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SOHP Series: Piedmont Social History
Transcription Priority: 3 (transcribe parts
(1-Transcribe; 2-May Transcribe; of 2 B)
3-Do Not Transcribe)

Interviewee: Robertson, William R. and Margaret E.P.

Last First Middle

Date of Interview: 3-27-79

Total Number of Tapes:

Place: Burlington

Cassette: C-45 2 C-60 C-90

Interviewer: Allen Tullos

Reel: 5" 7"

Interviewing done in R's home.

Context of the interview (e.g., study of a special topic, the interviewer's particular interests, focus of the questions, anything significant about the setting or circumstances):

Life and work history. Problems in Mr. Robertson's hearing made interview difficult. Poor health.

He was one of original group of workers at Piedmont Hts. mill. Mrs. Robertson's

contributions suggest another interview with her. Some of Mr. R's expressions

however, are excellent, these are transcribed here. More on tape 2. *Mr. R. (according*

to wife + neighbors suffers from "hardening of arteries") often disconnected and rambling.

List topics discussed in the order they occur on the tape.

Tape # 1A MrRobertson's family from Rockingham Co. Mrs. R's from Cumberland. She came

Side from down there where "old man Love" was at. Redmon calls Spencer Love - "Little Love."

Little Love's father gave us a supper once down here near Graham, his subject was "Change."

We changed Burlington Mills from Broad St. (etc. vague) . Maggie's mother and grandparents

lived at Holt Mills when she was born. Then moved to Fayetteville, father died in F'ville.

Then moved to Duke (now called ~~z~~ Ervin), NC. Maggie went to school in Duke, NC. She

stayed a while with her sister in Rosemary, NC. Then back to "Ervin" Then family moved to

Durham and went to work in ~~z~~ #6 Hosiery Mill. Maggie started to work at age 12 in Duke.

She went to night school ~~z~~ in Duke. 5 sisters and 1 brother in Maggie's family.

~~Married~~ Married at age 19.

Redmon's parents were tobacco farmers. ~~adooped~~ 4 boys and 6 girls in Redmon's family,

one of the boys died in the 1930's - Harvey, 2nd from last~~y~~. Redmon was a "cowboy"

had two cows to tend to as a child. A mean mule ~~z~~ almost killed brother, was finally

sold to the coal mine. "He got so mean they sold him to the coal mine." Tells of mule

running away, throwing swingletree up in a hickory tree.

Tells story~~z~~ of flood in the bottom near their home and of father carrying mother and

children across sheet of wide water.

Redmon was a doffer ~~z~~ when he began to work in mill. Ended as loom fixer. ~~Maxxx~~

Made 15¢/day as a doffer. Maggie was making \$3.00 a week when she quit working in

spinning room at Duke. Then she went to running drawings, "a man's job." M. made

\$5.00/week drawing, still a child. Left there and went to Rosemary with sister, ran

winders then; then to Durham and hosiery mill as a spinner. Married, quit job. Began

to have children; had 13 children. Lost three in this house, boy age 13, boy age 7,

and then lost married daughter two years ago. Now one son in Cal, one in Burl, one

in ~~Rx~~ ~~z~~ Kernersville, two daughters in St. Petersburg, Fl.; ~~z~~ one daughter near Saxapahaw.

Redmon "went from country to the mill" age 10. Maggie was~~z~~ in orphans' home then.

Redmon three years older than Maggie. Redmon~~z~~ left Eden~~z~~ and moved to Reidsville in 1908.

Left R'ville and went to G'boro. From G'boro to Glen Raven. From G. Raven to Burl (this

was mother and family and cow, moving together). From Burl to Graham.

Explains mule spinning. Moved so much ~~z~~ to get "to a better place or to a place that

was running." "We had to feed ourselves you know" Manufacturers would "go on short

time" or "curtail." Redmon was oldest boy and had to be there for mother to depend on.

Redmon has sister, 1 1/2 years younger, who is Holiness preacher.

"I'm the oldest Robertson that's ever been in my family." Except the great ~~z~~ grandfather

who came ~~z~~ from Europe right after Christ was ~~z~~ born. You see, you getting way back

yonder now. Christ was born in the middle of the Bible. In the middle of history."

Maggie says ~~z~~ Redmon is "stretching the point." Redmon's mother worked in mill, took

in family members who were married as boarders. Redmon on~~z~~ work: I always took

advantage of my work. If I had a job I couldn't run, if it was going to run me, I'd

try to switch that. Get me an easier job. End of 1A

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Tape # 1B

Side Maggie on conditions of work whenshe started at age 12. "really bad." In spinning room, 12 hrs a day, no rest, school at night. School over company store, school paid for by Mr. Ervin. Redmon worked at Golden Belt in Durham once.

~~Redmon met Maggie at #6 mill.~~ Redmon met Maggie at #6 mill.

~~He~~ Courting: to the movies, to the park, a playground at the mill. Company would show movies at the mill recreation area, could play records, read books and magazines. Go to Lakewood Park sometimes. Redmon remembers Charlie Chaplin: "A good Christian ~~play~~ play-boy." Redmon says he put first 15¢ in Swinny's church. "I was born again up on Davis (?) street at a little three room wooden building - church." Baptized in ~~in~~ 1911. "That was right after the Titanic sunk. ~~That's~~ That's the way I kept up with it." Tells how he became a Christian.

