a foster home. And I have a lot of boys too, and you know how they get clothes dirty. And so I used to use it.

Riley: I know my mother used to take my brothers'. . . .

Phillips: Put them in an old wringer-type of washing machine, and wash the prettiest clothes you've ever seen.

Riley: And my brothers was on the farm and the overalls would get real dirty. And she would take a knife and whit it off like that in this pot to boil the clothes with.

GM: Oh, I see. So that's how she'd make soap flakes, almost like.

Riley: Yes. And you didn't have powder and Clorox and stuff like you do now, 'cause they didn't buy that at all.

Phillips: We used to put a little lye in our wash, and that would keep your clothes white.

Riley: Yes it did. And they didn't know what it was to buy powder like you do now, Clorox and this stuff.

Phillips: Well, they didn't have the money to buy it.

Riley: No, you didn't. And see, you raised all your hogs; you raised

your chickens. You had all your corn to make your corn bread. You would raise your wheat for your flour. And you raised all your beans, all your vegetables that you eat.

Now they would kill four and five hogs. They always killed hogs before Thanksgiving. People should never kill hogs like they do now; they kill hogs year-round now. But we didn't do that. They always killed those hogs, because it would be cold and we'd have big stores. They'd always get those hogs killed before Thanksgiving because it was cold weather, and they'd kill four and five hogs at a time. And sometimes my mother would take the hams and take them to town and swap them and get this fatback meat, because you didn't have money to buy the fatback meat. So you would take the hams and take them to town, and you could swap it in for fatback meats.

And she would make coffee. Have you seen one of those old-timey coffee grounders? A lot of people have them.

Phillips: It was partially cocoa most of the time.

Riley: Yes.

Phillips: Do you remember green coffee?

Riley: No. But I remember she made it out of something.

Phillips: They would take it and put it in their ovens.

Riley: And she has made it out of wheat.

GM: Oh. Does that make coffee?

Riley: Take this wheat and put it in the oven and brown it. And you take it and put it in there and grind it up, just like that, to make your coffee.

GM: Do you know where she learned to do that, make wheat coffee and

that sort of thing?

Riley: I don't know. I guess from her parents, because they had to. They had to learn these things on their own, because they didn't have money to do. And they liked their coffee. And all you had to do was buy you some sugar. Sugar was two and three cents a pound.

Phillips: You could buy a five pound sugar for a quarter.

GM: So sugar was not. . . .

Phillips: You could buy it for a quarter, a five pound bag.

GM: So was that cheap enough so you could afford to have sugar?

Riley: Yes. Well, what they would do: you had a yard full of chickens. And the hens would lay, and you would take them to this store up here. And he would give you maybe twenty-five or thirty cents a dozen for eggs, maybe fifteen cents. And they would buy their sugar; so you kept sugar. [Interruption]

GM: Was that store located there near Stagville, where you would take these?

Riley: Yes, right there. It was right on the side of the road. This man named Bud Weaver, this old man had a store, and we used to go up there. And you could buy this, I think it was, Vienna sausage, a link sausage in this barrel. They had it in barrels. And they would let you have that, and we would go up there and buy that with the eggs, swap this in. I don't know whether he had chickens or not; I think he must have had chickens. But he would always buy these eggs, I guess by knowing my parents so good and them being on the same farm. He would just take these eggs and let us have a half a gallon of this Vienna; get it out of this wooden barrel. It'd have the oil; it was in the oil, and they would get it out and let you have it.

And my mother's cousin, Martha Kane. . . .

GM: Did she live there?

Riley: Yes, she lived there too, and she had one child, Easter. She could hitch up the wagon and the mule just like a man; she was like a man, to tell you the truth about it.

GM: Was this Martha Kane, or her daughter Easter?

Riley: Easter was her daughter; Martha Kane was the mother.

GM: So Martha was the one that hooked up the mules?

Riley: Yes. And they would go to town. My mother would go to town. And how they would buy all this--here stuff, you know, for her. You know, you didn't get much candy then, and she would buy us some of this stick candy, peppermint.

Phillips: Tell him how we used to make molasses candy, and how they used to raise their own cane, and how they would grind it with the mule.

Riley: Oh yes.

GM: OK, before we do that--I'll write that down so we won't forget it--when your mother would be washing these clothes, how long would it take her to do that? Would that take her all day to do a load of clothes? Or how much time after she washed it and ironed it?

Riley: See, you didn't have to take these clothes back the same day. You'd take them back on Friday; you'd get them on Monday. And see, she had so many different families of clothes. Then she would do all of them, and then take them back on Friday for these people to have for the next week.

GM: And so about how long would it take her to wash these clothes?

Riley: Well, you take maybe three or four different washings a day.



Phillips: Two whole days.

Riley: See, you could do three or families a day like this, and put them on the line. And when they'd dry you'd take this family off and put another one on, and you had another one ready to hang out on the line.

GM: So she was making fifty cents a load, a family.

Riley: Yes.

GM: About how much money would that be bringing in a week?

Riley: Oh, maybe probably about eight or nine dollars. It wasn't anything then. But sometimes it wasn't that much. It just depended on how many washings you had. See, if she had enough to last her in all the week, that's all she had.

Phillips: It would take her all the week to do it, because she had all the families.

Riley: And see, this is all the money that you had until the fall of the year, until you sell your tobacco or you wanted to sell some of your corn or something like that. They had very little money. And they made out real good on that, because the money wasn't in circulation, especially to the black people. They didn't get very much money. And we had to walk to school. And we had two pair of shoes a year: one pair for Sundays and one pair for everyday. And when you'd wear those shoes out you don't get no more shoes, 'cause you don't have no more money to buy any more. She didn't have any more to buy any more. We had to make those shoes last.

GM: What would you do to make them last longer?

Riley: Well, you know what people used to do is, they had something standing up like that.



Phillips: A last.

Riley: Yes, a last. And this fitted over this shoe; it fitted over there just like that. And they would take leather. . . .

Phillips: They would go to the store and buy a dollar's worth of leather and they would make this piece.

Riley: And put this sole on this here; they had to tack. And see, by this thing being on that goes up in there, it would bend that tack up under there so it wouldn't stick in your foot. And these shoes had to last, because sometimes the leather would come loose, separate and wear out awfully fast.

Phillips: Well, they used to mend their own shoes in my day. They had a lathe. And he had the leather, and he would take it and trim it and put it on there. He would tack this piece on there just And then he would put these tacks all the way around. And then he would take his knife, a real sharp knife, and trim it right around the sole.

Riley: That he did.

Phillips: Then he would take a little piece of sandpaper if he had it, and then sand it off so it would look nice and slick.

Riley: But they had this sharp knife that they'd go around that and cut it off real smooth right around the edge of it. They did that. And those shoes had to last you all the year, those two pair of shoes: one pair for Sunday and one for everyday. And you didn't get any more shoes until another year. And the Sunday shoes would last you. When these everyday shoes would wear out. . . . They used to call them hobnail shoes at that particular time. And if they wore out then you could start to wearing your Sunday shoes, once in a while when something was at the school

like a play or something like that. You could wear them through the week, but you wasn't allowed to wear them otherwise. You had to wear these hobnails or brogans or whatever you call them.

GM: But it's like the work shoe, the brogans?

Riley: Yes, this is what it was.

GM: And girls and boys wore those kind of shoes at their work?

Riley: Yes.

Phillips: Right.

GM: Were women wearing about the same kind of shoes as men, work shoes for everyday shoes?

Riley: Yes, they wore just about on that same order.

Phillips: But theirs were little high tops, you know; they'd come up right around there, and they laced all the way up. And long old cotton stockings.

Riley: Yes.

GM: So almost up to mid-calf the women's shoes would come up?

Phillips: Yes.

Riley: Yes.

GM: Their work shoes would come all up?

Riley: Yes, you wore those all the year.

GM: Whereas the men's shoes just came up a little bit over the ankles, the brogans?

Riley: Yes. And so this is how we come along. And just think about that: you didn't ever go to town. We didn't ever hardly went to town, 'cause, see, my mother always bought what we had; what little we had she would always buy it for us. We didn't go to town. And when we did go to

town, oh we thought we were going to New York, you know!

