

STAFFORD COUNTY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF JAMES M. JACKSON
BY MARGARET MOCK

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Brent Point Road

A: Right.

Q: for the Stafford County Oral History Project on Tuesday, August the 19th,
1986, and I'm Margaret Mock. Okay, Mr. Jackson, would you give me your full name?

A: James Monroe Jackson.

Q: And when were you born?

A: August the 2nd, 1913.

Q: And where were you born?

A: Widewater, Virginia, in Stafford County.

Q: How far from where we are sitting today?

A: About a mile and a quarter.

Q: You were born at home?

A: Right.

Q: I see. Had your family lived in Stafford County Long when you were born?

A: Yes. They had lived all their life in Stafford County. My mother was originally from down where they call Fredericksburg--you know where Cranes Corner?

Q: Yes.

A: My mother was from there and my father was from here.

Q: Widewater?

A: Widewater.

Q: How about your grandparents? Were They from here?

A: Originally they were from Westmoreland.

Q: Westmoreland County?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, but your parents had lived in Stafford County all their lives.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know where that name comes from? Why do they call it Widewater?

A: Well, as far as I know, the river -- the post office was right on the river. Potomac River, which is supposed to be five miles wide there.

Q: Oh, I see. So this is a whole area right close to that.

A: And that was the name of the post office. Widewater--

Q: Is the post office still there?

A: Well, a part of it is--the old cinder block part is. The original post office has been destroyed long ago.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: There's not a post office there anymore but--

A: There was a train station there where you got your tickets, caught the train and all.

Q: Oh, really? Right there at the same place?

A: At the same place.

Q: Right on the river?

A: Right on the river.

Q: Where the river is widest, it's five miles wide.

A: Right.

Q: What kind of work did your family do? What did your father do?

A: Well, my father, he ran a blacksmith's shop. And he was a carpenter, he built houses, boats, and he also farmed.

Q: Okay, you said that your father farmed. What did he raise?

A: What kind of crops did your father raise?

A: He raised corn, beans, and hay. All vegetables.

Q: Vegetables. And he earned his money by doing blacksmithing and did you say something about fishing?

A: Yeah--he had a net and he'd go fishing. And during the fishing seasons, he sold vegetables also.

Q: Oh, not just for your family?

A: No.

Q: He sold some.

A: He sold some, too. And we stored away food for the winter. Vegetables, hogs, we'd butcher the hogs, beef, and that's the way that we made our living. We sold eggs, trades off for sugar, coffee, and the main things that we had to buy. And that made it sort of easier for us.

Q: Like in the time of the Great Depression when a lot of people were really hit hard. You weren't hit as hard?

A: Not as hard, no. Because we always had a few dollars coming in, one way or the other. And we saved our food. We put--we had a place called cellar in our house. We put away our apples, our potatoes.

Q: A cellar in your house?

A: That's right. And we bedded our cabbage and turnips right in the garden for the winter.

Q: So you could go out during the winter and get them?

A: Right.

Q: And then what about the beef? Did you say something about it?

A: We hung the beef up in the meat house. Smoke--meat house. And it stayed there in the cold and it stayed there the whole winter--during the winter because it snowed two or three feet deep in the winter. It froze up--it would freeze for months and we kept it there and slice off it, cut off it. Then when the weather started getting warm, what was left, we cut it and put it in brine--made cornbeef. And we used it that way. So it wouldn't be wasted.

Q: So people can't do that now, cut up a pot of beef like that because...

A: The weather is so unregulated to what it used to be. We have cold spells, but it doesn't last that long.

Q: Doesn't stay cold.

A: It doesn't freeze that long that you can keep it hard.

Q: How about your family. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: Well, my father was married twice. And the first of us was five of us. And I'm the youngest of the five. I had two brothers and two sisters. Three boys, two girls. Then my father was married the second time with one boy and three girls.

Q: And you were the youngest of that first marriage?

A: First marriage.

Q: What about schooling? What type of schooling did you have when you were growing up?

A: We had--well, we had a school here and it went to the seventh, it used to go to the sixth grade, then it started in the seventh grade. And I went-- I didn't go as regularly as I should have. The children got a good education. Very good so far. And my two sisters, they went to D.C.--and lived with their aunt ... going to school for a few years ... they went further in school than we did.

Q: Did you have to pay to go to that school? What was the name of your school?