"I put 15¢ in ~~that~~ the foundation of that church up there (means Swinney's) and I put my whole life into Burlington Mill. And everything that I've ever put my foot on, He doubled and increased."

Maggie worked at home putting tags on tobacco sacks, in Durham, after marriage.

Redmon: "We always worked."

Marriage in front room of Maggie's mother's home. ~~Some~~ Some family present.

Redmon didn't goto WWI, was deferred due torupture which he says army doctor gave him, also totake care of dependants in his and wife's mothers' families. Did go to Camp Jackson, Columbia, SC for a short time. Redmon and Maggie ~~lived~~ lived for a while in ~~in~~ Maggie's mother's home. Then shared house with his brother.

Tells of first child, premature baby, put it in shoebox to scare grandma, child lived ~~and~~ grew up, died at age 56.

End of 1B

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SOHP Series Piedmont Social History
Interviewee: Redmon and Maggie Roberts
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Tape # 2A

de Maggie on conditions in cotton mills. "You could just see the dust everywhere. It was terrible. And lot of people used tobacco and snuff and they spit all over the floor. They had spittoons (sp), but they just spit wherever they was at." M's sisters used snuff, everybody just about did." Redmon says the tobacco would help keep the cotton dust out of your mouth. Redmon gestures with his thumb and first fingers at how the cotton dust used to get in noses of workers. M: You had to brush it off of you when you came out of work. You had it all over you, in your hair, on your clothes.

Mill accidents. M. tells of a ~~woman~~ woman whose hair was pulled off by a belt. Redmon tells of his sister getting her hair cut in a machine. They tore that machine to pieces to get her hair unbound. She was 8 years old and a-spinning. That's how we had to make a living. They put everybody to work that they could. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 years -- and if they were older than that they didn't work, they stayed on the farm, example of M R's oldest brother. The boss's wife made R's sister a dress (to make up for the accident). He give her a nice ~~dress~~ dress because she was so little and he thought so much of her. R tells of accident he had, got finger cut on frame, before WWI. Tells of how army doctor caused his rupture.

R and M came to Burlington in 1923, August.

M's father died when she was 4. We had to work for a living. She and brother went to an orphan home at Oxford.

Redmon tells of his schooling: only a few years, at various times.

recalls beginning of Piedmont Hts. Love had a black chauffer named Clarence (?). Redmon: ^{has} a wealthy man/a nigger for a chauffer. It's cheaper than a white man. A white man would haul him a while and you couldn't tell which one was hauling the other."

Some details on starting up of mill.

Recalls Jim Copeland: "He'd give you a whupping and then he'd laugh at you."

M.B. Smith was Pres. of Pdt. Hts. His son took it after he died. Love was head of all Burlington Mills. Tells how Copeland was drawing \$600 a week for being supt. of 6 different mills at one time; this was the cause of Smith firing him says Redmon.

Redmon says Bufl. Mill area wadn't no worse than any other part of the country. Just some sinners that hadn't been saved. We tamed them.

Preacher got them to let him put a cook place and an ice plant at back of mill. Preacher took that money and Love's money and our money we made up and got some people saved, built a church. We got out of Chicago.

Maggie shows photos from chur. history book, Swinney (sp). Maggie and Redmon joined Glen Hope. Swinny's son is on radio on Sunday morning (Donald). They joined church in 1932.

Redmon on unions: If it hadn't been for the unions there wouldn't be no social security. I belonged to union in 1940's. Remembers no union in 1930's, no one trying to start one. The union didn't come through WWI. Tells of 1940's ~~XXXXXX~~

End of 2A

Begin 2B. Redmon a loom fixer at Burl. Mills. Describes job.

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Tape #

Side on fancy looms we had 16 pick and picks (at beginning). plain looms we had 32.

They cut us down to 24.

"I liked it. I could do it and rest. I could just whup that ol loom and that was it.

One time I went in there and I picked up a screw on the floor and put a strap back on a picker stick and that's all I done that day. Nothing didn't happen. I had them going didn't I. Just automatically run. That's the only time I ever had that to happen. Just one time."

Relations between weavers and loom fixers. If you lag, the weaver can't get no pay. Some weavers were bad to get along like ~~xxxx~~ that.

"I liked that work. I wouldn't go through it again for a new life. I wouldn't take the changes on getting killed as many times as I have for nothing. ~~I~~ (Tells of several near fatal accidents.) (some good things here)."

Tells of fatal accident at Burlington, man wound into cloth.

Church attendance at Glen Hope. Redmon "We went just as regular as a clock til the church ~~xxx~~ burnt down. ~~X~~ and they moved ~~it~~ it way over ~~xxxxx~~ yonder.

Maggie recalls Love coming to church. Recallin g Love's gifts to church.

Robertson's house was not mill house. He bought it in 1923, expanded it ~~xx~~ several times.

Redmon recalls favorite food as a boy. "I eat everything I come to and anything that would stay there, that was eat. And I starved to death. It was right after Cleveland's panic and nobody ~~x~~ had anything and everybody had nothing." "I was born between two troubles. One of them was starving to death and the other was that you didn't have no place to go get it," There wadn't no tin cans when I was growing up..

We liked peas, butterbeans, corn. Didn't like cucumbers much. Onions ~~xx~~ is my favorite vegetable. If I was going on a vegetable and nothing else a tall I'd take a onion.

~~Mx~~ Maggie points out that after towns incorporated you couldn't raise chickens and hogsx like people used to.

Redmon still has two chickens in yard.