Phillips: Well, sometimes the mothers could sew a little bit, and they would go and buy this old stuff--what did they call that stuff?

Riley: Some kind of old denim, denim material. And they would make most of your dresses.

Phillips: Little gathers around the waist, and a long sash and a Peter Pan collar.

Riley: Yes, and put that bow back there; and they would starch that. It was pretty, because you wash it in starch and then you iron it. And this insurance man used to get us to pick him blackberries. And he would give us ten cents a quart for blackberries. And we would pick him about five quarts. He would tell us when he was coming back, and he would give us fifty cents for those blackberries ('cause they were ten cents a quart). And we thought we had big money at that time--which it was, big money, 'cause that was unusual. You had no money at all. And I know sometimes when we would go to the store and have these eggs, sometimes we would slip a few eggs on the side to buy us a piece of candy, a sucker or a stick of candy. They sold mostly stick candy at that particular time. And we would eat this candy up before we got back home, 'cause we didn't want our mother to know that we had slipped this. And this is how we come along. It's just something to think about, how we come along.

And you used to braid your hair all the time at that time; you didn't know what it is. . . . I don't know whether it was even out of the beautician or not; I don't even now remember one.

Phillips: Well, most of the time they would wrap the hair, you know, with white strings, and it went all through the week. They were there to

stay wrapped, because it would be nice and cool.

Riley: You'd get this white string that you tie tobacco with, and get it in those parts. And they would wrap it, just wrap it in rows. And you let your hair stay like that all the week until the weekend, and then you could take it loose and plait it, make braids out of it.

Phillips: Of course they didn't know what it was to have a straightening comb and those curlers, not back in them days.

Riley: No, you didn't.

GM: Now, when your mother would be washing clothes, she would be taking in these clothes from up at Orange Factory. And then your father and brothers and sisters, and other people in the community, would they wash and starch their clothes too?

Riley: Yes, everybody did. It was on the same basis; everybody was mostly on the same basis. Everybody didn't take in washing and ironing. In the summertime when gardens and things come along, they would take some vegetables to town and sell it, peddle it out (they called it "peddling") on the street; go to the houses and sell it and get some money. Everybody had a different trade. Then people would make their preserves, because there were big apple and peach trees out on this farm right in the back where we lived. The trees was great big huge trees, bigger than that one. They'd have to get the apples off, and can the apples. And they'd make their pies; and the blackberries, blueberries, strawberries . . .

Phillips: Cherries.

Riley: . . . and everything like that.

GM: Do you know when that orchard was planted?

Riley: No, because it was there when I was born.



GM: And there were good-sized trees then?

Riley: Oh, they was bigger than that tree out there.

GM: OK. How big is that?

Riley: You see that tree out there?

GM: So that tree is probably about, oh, a foot and a half in diameter, something like that. So do you think this orchard may date back to slavery days?

Riley: Yes, it had to be, because it was there ever since I could remember. And it was on a line; and we had a garden right here, and the Umsteads had a garden. This orchard divided our garden from their garden; that's what it was. And everybody could get apples and things off of there that wanted to, because it was just there. So my mother would can these apples in half gallon jars; that's all she used, 'cause she never used quart because it was too big a family for a quart. And she had these half gallon jars, and she would can these apples. Then we'd go out and pick berries, and they would can those. Then in the winter time (you didn't bother this canned fruit until winter time). . . . You'd make your pies out of things during the summertime. So when she canned, we didn't bother them. They would can tomatoes and everything; they canned everything.

Phillips: But you know, a lot of times when they didn't have time they could prepare the tomatoes, and they would put them in the tobacco barn. They could can tomatoes in the tobacco barn.

Riley: And she dried apples; my mother dried apples.

Phillips: They'd dry them in the tobacco barn, in other words.

GM: Oh, I see. They'd dry things like apples.

Phillips: Yes. They could can tomatoes. That's the only thing I



have seen my momma do, was can tomatoes. They would set the cans in the back. She would pick them whole, and they would be so good--when they were curing tobacco.

GM: Yes. After your mother would can. . . . Well, first of all let me ask you: how was it that she canned the canned apples and the other berries and that sort of thing? What was the process of preparation?

Riley: Well, how my mother canned it, she had these great big dishpans, and she would set them on the stove. We had a wood stove with the four eyes; have you ever seen one?

GM: Sure.

Riley: And she would sit them on there.

Phillips: Tell him how she would prepare them first.

Riley: First she had to peel them and slice them; you know, you don't put the core in it. And slice them and cook them, and sterilize these jars (wash them and then sterilize them). And when it gets down enough-- she knowed when it was cooked enough to put in these cans while the jars was hot and this was hot--you put it in there and seal it. And my mother used to turn the jars, and when I can something I do that same thing.

Phillips: But we didn't have the caps like it is now. They would have a rubber.

GM: Yes, I was going to ask you about that, because now you go to the store and you buy those Mason jar lids. But you can just use them one time and for one canning.

Riley & Phillips: Yes.

Phillips: But you could use your tops over and over again because of the rubber.

GM: Oh you could?

Riley: Yes.

GM: Yes, you had to get the rubbers.

Phillips: You'd have to get new rubbers every year, 'cause they couldn't afford to buy new tops every year.

Riley: And you put this rubber on there first, and then put this top on there and screw it.

Phillips: And then screw it on there correct.

Riley: Yes, you had to screw it on there. And I remember my mother when she first canned it, then she turned this bottom up on the top to help seal it, so no air. . . . If she ever hear any air, you know that wasn't any good.

GM: They're supposed to pop, the jars you have now.

Riley: Those wouldn't pop.

GM: Oh, they wouldn't pop?

Riley: These kind will pop, but those wouldn't. I wished I had some.

Phillips: Because if they popped that would be the end of it!

Riley: That wasn't any good. If you ever hear it pop, this wasn't any good. But these here will, but those kind at that time would not pop. And she would turn it over, their heads up like that, to make sure it would seal itself. She said, "This is sealing it." And she'd let it stay for that day, and the next day she would turn it back up. And you didn't hear no air, and you knew that was all right; that canned fruit was good. Then she would sit it up when it got cool enough, up in the upstairs in this room.

GM: In which room now? You're going up the stairs, and then you have

rooms. . . .

Riley: See, this is the fireplace here, and enough heat would go up through this ceiling ('cause the house wasn't any kind of . . .) and it would keep that fruit up there all the winter.

Phillips: That was to keep it from freezing.

Riley: It wouldn't freeze so it would pop; you know, it would burst the jars if it ever freeze.

GM: Which room was this in? Was this in the room, the upstairs room towards the Umstead house, or was it on the spring side?

Riley: Yes, up here towards the Umstead's house, because this is where we had the fire. And that's why we kept the canned fruit up there, up the stairs and in this room.

And when they had tobacco, then they'd put tobacco (because they didn't have places to hang the tobacco) in the other side.

GM: Oh, hanging down from the rafters?

Riley: You put your tobacco in the same house that you live in, and you stripped this tobacco and carried it to the market. Of course they don't do that now; it's altogether different now. But you had low benches, and it had little sections in it. They had to grade this tobacco, the best, the second and the third grade, and put it in this little stall. And then you'd tie the head. Have you ever seen that?

GM: Yes, I've seen a little bit.

Riley: And you do that. And you hung it on sticks, and you'd take it to the tobacco. . . .

GM: How would you grade it? When you would be stripping the tobacco, you picked it off the stalk out in the field and then you'd bring it home.

Riley: You'd cure it first, in the barn.

Phillips: Back in them days they would string tobacco. They would just cut the whole stalk on it.

Riley: Well we did; we'd string ours.

Phillips: I can remember when they'd cut it down. A long time ago they would take it and split the stalk in half and hang it on the stalk.

Riley: Yes, well we have done that.

Phillips: They would have the whole stalk.

Riley: Yes, but we mostly primed it, they called it. You know, you primed this: go down to the bottom and come up as it ripened. Every week you had to do this. This is the way we did it.

GM: What would you do now?

Riley: Go down the stalk; this is where you start, from the bottom. And then the next week you prime so much off.

GM: You picked off the leaves at the very bottom; oh, I see.