A: Oakgrove.

Q: Oakgrove?

A: Oakgrove at Widewater.

Q: At Widewater?

A: But no, we didn't have to pay to go there.

Q: Did you have to buy your books?

A: We had to buy our books. Had to buy our books.

Q: How many children do you have? We..., let's see--I didn't ask you about your marriage. You are married to?

A: Nettie.

Q: Nettie?

A: Nettie Baugh.

Q: Baugh. And how long have you been married?

A: 50--what did I say?

Q: You said 54, I believe.

A: 54.

Q: Will be 54 in September.

A: 54 years this September.

5

Q: Did she work outside the home?

A: Yes, she did. She did work for a private family.

Q: And how many children did you and Nettie have?

A: Two.

Q: Two?

A: Right.

Q: Boy and a girl?

A: Uh-huh. James Jackson and Patricia. James lives here. Patricia lives in Maryland.

Q: And how many grandchildren do you have?

A: Now, let's see. I've got eight.

Q: Is that right?

A: Eight grandchildren.

Q: Your son lives over just next door to you?

A: Right. And one great-grandchild.

Q: Have you ever lived in any other area of the county or have you always lived right here in Widewater?

A: Always lived in Widewater.

Q: Tell me something about the Widewater Community. What do you think it offers people and why you've stayed here all these years.

A: Well, I like the Widewater area. I never liked the city. And it... convenient things that I like such as work, fishing, hunting, and all of that. Good people in Widewater. Good place to live in. People work together and they work with one another and we had a man, one time... neighbors, a white man by the name of Richard Decatur(?) and I ... he had one horse and my father kept two all the time. My father would cut his hay--he'd cut his wood and my father would haul his wood for him and he'd help up haul our wood. We'd work as a team. And it was very good. And I had a neighbor up the road here by the name of ... and we worked as a team. We helped one another. Everybody in the community would help one another. People wou--if you had wood to cut, they'd help you. And we worked together.

Q: It didn't matter if you were black or white?

A: Right.

Q: You worked together as neighbors?

A: Right.

Q: That ...

A: You could go away from home--... never locked our door. We left our house open--nobody ever bothered it. Nobody locked the house. I was a kid, my father put me in a horse and buggy and tell me to go by the neighbors up and down there to see what they need from the store. Daddy would bring it out. They'd give me a list and I brought it back. That's what we did at my house. Can't do it now.

Q: No, times have changed, haven't they?

A: Yes, they have.

Q: They really have.

A: Times that have really been, they'll never be again.

Q: I guess that's true.

A: And some people say that now is the good old days--you make more

money--got more money got more opportunities, but I don't think the...

Q: Maybe not as good as it was at one time.

A: Right, right.

Q: You think--what do you think changed that? Do you have any idea? What brought that change about? That people aren't as neighborly and as helpful like they were at one time?

A: Well, I think that by having a lot of people moving into your area and different people.

Q: New people.

A: New people and I think it's a great change.. I hope I'm saying the right thing. But I think it made a big difference. And then again, we find that so many people that raised their children up--they don't discipline their children like they used to. If we was told to do something, we did just that. If we went away and were supposed to be back at 9:00 at night or 3:00 in the evening, we were back home. If we didn't, we wouldn't go again until they saw fit for us to go. And we--our parents told us to do something, we didn't tell them we weren't going to do it, children of today say "I'm not going to do that". We didn't do that.

Q: You weren't allowed to--you weren't brought up to do that.

A: We weren't allowed to do that. And our parents didn't say and do everything in front of the children. They might have did it, but they didn't do it in front of their children. As sometimes the younger people to today.

Q: Yes, I know what you mean.

A: And that had to be a big change. Well, people say the world is bad--the world's not bad. Everything God made is good. So it's the people who are wrong.

Q: Well, talking about your work now--what kind of work did you do?

A: Well, I worked for the -- when I was real young, I used to trap a lot. I liked fishing and trapping. I caught, trap, and sold the hide or fur. See, I did a lot of that. And then I worked for the Lees-- Miss Nanny Lee.

Q: Nanny Lee, who you said was the niece of Robert E. Lee.