Riley: As they ripen, see, they would turn a little yellow, and you'd know it was time for it to come off. And they went up the stalk like that until they got to the top. And the top of this was called the tip; I don't know why, but this was called the tip. And we would get out there under a shade tree. They'd have slides that they'd put this tobacco in and bring it to us. And the ones that tied were standing there and looped it on this here with this string, and the other one would hand it to you. And one would be there to lay it off in a stack until you got a stack. And you put this tobacco in this barn. See, these barns hold 560 sticks. Then they would cure it. They used to cure tobacco with wood; they had the furnace there. And they used to sit up at the barns all night and



cure this tobacco, and then pack it in the house and take it in the fall of the year, in September. Tobacco markets, they open early and they stayed open 'til after Christmas at that time; they don't do it now. They close early, 'cause they starts early and they close early now. And they would cure this tobacco and tie it, take it to the market. And you didn't get nothing for it! This is the hard part. Tobacco used to be a year-round job. You'd fix your plant beds in January, and sow them and get them ready. And you worked in tobacco until September, until you carried it to the market and finished it, which was almost a whole year-round job. You had to suckle this tobacco during the summer.

GM: What does suckle mean?

Riley: It's something that grows up inbetween the leaves and the stalk; this is called suckle.

GM: Is it a weed that grows up?

Riley: No, it's part of the tobacco, but it's like a sucker. And it grows up, and it used to take the strength out of the tobacco.

GM: Oh, I see.

Riley: And you had to go in there and pop that out, and worm this. See, people doesn't do this now.

Phillips: Turn the leaves upside down and see if there's a worm on it. And if there was a worm on it you'd take it off and kill him and throw him down.

Riley: Because, see, the worms would eat the leaves. And they didn't like this, because this cut you when they'd take it to the market. And the suckers would take the strength from the tobacco leaves. Of course they wanted the leaves to weigh as much as it would when you carried it to the market. And they would take this tobacco and steam it and get it in



order for you to grade it. And as I say, they had these benches, and they had little stalls.

GM: In the house, you mean?

Riley: Yes, that you'd grade this tobacco. This is the best grade; this is the second; this is third and fourth.

GM: And how old were you when you started grading tobacco?

Riley: I didn't ever grade it. My mother never did that, and my older brother. And then she would let us tie the trash; they called the trash the worst of it. They would let us tie that. But the best, my mother wouldn't let you do that.

Phillips: We had to tie it pretty. The leaves had to be very nice and even.

Riley: Because you had to tie those heads just as slick, you had to have this tobacco just as in order. . . . And it was soft so you could bend the whole stem on this here. And then you wrapped the head up and tie it real pretty. If it goes to that market like that, that cuts your tobacco, what little you got out of it. They didn't get very much like they do now, a dollar and some a pound for it. They wasn't getting that much for it then. And you have to fix it up as pretty as you could for it to bring top price, maybe fifty or sixty cents at that time a pound.

GM: So when you took the tobacco to market, how much would your family make off that tobacco?

Riley: I really don't know, 'cause it was such a little bit.

Phillips: You had to divide it in so many parts or thirds.

GM: Did it ever go to the landowner?

Phillips: Well, sometimes it wasn't but a very little left.

Riley: No.

Phillips: Having to pay for the fertilizer was a lot.

Riley: You'd get a fourth, but, you see, you've got to pay for your fertilizer. I don't know how much it was, but it was very little that you got out of that when you sell your crop; you didn't have nothing.

GM: So your mother's main income, really, was from the washing?

Riley: Yes.

GM: I mean as far as money coming in.

Riley: For money it was, because when you sell this tobacco it's time for you to buy your fertilizer for another year. See, this is the thing about it, unlessin this man (let me see, what was his name? Oh, I don't remember whether it was Don Kelly or--Cassem Tilley, that was his name), he had this big store. And you could go over there and get your fertilizer and say "I'll pay you in the fall of the year when I sell my tobacco." If you didn't have the money he would do it, by knowing them so good, and had been knowing them and each of us all their lives. And he trusted them. And, see, when that time come, when you sell your tobacco then you've got to go pay your bills up. And you really didn't have anything.

GM: Was your family able pay out to Tilley at the end of the fall?

Riley: Yes, they would pay him. They would pay that, but they didn't have nothing after they'd pay up their bills. See, there wasn't anything left but just a little bit. And my mother would go and pay Santa Claus for us. You know, we didn't get very much. We'd say what we wanted, you know, because we knowed how much to ask for.

GM: This was in the fall that she would go pay for Santa Claus?

Riley: Yes, for Christmas. And we would just ask for so much, 'cause we knew we wasn't going to get but just so much.

Phillips: A rag doll or a stick of candy or an apple, those things.

Riley: Yes, and maybe you'd get a pair of socks, or something like that. You'd get a doll. But you was very proud to put out your shoebox (that's all we had); you'd put your shoebox out at that time and you'd go to bed--'cause that was all you was going to get was that shoebox full of stuff. That was your Santa Claus. But you appreciated that very much at that time. Just a shoebox: everybody kept their shoebox when they got a pair of shoes. You'd keep your shoebox, 'cause that what you was going to get your Santa Claus in. And that Christmas morning you'd get up, and Santa Claus come down the chimney. See, that's what people used to say, and we believed that for a long time.

Phillips: They would bake a cake, and then the cake would be took the next morning.

Riley: They would cut it.

Phillips: We had to give Santa Claus something.

Riley: If Santa Claus come down the chimney he had something.

GM: Oh, you'd bake a cake for Santa Claus?

Riley: Yes, put it on the table. They said, "Santa Claus is coming tonight, and you're going to have to give him a piece of this cake." And see, they would eat the cake and say it was him.

Phillips: Say it was Santa Claus. But my daddy was Santa Claus. But you know it was fun.

Riley: It was wonderful. I think about that.

And another thing I have to tell you on this wheat they sowed. They

would thrash this wheat. And my mother used to have these great big pieces of material, like these white sacks. And she would sew them together and make bed ticks out of them. And you would take this when they would thrash this wheat and have the straw, and make your mattress out of it. This is what we did. And we would make them and chunk them full of this straw.

GM: Would you boil the straw any before you put it in? Wouldn't it be stiff and poke through the. . . ?

Riley: No! It would be stiff, but you didn't boil it. No, you didn't do a thing to this. And the only way you did it is you had to sleep on it a long time. Of course it would finally get real beat up; it would beat up by you sleeping on it every night. This is where we come from.

Phillips: That was the mattress.

Riley: Yes, this was your mattress.

Phillips: And they saved their own feathers for the pillows. When they would kill chickens they would dry the feathers and they would. . . .  
BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

Riley: My mother worked in that Orange Factory. We didn't save ours, our feathers. See, by her working up in Orange Factory those people up there were making cotton (this was the cotton factory), and they would give her the cotton. She would get enough cotton. . .

Phillips: Well, that's the advantage you had.

Riley: . . . to make her pillows out of. That's one good thing we had. Now we didn't have to worry about saving the feathers.

GM: Oh, I see. Well, that says something to me, your just saying that that's one good thing you had. If things are so bad, then just the



fact of having a cotton pillow. . . .

Riley: A good pillow, this is one good thing: we didn't have to worry about saving the feathers. But these ticks that we had, we'd make them and pack it full. And you'd leave a long slit in there so you could pack it. And then when you get it full, then you would take the needle and stitch this here opening closed so it wouldn't come out. And this is how we used to live. Just think about that. Lord, I thinks about this a lot of times, how she did and how hard she worked to bring us up and lived to see all of her children grown. Then when she got old and I got a job working, I tried to show her how I appreciated her and what she'd done. And at that time--I shouldn't say that on this [laughter]--people used to have what they called cheeches.

GM: Yes, bedbugs.

Riley: Yes, but they called them cheeches at that time. In this old house where we lived, everybody had them. And sometimes one would bite. And we'd be asleep, and we'd just scratch. And she would wake up at night. And this makes me feel real sad to tell this; I tells it once in a while, but it makes me cry. And she had this lamp sitting beside her bed, and how she would tell us, "Do that." And she knowed a cheech or something was biting her child, and she would get up and scratch a match (you know, they had these big old Fireheads, they called them; you'd get a big box of matches, stick matches for five cents at this time). And she would always keep them beside her bed, and this lamp. And she would get up and scratch a match and light that lamp and come there, and she would see if there was a cheech biting my child. And every time I tell that I have to cry; I think about how she watched over us. You all have to excuse

me when I tell this; it makes me feel real sad. And I tried to show her after I got up grown how much I appreciated her, so much, and how hard she worked for nothing to bring us up. I tries to do something for somebody else today. And I tells my sister's children how I would like for them to finish school. I said, "I don't want you all to go through with what I went through here," because the children, they don't have to now. And I'm telling you, it makes me feel so bad. And I say she worked all of her life as long as I've known her, and never had nothing, but was a very happy person.

Phillips: Well, she had a satisfied soul.

Riley: She was happy. We wouldn't have been that happy.

GM: In those conditions why do you think. . . ? Well, how old were you when your father died?

Riley: I was around about twelve, I guess, when my father died. My father got disabled to work because he went blind, <sup>just about.</sup> / He had cataracts, and he went to have the cataracts cut off. And I used to lead my father around. He would want to go to the barns, and he couldn't see how.

GM: How old were you when he had that trouble?

Riley: Oh, I would guess I was around about ten. And then he went to the hospital and had these cataracts cut off his eyes, but he never could see. He could just see barely, just a little bit. And I remember I used to catch him by his hands (he called me "Duk;" that was my nickname). He'd say, "Duk, I want you to take me. I want to go to the barn." They was curing tobacco. He wanted to go to the barn, but he couldn't see how to get to the barn by himself because he would wander out of the path. They had paths at that time from the house. And I used to take him by his hand

and lead him around, because he always depended on me. And I would lead him to the barn, and I would open the barn door. In the barns when they was curing this tobacco they had thermometers that tell you how high to raise the heat, to push the fire up under there to start to killing it out and all like that. And I would have to read these numbers off to him because he couldn't see it. And he said, "How high is it?" He knowed how to do this, but he couldn't see. And if it wasn't high enough he knowed how many days. . . . You know, you cure a barn of tobacco a whole week then at that time. And if I would tell him it was up to sixty, he said, "The fire needs pushing up under there." And I would help him push these big logs. They would put these big logs up under there and let the heat go up in the barns to yellow the tobacco. [Interruption]

GM: You were talking about the thing that kept them going. It was what?

Riley: They had religion. They had faith in God. And I think this is one thing that brought them so far, and kept them going and kept them happy, because they didn't have nothing. They didn't have nothing else but God to believe in. And they went along, and they was so much happier than we are today.

GM: Now I've heard other people say that, and it's very hard for me to believe that, really, that they were happier. On the one hand I just wonder whether people are saying that because I'm white.

Riley: No, I don't think so; I don't think that, because I have talked to a lot of white people this same way. And they agree with me, they say, because I know about this. Because a lot of the white peoples come up poor just like the blacks did. And they say, "I believe in that.



If it hadn't of been for God I wouldn't have come this far." And another thing, they didn't go to church like we did every Sunday. They went to church once a month.

GM: Back then?

Riley: Yes. They went to church once a month. My mother and father was primitive Baptists, which they called . This is what they called them. But they were primitive Baptists; they are not the same denomination as I am. Of course I have some of that rubbed off on me; I always believe that. But I can remember, as I was telling you, about how my mother used to wash. And she would get over the tub, and she would be singing these hymns. That's all they sang was hymns: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound . . . I once was lost but now I'm found, Was blind but now I see. Grace has brought me so far, and grace will take me home." See, this is the song and the things that they lived on. They dwelled on these things. And this is why I'll say today is how they come so far and they were so happy. If they was ever sad about a thing and they knowed they didn't have much, they never showed it like we would show it today. They never got emotional about it, "I don't have this, I don't have that." We will say this, "I don't have this."

GM: It was a form of resistance. Like Ben or Hannah Cameron or the white people there, keeping more land and not giving them anything: you didn't have money for medical attention, or your father had bad eyes or your mother was having to take in all this laundry. Just being continually oppressed in that kind of way, being kept down, surely they would get angry and want to stake out their own freedom, and get out from under that.

Riley: But what could you do? You didn't have any other choice, because



there wasn't anywhere else to go. See, this is the point: you had to stay there. They had to stay there, because there wasn't anywhere else. And this is why that I say they made themselves happy. And when they would go to church once a month, see they'd go to church on Saturday and on Sunday, just these two days once a month. And when they would come back I remember my mother, as long as she went to church, she would sing these hymns. And "Amazing Grace" is one song in particular that I know she would sing so much, this song. And this song still you'll hear it every once in a while now. Of course people have changed the tune of it, but they would sing it in a different tune from what we would sing it in now. They still sings it up here at this church. They tore down this primitive Baptist church right up here at the corner. Did you ever know where it was?

GM: No.

Riley: But right as you turn off Roxboro Road to come on through . . .

GM: Oh yes.

Riley: . . . it was this church that sat there. Well, they tore it down about a year or so ago and built it over here on the Road. But it's still Mill Grove Church over there. And when she would go to church when we was living over there, they would catch a ride or they would walk or go on the wagon.

GM: To the Cameron Grove. . . .

Riley: No, to Mill Grove; this is Mill Grove. And they would sing these-here hymns. And I noticed as I was a child, when she would come back they would talk about the sisters and the brothers, you know, and how the pastor preached. And they sang these hymns. They called everybody

sister or brother so-and-so, you know; they don't call them by their names like people does now. "I saw Sister so-and-so, and I was glad to see her." Of course they didn't see each other but once a month. And they showed that love that they had. It looked like you could just see it, that love that they had for one another, because they didn't see each other but once a month. And they were just overflowing with love. They sang several hymns up there; they do now. But this-here particular song, "Amazing Grace," it just looked like the next week and just weeks on they had something to live on, it looked like this song just carried them through. I have come so far through hard trials and tribulation, you know, and all like that. And I didn't understand it at that time: "why? When I get up, I'm going to leave here; I'm going to do so-and-so." But now I can understand, I think, most of it. They had God to guide them. And when they wasn't able or didn't have privies to go out and pray, when they had to steal away and pray, they knowed they had God on their side. And this is what I believe that kept them living. And all those peoples over there, I don't say all of them was religious people. But most of those people did. They was old, and they lived to get ripe old ages because I think this is what they lived on was faith. You got to have faith. It's hard. I know it's hard, 'cause I myself now, I believe in these things because I can understand now a little bit (not completely) how my mother and my father and those other people, how hard a time they had. / <sup>And</sup> what little they had, they was happy.

GM: Did you ever see any ways in which the people there at Horton Grove, or any of the black people there on the Cameron land, would get angry at the whites and either beat the overseer when he would push them

too hard?

Riley: I never, never knowed them to do that. If they did, nobody didn't know it. They didn't do it. Whatever Bennahan Cameron. . . .

GM: Or would they purposely work slow, sort of work slowdowns, or instead of giving a fourth to the white family just giving them an eighth?

Riley: No, they didn't ever. . . .

GM: Or deliberately sabotage things, or taking out their anger at the system?

Riley: If they did they never showed it. This is what I understand so. This is why I say they had to believe in God and have a lot of faith to do this, because I never heard them say, like people say, "I will not do this. Before I do this I will kill." If anybody on that plantation when we lived over there ever said that, I can't remember it. And they went ahead and they did these things. I don't mean . . . he wasn't a mean man to anybody. I never heard anybody say he did. He didn't scold them, and he wasn't rude to them. They just went ahead on. They knowed what they had to do. They knowed what to do, and they went ahead on and did this, you see. And they never got emotioned; they never showed they were angry. If they did I never knowed that. This is the good part about living over there, because he let everybody live over there. He never bothered them. And sometimes he would just ride by, you know, and see them and talk to them a little bit, and go on about his business. He never bothered them.

GM: This would be Bennahan Cameron?

Riley: Yes. And then what's his name now, after Bennahan Cameron had died?

GM: Madelisse, yes, and Vaneseth.



Riley: And Arbiturrtine, yes.