A: General Robert E. Lee and General Fitzhugh Lee. And General Robert E. Lee's wife lived in Alexandria. She had a daughter and they came here and lived with-- after he passed away-- they came and lived with Miss Nanny Lee in the summer. Boarded there. She had a boarding house.; She had a lot of people there. Well, she didn't have a lot either-- She had about six or seven. And I did the driving and cooking for her for years. And I drove... dook and the lawnmowing. Then I got tired of that, I wasn't getting social security, I wasn't getting money enough, and I decided to work for a contractor.

Q: Contractors? You worked-- doing what for contractors?

A: Well, I worked at Fort Belvoir-- They were building Fort Belvoir in World War II. Then after my job finished there, Quantico. I worked there with a contractor. That's when I got called to the government. In 1942 or '43, I don't know which I got called to the government.

Q: And you worked there how many years?

A: 30 years and 6 months.

Q: 30 years and 6 months and then you retired?

A: Right. And just before that, I worked over at Cherry Hill, for the District government, for a year and I quit working there. It wasn't good for my health, the doctor told me.

Q: Is that right?

A: All the sewage, all the garbage and all in D.C. came down there and we had to cook it. Put it in a press and have it pressed and they made soap out of lye(?).

Q: Really?

A: Oh, it was terrible. All over, dead animals and everything.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

A: And had to cook that--

Q: The fat from the animals.

A: Right- I just couldn't stand it.

Q: Yeah-- so you've been a chauffeur, a cook, a carpenter's helper, and what did you say you did before you worked at Quantico? What was your job?

A: I drove-- I was a truck driver. A run a A section(?). I drove a truck for 27 years there. And I run... section.

Q: Someone indicated that you would probably know something about the lumber industry and railroad in Stafford County. Do you know anything about railroading and lumber?

A: Well, I know... we didn't have but one track.

Q: Is that right? One track?

A: From here to Quantico. From Brook to Quantico. Just one track. And they switched over on a side track and let the northbound train go by and then put the southbound train back on it. Now they got two full lanes and a side track. They did that.

Q: You said the train stopped up here at Arkendale(?) and that way you got to where you needed to go?

A: That's the way I go to work, right. We would use that to go to work, to Washington, Fredericksburg-we used that.

Q: But the train doesn't stop there anymore.

A: No. They had a ticket agent down here at a store-- a place where you buy your ticket. Now at Wodewater, they had a regular train station there, where they had seats and all to sit in and wait, for your train.

Q: That's no more. Do you remember when it was?

A: And they had great fishing down there and all-- Widewater. Post office down there- I told you that already- you got that already.

Q: Wasn't it the post office you were talking about the China fisherman and the big net?

A: Yeah, they had a seine about 5 miles long and they put it out with the boat and a motor and then they brought it in with a horse.

Q: A horse?

A: In a circle.

Q: A horse walking around in a circle.

Q: And you sold the fish, so it was commercial fishing?

A: Right. Had two-- one down on Arkendale and one down on Widewater.

Q: What was the name-- do you know the name of the business or the fishery?

A: No, I don't. Just a bunch of men that had nets down there. They was one of the many ones down here at the end of Brent Point. Down there at the end of Brent Point Road where the creek and the river joins together there at the Po Ridge. You can't get out of there-- you have to come back up the same way.

Q: Is that right? Let's see, which creek is that?

A: Aquia Creek.

Q: Aquia Creek?

A: Aquia Creek and the Potomac River.

Q: And the Potomac River-- where they come together, this Brent Point Road goes down to there?

A: Right down to there. The people who owned that land was the Brents. And when they changed this road from Route 658, they put names up and so they put the name of the people who used to own that property.

Q: That was a long time ago.

A: Yes, it was.

Q: Before your time!

A: Yeah.

Q: What about doctors?

A: Yes, at Widewater, there used to be a picnic ground that the RF&P Railroad built.

Q: Oh, really?

Q: You say there was a picnic ground?

A: Yeah, a picnic ground there and they used to run schedules from Richmond and Baltimore there and they had big picnics and they had dances and everything down there.

Q: Oh, really?

A: And they had dance hall down there-- they had everything. Trains brought them there so many schedules brought so many coaches brought them there and they stayed all day, waiting for them. Anywhere from Rivhmond to Baltimore-- they came down. And during the meantime, a man by the name of... Lee had boats down the river. A man by the name of Willie Cohen(?)-- we used to go down and get them and run-- take people out for boat rides.

Q: Oh, yeah?

A: And we would go across the river, 5 miles across the river and back for 25 cents a head. And we paid \$1 an hour to row around with a rowboat.