GM: I'm sure that your parents and other black people there at Horton Grove and elsewhere out there on the Cameron place, they had this faith in God that you so well described. No doubt they asked themselves the question, "Why is God putting me through this? Why am I having to do this?"

Riley: I don't know. I don't know whether they. . . .

GM: What did they think God's purpose was for them?

Riley: Well, I guess this is the best I can explain (which they never said). . . .

GM: Going through all that poverty.

Riley: This is what I think gives you strength and more faith, I think, to believe in him. Now like I'll say you: you don't have to go through with that. You won't have to go with that; you had it different. And maybe that is the reason why that you don't have faith, that you don't believe in God, because you don't have to go through this. This is why I think a lot of times that we have to have hard trials and tribulations, to make us believe in these things. And see, by you not have to having it, you won't know it. See, I have had to come up under this. I never had it really hard like my mother; see, she had it hard. I have worked hard, but I never had it hard as she did. And then once I didn't believe in this. I was like you: why did I have to go through with this? But then, you know, after you grow older and you try to figure out these things, then you look back. You've started thinking and look back. This is what you do. Maybe God give you this to let you that HE is God, that if you will trust in him HE will take care of you, and he will see you through these hard



trials and tribulations. This is how I think I understand it. Probably you will later on.

GM: Do you think that your parents and other black people out there felt that they were put as part of God's purpose into a life system and into a system that was racist and exploitative of other people because. . . ? I mean, what did they think was God's purpose behind that, I mean, in that kind of system: "Why am I born poor and black, and in a place where I've viewed upon by other people, by other white people and by the government and by the powers that be in society as being somehow subhuman and inferior?"

Riley: They never said "Why?" Only thing they did, the best I can remember, is "I just have faith in God." See, they never talked too much about this. God will take care of it.

GM: Did they see themselves as a special people, that going through this. . . .

Riley: Yes, these hard trials (they called it hard trials and tribulations), God will see me through.

GM: Do you think there was a special purpose for me and for us as black people?

Riley: Yes.

GM: Like God's kind of chosen people: we're going through all these hard trials and tribulations.

Riley: Yes, one day we will all become. . . . "I may not see it"--I'm thinking what my mother would say--"I may not see it, but my children will see it." This is the thing of it. "I'll go through with this; I'll see it. God will see me. I may not see it, but my children will." Well

now, you see, as she lived and come on down, we hasn't had to go through with what she did. We went through with some depression, but not what she's gone through with. She went through with it for a good many years. And they didn't have money to buy a home. They didn't have money to buy a car; they'd never owned a car. They had mules and they had cows, and that's all. But they never had a car. Well, you see, I have a car; I have a home, and it's paid for. My home is paid for; my car is paid for, and everything that I have except for the things that I got last year. And see, my mother never owned nothing; she never owned nothing, not a thing. And they worked hard all their life, as long as I have known them. They have never owned nothing, not one thing, nothing but the clothes on their backs. When you could get material for five and ten cents a yard, she would make her dresses and she would make our dresses for us. You see, this is why that I think that she knowed, those people knowed back in those days, they had to know something about God. They had to for what they went through with. They would have killed, killed, killed. Well now, there wasn't as much killing going on then as there is now. And the people has everything now, and they are not satisfied. See, this is why that I say they had to have the love of God in them to carry them through what they went through with. And a lot of them (I didn't see this, but I've heard them say), long back some of the slaves, they was put up on blocks and sold just like you would sell cows and horses. And if they didn't do so-and-so, the "marster" (they called them) would whip them until the blood run out of their backs. This is how the black peoples come from, and how they was treated. See, they has been mistreated. I was talking to a white lady one time, and we was talking on this subject. She was much older than I;

I used to work for her. She died a few years ago. And she said, "I think about how the black peoples used to be treated, and how they was whipped and beat, and they was sold like they was animals. And I think that they should have equal rights; I believe in that. They should have equal rights, 'cause they have been in slavery all their life. And they should have some of the things now." And she said, "I'm glad to see it." She used to go to the movies, you know, when they didn't allow the black and the white to sit together at that time (I guess you know about that). So then they started to letting them all go together, and they could sit where they wanted to. And this lady said to her, "Are you going to that movie? I'm not going to sit beside that black person." And she said, "I didn't go to the movie to look at the black person. I went to see the picture. And regardless to who I sit beside, it doesn't make any difference with me." She was a very nice lady. So I said, "Well, that's true. Just because my skin is black and yours is white, you are no better than I am, because God made all of us. It doesn't make any difference. I think I am just as good as you are, and you think you are just as good. I don't think it's any better that anybody is any better than I am, I'll tell you that. And if a person whose skin is white, if he doesn't want to sit beside me I don't want to sit beside him. It doesn't make me any different, because I'll be good to anybody that's good to me. Because I don't mistreat anybody; I try to treat everybody like I wish they would treat me." And she said, "I do too." She was a very nice lady, and we talked about this a lot. I used to<sup>just</sup> go to see her after I quit working for her, after her husband died. I used to go and just sit and talk with her, and she enjoyed that very much because she was a very



nice lady. But you see, some of the people today, they are prejudiced against the blacks. So this is from way back they still have that in. This is what brings the trouble in now. The black people have come so far, and they are not going to be put back where they were. And they will kill before they do it. See, this is why that peoples have got to understand that nowadays peoples are not going back. Maybe some of the peoples your age, the black peoples your age, they say, "My grandmother, my grandfather was a slave. I'm not going to do that. I will kill before I do that." This is what brings in the trouble today. But, you see, me, I wouldn't do that. I would just say, "Well, I'm not looking for a whole lot. I'm just thankful of what I have, and I let well enough do." I'm not going to go out there and try to take anything. I'm happy, because I think about my mother who didn't have nothing, not nothing. She had nothing; she never owned nothing, never owned nothing. I said, "I can say that I have owned a car (I still have a car; that's my car out there), and I have a home." Even down to this, believe it or not: we have lived out on that place, and the peoples on that place didn't even have a toilet, an outside toilet.

GM: Where was this?

Riley: Out at Stagville.

GM: Oh, is that at Horton Grove?

Riley: Yes.

GM: There weren't even privies?

Riley: It didn't even have an outside toilet. You know what an outside toilet is?

GM: Yes, sure.



Riley: They didn't even have that. This is what I'm talking about. They had to go out in the woods. This is true; this is true. You didn't see any when you was out there to the house because there wasn't any.

GM: No, I was going to ask about that.

Riley: It wasn't any. This Ruffin girl that lives down here on Avenue, we talk about this, how our mother and father and them lived. They didn't even have an outside toilet. Now we had one; we don't even have to go outside if we don't want to. We don't even have to get us-- they had tin tubs they took a bath in. We have a tub. You can go in there and turn on hot and cold water. And the dishes you washed in a dishpan. They had hogs; they saved the dishwater for what they called slops for to feed the hogs. And you'd pour it in this big bucket and keep it until it'd get full, and then you'd carry it down there and dump it in there for the hogs. We go in the kitchen and turn on hot and cold water and wash the dishes, and scald them, put them over there and drain them. You didn't know what that was. This is what I'm telling you: all of this, this is what the black peoples has gone through with all of these years, all down through the years. And I think that when my mother, when she first stopped farming they had an outside toilet, because they built outside toilets. They finally started building them.

GM: This was at Snow Hill?

Riley: No.

GM: The farm at Stagville?