Q: How about that? So that was some of the entertainment that was-- back in those days.

A: That's right.

Q: Well, what about medical facilities and doctors? What did you do if you needed a doctor?

A: Well, they had a doctor up at 610-- right off of 610-- right where 95 is. And his name was Snead(?). And up past where the Anne E. Moncure School is, they had one doctor by the name of Dr.Garden(?) and one by the name of Thomas Paine. And they were the doctors we went to. They had one right across Aquia Creek down here. And we could go down there and shoot a gun or blow a gun barrel or call in, and he'd row across the creek in a boat and come over. And take care of patients.

Q: He was on the other side of Aquia Creek.

A: Other Side of Aquia Creek. And then we used to go down to Miss Nanny

Lee's or down to the store and call. One of those doctors from Garrisonville and if you couldn't get up there, they'd come down-- they'd ride horse down.

Q: So Miss Nanny Lee had a telephone and who else had a telephone?

A: They had one down at the store down there. Back then, the man ran the store by the name of McCleet(?), but Miss Mountjoy done bought it after that. Mountjoys bought it after that. The first man I knew running the store was McCleet and then was one down at Widewater down at the post office by the name of Ward Powell(?) and they had a phone down there. But no more phones around here.

Q: But Miss Nanny Lee was the only resident that had a telephone?

A: Right.

Q: Who was the first family after Miss Nanny Lee to have a telephone?

A: In here.

Q: In your house?

A: I was the first one that I know that had a phone.

Q: And when was that? What year was that?

A: That was 1942.

Q: 1942. What about electricity? Did you have electricity did you first built this house? In 1942?

A: No.

Q: No? No electricity.

A: No. I don't remember what year the electricity came in here, but it's been here a long time, but it was back in the forties, I know. It was late forties.

Q: Late forties. What about paved roads? The one I turned off of coming in here was paved. Do you remember when they first paved the roads out here?

A: Yes, I remember- I don't remember the year that they- but they've been

paved quite awhile because that wasn't nothing but a mud road. And it used to be cross rods with pine poles.

Q: Oh, really? Pine poles over it?

A: Right.

Q: So you could ride on it.

A: Right.

Q: What about when you had an automobile? Did you ever ride on the pine road?

A: No, not then. They put dirt and stuff over it.

Q: Gravel?

A: Gravel and stuff.

Q: What about automobiles? Who was one of the first people to have a car down in this area?

A: One of the first ones that I know that had a car in here-- I think it was William Harris. William Harris one of the first ones. And then it was the Duncanses and Miss Nanny Lee and then John Buckner. Those were the ones.

Q: And your dad got a car.

A: Then he got one.

Q: What kind of car did he have?

A: He had a Star.

Q: A Star?

A: A Star.

Q: A Star car. Do you remember where he bought that?

A: He bought that in Triangle.

Q: Is that right?

A: I think he bought it from a man named Crowe. Was a car dealer.

Q: And what about you? What kind of car did you have?

A: The first one that I had was a Mormon.

Q: Mormon? M-o-r-m-o-n?

A: Right. And that was back in the thirties. That was in the thirties. And the next car that I had was a 1933 Ford.

Q: 1933 Ford. Let's see, I've asked about your children, oh, I know-- community activities. What's the name of your church and tell me a little bit about it?

A: Oakgrove Baptist Church.

Q: Oakgrove Baptist Church?

A: Right.

Q: And tell me about the church and its role in the community.

A: Well, I think the church plays a good role here in this community because we have a nice congregation. We have young people in our church doing a good job and or so it seems. We have a young choir here. We have young ushers, we have nurseries in our church, we have a senior choir, and we have practically all the activities that we really needed. And we sent them off to conventions and different things-- the yough have gone to the Baptist ... up in Gainesville.

Our church clerk and one of the chairman of the missionary board have gone there today. So this goes a whole week. ...main two days ... go. You register and everything and get all the notes and everything is Tuesday and Wednesday. My wife and I used to go all the time, but I don't go up there much now. It's very good. I've been the chairman of the deacon board for quite awhile. My wife is chairman of the deaconess board and she sings in the choir and my son sings in the choir, my grandson and his wife, my daughter-in-law-- she sings in the choir. James., my son, he is a deacon, too.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: Yeah.

Q: So the church has been really important to your family?