Riley: No, at Snow Hill. And then she lived right over here when they stopped farming, and I moved her here with me because she got too old to try to cook and do for my brothers for them to farm. So I moved her here

with me, and my older brother (the one that died in February back this year). I didn't allow her outside the house when I would go to work. I worked right up here. And I would get up and fix her breakfast, and she wouldn't get up 'til nine o'clock. My husband was driving the car (we didn't have but one car at that time). They would pick me up every morning, and I would come back about nine thirty because the little boy was going to school that I was keeping. And I would walk back down here (because it's right up there near Roses, and I could walk back down here in ten or fifteen minutes). I just found what time she got up, and I would get up and come back. I'd leave her breakfast on the stove warming, but I would come back and see to her getting her breakfast right. And then I would walk back up there to work, see. I was trying to give her some thanks and appreciate her for how she brought me and how hard she worked for me. I tried to show her that as long as she lived. She used to tell me, she said, "You know, you're a good child. The Lord sure will bless you one day. You're good." She used to tell me that; I never would forget those words. She said, "You're a good child. The Lord will really bless you one day." And he has really blessed me. And I think about those words that she has told me so many times. I wouldn't let her go outside when it snowed. And I used to have the oil circulator sit there. We didn't have floor heat; we hadn't put it in the house then. And I would tell her, I'd say, "You stay in the house and don't go outside." Wheresoever she lived, all of us would go there. When she was staying with me, all my brothers and sisters, they would come over here and we would have dinner. Everybody would bring the food and we'd eat wheresoever she was. And then this grandchild of hers got married and she had twins,

her grandchild. It was a girl and a boy. So she loved those great-grandchildren so good. And they would bring them over here every day. And they said, "Momma, come and live with us. Momma, come and live with us." And she loved those great-grandchildren so good she couldn't resist it. And she finally went and lived with them.

And then Christmastime we would always go over where she was over there; all the brothers and sisters fixed dinner and would go there and spend the first Christmas day with her. And she enjoyed that so good. She's been dead about six or eight years.

GM: Sixteen?

Riley: Yes, 'cause my baby / <sup>sister's</sup> baby girl is about sixteen, I think, now, going on seventeen. And she died in January and this child was born in May.

GM: When was Horace Cameron born, do you know?

Riley: No, no I don't. I really don't.

GM: And do you know about how old he was when he died?

Riley: When he died he was . . . oh my gosh, I forget what he was on that tombstone. And I guess that cemetery is grewed up into. . . .

GM: Is that over there by Cameron Grove Church, the original Cameron Grove Church there over in Hillside?

Riley: Yes, where the church was moved from.

GM: Yes, that hillside that goes down.

Riley: It's back in there from where the church was, that cemetery. And I guess it's grewed up. I don't remember what it was on there, 'cause I was so young when he died.

GM: About how old were you when he died?



Riley: I guess I was round about twelve, something like that.

GM: Well, let me figure it out. Do you remember anything when you were growing up that your father said about slavery?

Riley: No. He just always said that "I was brought up hard. I was made to work, and I had to work." That's all he would say, that he was brought up hard. "I was made to work."

GM: Did he ever say how they would make him work?

Riley: They'd put you in the fields, and what they would make you do. You had to go. They'd just say, "You've got to get out there; you do this." I don't know how they farmed at that time, 'cause I don't remember exactly how he'd say it. Of course me being young and he talked about this, I didn't pay too much attention to it, to tell you the truth about it. But I remember him saying, "I worked hard; I was made to work. And I don't mind working." And he did. He worked as long as he was able, as long as he could see good enough to work.

GM: Did he tell any stories, or from your mother, do you remember anything she said about her people who were slaves?

Riley: No, she never mentioned anything about her people who were slaves. She never said anything about it, never. The only thing I know is that my father was a slave. And I imagine his parents were; I'm pretty sure they were. But I never heard my mother say anything about hers being slaves. I guess some of them was, but she never did mention it. If she did I don't remember her saying it.

GM: Why do you think she didn't mention it?

Riley: Well, I don't know whether they really was. And if they was, she just didn't mention it. But she was just brought up to work hard, and



she just worked hard. I don't know whether it was because she had a big family of children and she wanted to do the best she could by them, or what it was about that. Only thing I know, she was really a hard worker. And she made us get out there in the field and work. We had to work when we was growing up on that farm. Of course we was farming. And she knew that by her canning all this stuff and putting up and having all this stuff, this was for the winter months, because in the summertime you could get most anything like that. You'd go out to the garden and you'd gather tomatoes. We liked to eat tomatoes with salt; and watermelons and cantelope, they raised all of that. But in the wintertime you didn't have that. And this is why she put all this stuff up, so in the wintertime we had all these.

GM: Do you remember your father or your mother ever saying anything about any religious meetings that the slaves would have?

Riley: No, they didn't mention that. They would just mention . . . like once in a while it used to be a lady or somebody would come and say, "We'll have church in some building," like this old school back in there (I guess it's torn down now). I know that she would be anxious to go. My father was disabled to go. And we would all go with her. And we thought this was grand, 'cause we didn't get to go to church very much, just once a month when this church was sitting over there in the woods. And we would enjoy hearing them sing. And then after I grew older we would ask them why did they sing these hymns in this particular tune. I wish sometimes that on second Sunday you could go up here to Mill Grove Church and hear them. They still do that.

GM: Oh do they?

Riley: They have their song book. I can't sing it; no, I can't sing in that tune. It's a very peculiar, different tune how they sing these songs. We don't do that in our churches; we have changed. But they never changed; they stayed the same. This is why that I say that not that I don't believe in the other denomination, but it's something about this primitive Baptist. They stays the same just about. They don't change like the other churches does. And in the primitive Baptist churches a woman is not allowed to do nothing but help sing a song. But in the other churches women can get up and do anything. They can get up in the pulpit and they can preach like a preacher. But they don't allow that; no, they never have. And they have never started that, but the other churches have. They don't change; they stay the same old seven and six all the time. Now the women, they have their hymn book and they can help sing. But I've never as long as I have lived heard a woman get up, and even down to testifying.

GM: Is this coming, do you think, from certain slave traditions?

Riley: I don't know what this is from; I really don't. I have wondered about this, why.

GM: Did your parents ever say anything about it?

Riley: No, they never did. They'd just go to church. And whatever songs. . . . Not that it's so much that <sup>what</sup> the preacher preached about would make them happy. It was the meaning of the songs; that's what they got happy and shouted off of. And they still do that today when I go up there. This is my mother and father's church, and we always try to recognize them because they had been going. I don't go up there very much now because I have my church, and in the different churches we has a program

or something just about every Sunday and I don't take time. But I'm saying I am going to postpone these others and go to second Sunday up there. So I'm going to go up for Mother's Day. We always represent them for Mother's Day at least. I put it off for them going. I go to Sunday School, and then I'll go up there to church. And when the time changes (you know, the time changes and go back an hour earlier?), they don't do it. They stay on their same time. Now I can go to Sunday School in my church and teach my class at eleven o'clock, and I can leave that church and drive up there and they haven't even started. They stay on their same time; they doesn't change like we do. They doesn't change with the time; they stay on their same time all the time. And this is why a lot of times that I think that it's wrong with the people. They change, and they doesn't have time to really study themselves, because they change as the time and the time does change fast. You know, something is always going on. You know that. But they stay at their same time. They goes to church. They doesn't hurry through their meeting. They sit in that church. You don't eat in the church; you sit real quiet in our church. But if they want to eat while singing, they get up and drink some water. They do that; they always did that. But you see we don't do that.

GM: Let's see: did you ever hear from your parents where at Horton Grove or where out there on the Cameron place where the slaves used to have their meetings, where they would steal away to?

Riley: I reckon back out there in back of the old barn. Of course I never paid no attention. I know they'd go out, but I didn't know where they was going, because me at that time didn't pay that much attention.

GM: When you were growing up. . . . I'm trying to date those houses,



and I've been told that those were slave cabins.

Riley: Yes.

GM: Do you know if those were slave cabins?

Riley: Well, they've been there all the time.

GM: But when you were growing up did anyone ever say, "This is where slaves lived, or my people when they were slaves"?

Riley: No, not really my people. I don't know who lived in those houses, to tell you the truth about it. My father had been on that Cameron farm, oh I've heard him say, "I've been with Bennahan Cameron and them for years and years and years." But I don't know whether he lived in that house or not. See, this is what I don't know. But he had been on that farm for years and years.

GM: But when he was a slave <sup>he</sup> /was on the Cameron place?

Riley: Yes, yes.

GM: You told before about name changes. You know, slaves just had a first name and that was it, and then after emancipation they would take on another name.

BEGIN SIDE I TAPE II

GM: OK, you were talking about your father.

Riley: Yes. See, Bennahan Cameron and them, they bought my father, and that's the reason why his name was changed. I think he was a Greeley. And they bought him; they changed his name to Cameron, see, because they bought him. He was sold; he was put on auction on the block.

GM: I see. Was his name Horace before?