A: Yes, it has. It has been a beacon light for the community. It certainly has. We have a young minister here now from Fredericksburg, the Rev. Robert Bumbry. He's pastoring us now.

Q: You said the previous pastor was there how many years?

A: 23.

Q: 23 years?

A: Right.

Q: You don't change pastors very often, do you?

A: No.

Q: Well, what about if you all-- you were pretty much self-sufficient- you told me that you raised all your-- you raised livestock and you raised vegetables and traded some of those things for what you needed. If you needed to do some major shopping of some kind-- clothing, for example, where would you go?

A: Then or now?

Q: Then.

A: Well, you know the people did a lot of ordering out of catalogues then. They used the Sears and Roebuck and Montgomery Ward and other things came in. People sat down and ordered a lot of stuff. You had the post office- you made out your order and you went to the post office and you got a money order and put it in there and sent it. If you didn't have the money, they sent it and they had them send it C.O.D. and then it came to the post office and paid for it and picked it up.

Q: Well, do you have a post office down here at all?

A: We have one in Stafford, but not one down in this area.

Q: Don't have a post office like you used to have.

A: No.

Q: Was it within walking distance? How far was it?

A: It was three miles.

Q: Three miles.

A: But we walked there- we was kids, we didn't pay attention to it. But this here now is between Aquia Tavern- not Aquia-- Austin Farm and the Stafford court house.

Q: Long way from here.

A: Right. We have nail delivery right to the door.

Q: Now you do.

A: Right.

Q: In the olden days-- back when you were a youngster, the mail didn't come to the house.

A: No. We went to the post office to get it.

Q: Now, it comes right to your house. So, you didn't go anywhere to do any shopping. You did most of your shopping through the mail order catalogues.

A: Right. Right. They'd take this train to Fredericksburg for some of the things that we wanted. My father, now, he was famous for going to Baltimore buying his clothes.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: Yeah.

Q: Balitmore. Well, you know, I thought that train line on the RF&P stopped at Aqua Po-- you know where the Aquia and the Potomac come together-- I thought the train stopped there. It didn't stop there? It went on across the creek?

A: Aqua Po-- yes, well, years ago, it was one-way railroad. When they built one line-- just one line, but before that years ago, the train quit the Aqua Po and up by barge to Alexandria.

Q: That's what I thought.

A: Yeah, but I was nothing but a kid then. I mean, I was just-- I can hardly remember. I remember when they put that lane through here. And one lane, but they used to go to Aqua Po and put off the train on barges and take them to Alexandria. Down the river.

Q: Right. But that was when you were real young? Most of your life, the track did go on up to Alexandria?

A: Right, right. Now, they put the second track, but they had one track from Fredericksburg to Quantico. One track. And they had it-- they used to have a turntable and they had one in Fredericksburg. And a train-- the engine could go around the block and back up and pull it on to Washington. And Fredericksburg could go back to Richmond. But they had one track from Fredericksburg to up there. So I know where that was at.

Q: Well, you said something about the post office. What about the postmaster or the postmistress? Do you remember any of those people? That had that job?

A: Yes, there-- I remember Mr. Wirt Powell had it for years-- since I was a kid--he had it.

Q: Wirt Powell?

A: Wirt.

Q: W-i-r-t? Wirt Powell?

A: Uh, huh-- Wirt Powell. Then, I don't know, we had a Miss Griffin. Mrs. Griffin, she was a real old lady. Her and her husband had it. The Griffins lived up here on 637 now, where you turn and come in here? She lives further up on the hill than that. Here and her sister, Miss Moore, they taken care of here for years. And I think they was the last ones.

Q: How about that? And then it closed down?

A: Right.

Q: Let's see-- schooling. Was there a school down here for you when you were young, growing up?

A: Right.

Q: What kind of school?

A: There was Oakgrove School.

Q: Oakgrove school?

A: Widewater. That was a one-room school. And at first, it was first through sixth grade, but I think it went up to the seventh grade.

Q: And you went most of the six years? Six grades?

A: Right.

Q: About 6 to 12?

A: Right.

Q: You quit to go to work?

A: Right.

Q: Well, let's see. You had some church activities. Let's talk about some of the holidays during the year that you might celebrate. What were some holidays that your family would celebrate?

A: Well, Christmas was one of the main ones, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, Thanksgiving, was the main ones. And Memorial Day.