Riley: This was all I ever knew him as, Horace Greeley. But see, when they bought him they changed his name as to them, Cameron. So he was one



of the Cameron slaves.

GM: Do you know where he had been before?

Riley: I think he was from somewhere up in Pearson County. This is where I think my father was from. Now I don't know whether this is where they bought him from as a slave when he was up in Pearson County, or they brought him to this farm or not. I've never heard him or anybody say that.

GM: How did you know that he was bought and put on the block and sold?

Riley: Well, I've heard him talk about Bennahan Cameron: "I was his slave." And me being a child I never paid that no attention about being a slave, you know. And he said, "My name wasn't a Cameron; it was a Greeley, and I was sold to the Camerons. This is why that's my name."

GM: When he would say, "I was sold to the Camerons," what would be his tone of voice?

Riley: Well, he'd just be talking to us, just like you and I talking. Because I think this one thing: he had stayed with them so long until he had really fallen in love with them. He was like a part of the family then. This is what I think. I don't know, 'cause he never said anything else different. He would always say, "Bennahan Cameron," and he would just talk about him just like he would anybody else. He never said anything ugly, or like he was angry about this. He looked like he was glad to be a part of this family for some reason. I don't know why. Maybe this was because they had treated him better than where he was; maybe this was why he appreciated this family so good. Because he never wanted to leave the Cameron farm, never. And he never did leave the Cameron farm; he died there

and he was buried.

GM: He must have been sold at a young age, taken away from his parents and sold.

Riley: I guess he was, maybe.

GM: So do you think that just that in itself, being taken away from your parents and being sold, that that would create this?

Riley: Well, you know what? They say at that time--I don't know about this; this is what I have heard from different people--you didn't have any other choice, because if a black family lived on this farm and they had children, you know they wanted their children but they didn't have no other say-so but for these children to be taken away from them. They couldn't help themselves. This is why that some people don't know who they are, or "Where do I come from?" "Who am I?" See, a lot of people doesn't know that, because like this white family, they have the say-so, the authority to do these things, and they would take this child and take him away from his parents. And they didn't have no say-so. This is what they did. And this is probably what my father went through with. He had to be taken away from his parents. And this is maybe the reason why that we don't know anything about his parents. He may have said something to some of them about his parents, but I don't remember. Oh, the black peoples has really went through with something! I have heard this old man. He's some of Gollum's peoples; his name was Jefferson Baldwin. I think it's his uncle.

GM: Jefferson Baldwin?

Riley: Yes, because this was his mother's brother; yes, he was. And he used to sit down and talk about things like that.

GM: And what would he say?

Riley: Say about the slaves and how they would whip you.

GM: Oh, he would describe that?

Riley: And how you was put up on a block. Of course I was older at that time, and he'd tell me about how he was put up on a block (I don't know what kind of block he was talking about, because I never did understand that). I don't know, maybe he was put up on a. . . .

GM: Auction block.

Riley: Or something, yes. And the one that wanted you outbidded the others and got you. And so he would say how peoples was slaves, and how they would treat you. They would beat you. If you didn't do so-and-so you had to be whipped, you would be whipped. Even if you was a grown person you stayed there, because you belonged to them. See, "I bought you, and you belong to me." And see, some of them stayed on as slaves as long as they lived; some of them died out from under. But I think after years Bennahan Cameron let the slaves go. He didn't really have them on as slaves anymore. He just owned that farm, and he just let everybody live there on it. "You have a home here as long as I live."

GM: Yes. Well, after the Civil War of course all slaves were freed.

Riley: Yes, they was freed. So I think this is what happened. And he just let everybody stay on and live there. All those peoples lived there until they died, all of those people just about. If they wanted to they could move away. Then after he died there was some changes made, after John DeVries married one of the girls (I don't know whether it was Sally or Belle).

GM: Sally.



Riley: Yes. And it was some changes made; a lot of the peoples moved away. I don't know why. Of course we moved away, because where we moved was different and it was better. Tom Wright and Dick Wright--do you know them?

GM: I know them. I know the names.

Riley: Well anyway, they bought Snow Hill. And by my brothers being good farmers, they wanted somebody good farmers. And they bought them what they wanted. They bought them good, big fine mules and everything they wanted to farm, because they was tickled to death to get a farm, you see, and wanted somebody on there that knew about a farm. And that's why we moved from over there to Snow Hill, 'cause it was better. Anything you wanted, all you'd have to do is. . . . Of course they'd visit the farm quite a bit. And he'd come by and ask, "What did you want?" or "Did you need anything?" And they were just like that; they was different.

GM: Well, did Jefferson Baldwin or anyone else that you know of. . . . What else? He talked about being sold on the auction block, and he talked of being whipped. What did he say of being whipped for?

Riley: Well, when you didn't do what the master said. If you acted like you didn't want to do what he said.

GM: Did he ever say what some of those things might be?

Riley: No, no. If you act like it, he said, if you just act like it--you know, just like a child today if you would tell him "You do so-and-so." You know, some kids will do that, stick out their mouth. And if you acted like you didn't want to do that and that master saw you, you got a whipping for that. Or else you got punished: you didn't have any food; you didn't get no supper that night. You'd go to bed hungry. And you was made to work. Sometimes they'd make you stay up all night long and do this.



They wasn't mean to the peoples back in those days. Oh, sometimes some of the peoples was mean to them, and they made them work. Then they made the womens, some of them, cook in the house. This is how--I guess you've heard this before; I know you must have by being a student out at Duke, because most of them out there knows this--the race got mixed, our race got mixed. Once it was a black race, but it's a mixed race now. That's the reason why they once called them "colored people." Like this white man and wife had this black woman working in his kitchen. And see, he could make her go to bed with him. His wife knew this, but there wasn't nothing she could do about it. He could get a baby by this black woman. This is how our race got mixed. But this woman didn't have no other choice. She had nowhere to go, and if she didn't she was beaten. But his wife couldn't say nothing either. She knew what was going on. I don't know whether she was afraid or what it was. But this is how our race got mixed like it is.

GM: Did you ever hear or did you know of any people out there at the Cameron place that this happened with?

Riley: Yes, yes. I can't call her name, but I know her. She's partially white; she's mixed, she's very mixed. I know her real good. I'd rather not call her name. She was. Her daddy was a white man; she was a black.

GM: Who was the daddy?

Riley: I don't remember who her daddy was, but I've heard her say, "My mother was a slave in this kitchen, and this white man was with her and got this child." She's white.

GM: Was it one of the Cameron family?

Riley: No. I don't know where she was living at that time. She didn't ever say where she was. And I knowed her, and I knew she wasn't a real black person. She was living on the farm at this time when her daughter was telling this, see, but I don't know where she was when this happened. Of course I knew she wasn't really a black person, and she wasn't really a white person; but you could tell she was mixed awful bad. She was half and half. So this is how our race started to get mixed. Now they don't care, see. This is what's happening now, they don't care if it's mixed. But at that time they didn't have any other choice. This is what I learned about that, because they had worked in the kitchen when they were slaves.

GM: Did you know of anyone out there on the Cameron place?

Riley: Not the Camerons' place; they didn't do that.

GM: That you know of.

Riley: That I know of. Not on the Camerons' farm, but I heard this from somewhere else. Now this particular lady that I know, I don't know where she was; but at the time she was living on the farm, all the time that I knew her. But whether this happened on this farm I don't know.

GM: Was she living on the Cameron place when you knew her?

Riley: Yes, yes.

GM: Is she still alive?

Riley: No, she's been dead. Oh, she died when I was a little girl. I can remember her right good. But I don't know whether this happened on the farm or she moved onto this farm. Because see, she moved with her daughter on there; she was living with her daughter on this farm.

It's one thing about this is what I can't understand, about this man's

wife, why she wouldn't say something or do something. I can understand about the black better than I can about the white woman. She knew this was her husband, and she knew what he was doing; and she still stayed with him, she didn't do nothing. She didn't do nothing about it. This is what I can't understand about this. I can<sup>see</sup>/about the blacks, because the blacks didn't have no other choice. She had to. If she didn't they would beat her to death; he would have her beat to death; he would whip her; he would punish her. But his wife, this is what I would like. . . .

GM: Maybe for that woman back then there wasn't much of a choice for her: that is, that she could tell her husband, "Don't do this," but he could say, "Well, I'm going to do this anyway. What are you going to do about it?" And where is she going to go?

Riley: Well, I don't know.

GM: It's the whole sort of embarrassment that if she were to go out and go home or try to get a divorce (which at that time was just unthinkable), just that social embarrassment for her and for her children and family and all that. It wouldn't be that she would get a beating, a physical beating, but the woman would have a subordinate place, was kept in a subordinate place too. And she would get, if not a physical beating--or maybe a physical beating--but a social beating.

Riley: I guess so, but I have often wondered more about that than I have about the blacks, because I know they said about the black that they had to. And this woman would have this child, this black woman would have this child, and he was brought up in that home with her because she was there. And this man's wife knew that her husband was the father of this child. Oh, my gracious. See, I could understand that. And I said,



"Well, I wonder why did she stay with him? I don't know whether she was afraid of him." I just didn't understand that part about it; I never have understood that. I'm<sup>pretty</sup>/sure she had a little more opportunity than the black did.

GM: Oh yes, oh sure.

Riley: You know she did; I know about that. Than why did she want to stay with him and she knew this was going on? I have heard--I don't know why it was--this lady, it hasn't been too many years ago, talking about this. And she said she was talking about this same subject that you and I are on now. And she said that the blacks didn't have no other choice, and that this white woman, she knowed it. I think her husband's auntie was in a home like this; she was the maid cooking. At least I didn't know him, but I've heard her call his name; but I can't remember it now, because I'm very bad at remembering names. He was going with this woman, and he got a child by her when she was cooking for them. So this boy grew up in the home. And then she finally married; she finally got out and she married. Well, this child was named Ernest (I remember her saying this boy's name Ernest), and when he got up I think around about sixteen he found out that he was white, his daddy was a white man. And he left here; he went up the road and he's never come back since. And his mother died; he wouldn't come back to her funeral. I don't think he come back to her funeral. And the last time I talked to her she said--oh, and she's been dead for I reckon twenty-some years--that Ernest at that time was about sixty-some years old. "And he left here," she said, "when he was sixteen. He found out his daddy was a white man." He wouldn't come back to her funeral, 'cause he just couldn't stand the thoughts of



him being half and half and his mother being with a white man. And he left here, and he's never come back. I don't know what part up North he's in, but he's never come back, she said. So I guess that he was just disappointed and hurt, which I guess at that time would be different. But people doesn't pay it any attention now, you know, like that, like they did at that time. But he just didn't understand; maybe she didn't explain that she didn't have any other choice.

And I used to work for this lady; this was her uncle that got this child by him, because she told me about it. She called this black woman Aunt Laura; she said, <sup>"She</sup> used to work for my uncle." I forgot her uncle's name. She was the first one that told me about it, but I didn't know Aunt Laura at that time too good. She said, "She was working for my uncle; she was a cook. He got this child by her, and," she said, "he left here when he found out his daddy was a white man. He left here." And then this other lady told me. You know, I didn't pay no attention, by me not knowing them. And then this other lady told me the whole history of it, of how it happened, and why he left. And she said he never come back here after he found out. I think she said he was about fifteen or sixteen when he really found out that his daddy was a white man, and he never come back. I don't know whether he's dead now or not. I think she said nobody had heard from him in years, so he may have just died--'cause at that time he was in his sixties, she said. She said he had to be, because he was older than she. So I just don't understand way back people's. . . .

GM: That's just so hard. It's a kind of history, you see, that's there. But to get at that kind of thing is not. . . . People don't write that down. But it's one of the things that I think is important to under-

stand, what's going on back then, because it still shapes . . . like this person who went North. And his children are there and his grandchildren are there; they don't know where they came from.

Riley: No, and they don't know who they are: see, who are my people?

GM: Yes. And everybody's in flight from their past. And as long as you're running away from it, it's like anything: you're in flight from it, and you never can stay still. It's like the only way to resolve the past, one of the ways to resolve the past is to confront it, like any problem.

Riley: Yes, I think that's the best. But he just couldn't stand it, 'cause he never come back. I never heard anybody say. And the last time this lady talked to me she said he didn't come back when his mother died. And so I don't know whether he's dead now or not, 'cause I know he had some half brothers that died (I don't know how many died). And I didn't hear anybody say. In fact, I went to some of them's funerals. Of course if he'd have been there I wouldn't know, because I don't know him anyway. But sometime I'm going to ask her if he's dead.

GM: Getting off of that and back on how we got started on this, we were talking about Jefferson Baldwin. Did you ever hear any descriptions of slave cabins, or anything about the physical life of slaves?

Riley: No, no. If he did I didn't pay too much attention to that. The most thing that I paid attention to is how they treated them, and how they beat them. If they didn't do what they said, or they acted like they didn't want to do this, how they beat them. That's the most thing that I paid attention to.

GM: But about old slave cabins and where they had lived, and the

houses they had lived in and anything like that?

Riley: No, I never paid any attention to the cabins. I don't know whether they lived. . . . Well, the women could live in the house; now I've heard them say that. The womens could live in the house, but where the mens lived I never heard anybody say anything about that. I would like to know about that myself. I mean, if they was married, I imagine they would have a house for them.

GM: Yes.

Riley: But if this woman wasn't married, now I've heard them say she could live in the house with them, with the man and his wife.

GM: With the white family?

Riley: Yes, yes.

GM: Now I've gone through the records left by the Cameron family over at UNC library, and over there they have lists of the slaves. And they'll write down the different slave quarters: so there'll be Little River quarters, Eno quarters, Farringtosh, a place called Leather's plantation. Have you ever heard of anything like that, Leather's place?

Riley: No.

GM: Bobbitt's was another name that was on there; Snow Hill would be listed. And there they would list all the slaves who lived there, give their names, of course their sex, and their age. Then sometimes they would group them in families: so they would have, let's say, Joe and Dilcey. And then under that they would have the children, with their ages. And so you would have slave cabins with nuclear families (that is, a man and his wife and their children) living there in this house. And they were scattered about the plantation in these quarters. Now from what I've been told,



Horton Grove had been a slave quarters. The construction of them suggests very strongly, by the kind of materials that are used, that they were built in the 1830s or 1840s. And in fact, on one of the houses over there at Eno place, Eno quarters (I think the Peaks used to live around there), there were the one-storey houses, but on the inside they looked like those houses at Horton Grove. They were brick on the inside?

Riley: Yes.

GM: Now on one of the chimneys on one of these--there's one house standing; there were three, these long, one-storey houses with that vertical planks in them--on the chimney are carved into a brick when the brick was wet the initials "S.P. 1850," which suggests that that's when that house (at least the chimney, and possibly that house) was built.

Riley: That's about when it was built, the chimney or either the house. Yes.

GM: Now I haven't found Horton Grove listed as Horton Grove in the slave register. So it may have been known as another name, or it may have been where the slaves who were at Stagville lived. But I'm trying to find out who built these houses that you were raised in. Have you heard anything about that?

Riley: I never heard anything about who built those houses. Now that plantation was called Stagville. But in there where we lived, that was called Horton Grove, yes.

GM: Who built those? Or why were they built there?

Riley: I don't know how they was built in there. Because, see, it was four houses in a line, and then this little house sit up on the hill. See, there was five; there was always five houses in there.



GM: Where Henderson Green lived, yes.

Riley: Yes, Green Henderson lived in this little house that sit up here, the first one. And see, Cy Hart, George Holton, Lee Umstead, and we lived in the last house down here.

GM: And who built those houses?

Riley: See, I don't know who built those houses, unless. . . . I don't know who you could ask, 'cause everybody that's old enough what could tell you, all the old peoples are dead that I know anything about.'

GM: How about Mildred Shaw? Do you know her? She lives on the Stanley Road with Willis Hart?

Riley: Moria.

GM: Moria Shaw, yes.

Riley: Now that's right. She is about the . . . because Cy Hart was her father, you know. Well now, that's about the only one that I know that you could ask, because I think that she's just about the oldest one that come from over there that's living.

END OF INTERVIEW