Q: Memorial Day.

A: The Fourth of July. Always celebrated all of those.

Q: What were some of the things you would do at Christmas? What was the way your family celebrated Christmas?

A: Well, we'd give gifts and we visited homes. And children were out and they'd gather and set firecreckers--fireworks. We were allowed to shoot fireworks, then.

Q: You did that on Christmas?

A: Right.

Q: As well as the Fourth of July?

A: Right. We did that at Christmas-- That was our main time.

Q: Oh, really? Main time was Christmas?

A: Right. We didn't bother with it on the Fourth of July so much, but Christmas was the main time.

Q: Shooting off fireworks.

A: Everybody cooked for weeks. Or cooked a week ahead. Cook it up, prepare it for Christmas. ...they made pies and cakes, everything. Everywhere you went, you had to eat.

Q: Can you remember well enough as a child exchanging gifts? Do you remember any of the particular gifts that you might have gotten?

A: Yes, we exchanged gifts. And get socks, handkerchiefs, and children would exchange toys. And mostly we got from the children. ...exchange toys. Wasn't too many toys given out back then. 'Cause didn't have that many toys and people didn't buy those many because the worst things that people had to buy was clothing for the children. And they'd give them more for Christmas was clothes to wear to school. For their schooling.

Q: More than toys?

A: More than toys. You gotten one toy, you was doing very good. But we'd make cards. Give them out. You know, write your name on it and then all the kids would give cards to one another.

Q: And do you remember any particular Christmas that was particularly a good one? or one that sticks out in your mind when you were growing up? Anything about any particular year?

A: No. I know one Christmas when I was small, we had a sleet. And it came a rain and icicles-- the trees were loaded down with icicles. And when the sun came out, it looked like you were looking through glass ice.

Q: Oh, really?

A: It was beautiful.

Q: I'll bet it was.

A: And I was real small then. I think I've only seen one or two like that since. And that was the only one-- the best thing that I can remember seeing.

Q: That would be pretty right at Christmas time.

A: Right. We used to have snow. And we'd wish for snow at Christmas.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we'd have that snow for Christmas.

Q: You were more likely to have it back then than we are today?

A: Right.

Q: Because it was colder back then, you said.

A: Right.

Q: What about any kind of ice skating on the creek or on any ponds, or anything?

A: Yes, we used to skate on the ponds a lot and we'd skate on the creek. And the way we got our ice for the summer, was a lot of the people that had big farms had ice ponds, which we people-- we didn't have any. So we went down on Aquia Creek and cut ice for a week, we would.

And we'd go over-- had a hole dug in the bank and we'd put this ice in it. I think it would be 8 to 10, 12 inches thick. And we'd haul it and cut ice, the men got together, and cut ice for a week. And packed it back in that and covered it with sawdust. And then cover it over with anything else you wanted. And that's--we... in the summertime and got our ice out of it.

Q: Is that right?

A: And make ice cream.

Q: Oh, so you--

A: You couldn't use it to put in water or anything, but you set your water on it.

Q: To keep something cold?

A: Right. And they had boxes made. My father used-- he was a carpenter-- they used to make boxes and they'd case it in with sawdust for the outside to it. Just like that wall there. I got the outside, see that piece there?

Q: Uh, huh.

A: And all it, they'd pack that with sawdust. And then they did the top the same way. Bring that ice up and put it in the box.

Q: An insulated box.

A: An insulated box. And you got that ice out there and made ice cream out of it. So then later on, they got trucks and things, as well as the horses, too. Then men started hauling ice around with a team of horses. Haul ice, sell ice.

Q: Sell it?

A: Right.

Q: When you were talking about cutting ice, I wondered how they did that. Did they use any--?

A: Well, I had a regular ice axe.

Q: Ice axe.

A: An ice axe had a blade on it about that wide and about that long (apparently demonstrating to interviewer). You know, like a pick and they'd cut that ice out. I've got my father's old ice axe out here somewhere now.

Q: Is that right?

A: And cut that ice out in blocks. And where they cut it to tie it, pushes it up, they take ice tongs and catch it up and haul it that way.

Q: Cut around and the water would push it up.

A: Right. If you once got one piece cut, but you had to stay close to the shore, because sometimes it would break, you know. But the ice got so thick, you could drive horses across it.

Q: Is that right?

A: Right.

Q: I wonder when the last time it was that thick around here.

A: Well, many a day-- many a day. I know I worked with... Lee one time and we drove lots of surry wheels on a surry-- a buggy and drove a horse and mule up from down at Arkendale up to Widewater on the river.

Q: On the Potomac?

A: Right.

Q: Well, let's see. So you have told me something about Christmas and that was the biggest holiday. I guess Thanksgiving maybe was the next biggest?

A: Right.

Q: Did you do the traditional getting together with family?

A: Right. Big eating day. People only eat turkeys then-- twice a year-- there was Christmas and Thanksgiving because the turkey wasn't good to eat in the summer.

Q: Is that right?

A: They eat turkeys all the time now.

Q: That's right, we do. Maybe had something to do with refrigeration.

A: Maybe so.

Q: Maybe they wouldn't keep too good.

A: I don't know. Well, they had different ideas back then, too. Eat certain things and certain things they didn't.

Q: Yeah. Can you remember any humorous experiences in your childhood or young adulthood? Anything that happened to you or to people that you knew that was particularly funny?

A: No.

Q: Unusual?

A: No.

Q: What did you do for amusement as a child? When you were a little boy? You said something about there weren't many toys given out at Christmas. What were some of the things that you did that you enjoyed doing?

A: Well, I always enjoyed fishing. Everytime I got bigger, I was a little smaller kid, I used to like to go fishing. But we used to play ring games. We used to have games-- jumping rope, high fly, and playing games. We had so many different games we used to play. The children don't play games any more. And we would go from house to house, playing games and all that.

Q: Is that right?

A: Right. And we'd pitch horseshoes and play ball. Used to have a thing with a circle around it, used to play dodge ball, and all that. That was most of the games that we had.

Q: So you had games that didn't require a lot of equipment?

A: Right, right.

Q: A ball and a bat and that was about it?

A: Right.

Q: Okay. Well, I think that we've just about covered the major questions that I have here. Unless there is something else that you can think of that maybe I haven't covered that you'd like to tell about. Growing up in Stafford County. You told me about the first electricity that came in, paved roads and automobiles.

A: No, I don't think there is anything else.

Q: I think you are a little bit unique and unusual in that you are pretty much living here like you were 40 or 50 years ago when you first built this house. I mean you've got

your farm animals, you've got your chickens and your cows, your vegetable garden. There are not many people who can say-

A: My geese and my ducks.

Q: Yeah, your geese and ducks, fishing pond.

A: That's right.

Q: You've got everything right around you that you'd ever want, don't you?

A: That right. I like it.

Q: Not many people can say that they live in a way now that they did 40 or 50 years ago. But you've got it all right here.

A: Well, we used to raise hogs too up until the last three or four years. I don't-- my knees are so bad, carrying the water out to feed them and all, so I had to settle-- we used to have 25-30 head of hogs ... one time.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: Yeah. Used to have a herd of sheep here. ...until I got rid of those.

Q: Yeah. Well, I would like to know a little more about the house. You told me you built it. Did you build it all by yourself or did you have some help?

A: My father helped me build it. And he...

A: Before I finished it, he passed away.

A: Yeah, he got sick and he passed.

Q: Where did you get your building supplies? Materials?

A: I went across that road over there and cut these trees down.

Q: Is that your property?

A: No, that was property of Nanny Lee. The lady I worked for. I bought this property from her.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: Which was Lee property. Cut trees and take them away from there. And haul the log trees to the mill. I knew what I wanted. My father knew what I needed.

Q: And told them to cut it.

A: How long to cut it, how many 2 x 4's I needed, how many 4 x 4's I needed, 2 x 8's I needed, and how many thousands of weather board. All this weather boards came right across over there and right off this place here.

Q: Oh, for Heaven's sake.

A: I carried it to the mill and had it sawed.

Q: Where was the mill?

A: The mill was down on this road here on 635. Between here and the fire department. And hauled it down there and had them to cut it and I brought it back here and laid it out here. And started building the house.

Q: How did you know how many pieces you would need?

A: I knew what size I was going to build the house.

Q: Is that right? You knew from your experience from working with--

A: Well, I wanted thirty by thirty and 1-- 32 by 30 and then I cut it 30 feet long. And then when I built it, I didn't put this porch on it then. And I built it and built it on brick and cinder block. Then I underpinned with cinder block afterwards.

Q: How long did it take to build it?

A: Well, I tell you, I was working in the days and building it at nights. Spare time, so I guess it take me about a year-- almost. We didn't move in it. We didn't wait to finish it before we moved... working days and nights, and the floors wasn't even down... and my wife, she held lights for me to put out flooring(?) at nights.

Q: Is that right? She held the light so you could put it down. And you were already living in the house?

A: Right.

Q: Well, it's a fine home. I think it's something to be really proud of. There are not many people who can say that they live in a home that they built with their own hands.

A: Yes, we built this house right here. Then I had a sister in D.C. She came down... had this flooring outside. She came down and put every piece of that flooring in the house for me one day.

Q: Oh, really?

A: And we put the roofing on the following night. She said to me one day, "What time are you going to start on that?" Early one Sunday, she came down. She's from the church on Sunday evening. "What time are you going to start tomorrow morning?" I said, "We're going to start about seven o'clock." She said, "I'll see you." And so we was out here five minutes to seven, here she come up the ladder to put the roof on the house.

Q: Is that right? Your sister did?

A: That's right.

Q: It was really a family project.

A: Yes, it is.

Q: Well, I think I would be remiss if I didn't ask you a little bit about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and if that had any impact or effect on the Widewater community or on your church or anything like that.

A: I don't think so. We was one of the first schools-- Poole School that was integrated. And we had a white superintendent by the name of T. Benton Gayle. I guess you've heard of him?

Q: Uh, huh.

A: Well, I and him were pretty close together. We had a lot of run-ins. But when we worked for the integration, Reverend Smith, Reverend Patterson, myself and all of us, we got together and Frank White and what's that Monicue boy's name? I can't think of it right now, but anyway, we went to work on it. And we didn't ...

Q: Is that right? You all just formed a committee?

A: Right.

Q: And went to the superintendent.

A: We went to him.

Q: With the request.

A: And we went to him and we got together and we got a petition and we worked on it.

Q: Because you wanted the black children to be able to go to school with the white children?

A: Right. And so when we did it, we had two to go in the same day. They sent the two of them. That was at the school up here at Stafford Courthouse.

Q: Where today is Stafford Middle School?

A: Yeah. Right.

Q: It was Stafford High School then.

A: I believe it is.

Q: It's Stafford Middle now.

A: Right.

Q: But it was Stafford High School. You had two to go in there.

A: Right.

Q: Do you remember their names? The students who first to go in there?

A: No, I don't. One was a Mercer- three of them went in there, I think. One was a White and I think one was a...

Q: A Mercer and a White.

A: I can't think of who that was. We just had that thing here some time back, too.

Q: Is that right? One of the anniversary celebrations?

A: Right. We had a banquet-- we had a speech on that. It was a year ago.

Q: Yeah. It probably been some of anniversary.

A: Right.

Q: In '85-- probably 20 years- probably about 1965, wasn't it?

A: Something like that, right.

Q: So, you probably had an anniversary.

A: Right.

Q: Celebration.

A: We had a celebration and had them all there and we had it up there at the (what school did you say?) ...

Q: North Stafford?

A: North Stafford.

Q: Is that right?

A: Right. And we having something there in September. We're having Lt. Gov. Wilder. He's gonna speak to us.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, which group is sponsoring this?

A: The NAACP.

Q: Is that right? That's good. So the Lt. Gov. is going to be up there.

A: Right. He's going to be there. I keep so much junk around, I tell you. I don't know where

Q: Was the NAACP-- was the local group of that formed about the time of the Civil Rights Movement?

A: Well...

Q: Or did you have one before then?

A: We had one long before then.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yes, we had one long before then. And we had one long before then. But we didn't get the NAACP in that. This is like one of the tickets like we had. What's going on.

Q: Let's see what this says. "Annual Freedom Fund Banquet at North Stafford High School. Keynote speaker Lt. Gov. Wilder" and this is on Saturday, September the 13th at 7pm. Oh, that's nice. That's real nice. You've got somebody in your group, in your NAACP group, Stafford branch, who's got some connections.

A: Yeah, we decided to get-- Wilder.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yeah. I worked with the NAACP, I worked with the Democrats. I go to conventions and what not.

Q: So you go ... local politics?

A: Yeah. All my life.

Q: Which

APPARENTLY THE TAPE RAN OUT AND THE INTERVIEWER WAS UNAWARE