

STAFFORD COUNTY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW of JAMES THOMAS CHINN by  
LOU Y, SILVER

APRIL 13, 1986

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Date of agreement 4/13/86

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Subject of Tape(s)

JAMES THOMAS CHINN

Q: Today is April the 13th and I am present to interview Mr. James Thomas Chinn for Stafford County Oral History Project. My name is Lou Young Silver. Mr. Chinn, the first question I want to know is when were you born?

A: February 20, 1896.

Q: That's a good, ripe old age. Where was your place of birth?

A: You could almost say "rotting" away.

Q: Were you born in Stafford County?

A: Right here on this spot.

Q: Right in this home.

A: Not this home 'cause the old house was down here.

Q: The old house which was close by. Has your family always lived here?

A: Yes, my father moved out here when he was a young man. His daddy gave him this first acre of land and he built a store and educated himself in this store by getting, borrowing, buying, and stealing all the books he could get; then he taught school 30 years.

Q: Do you know where they lived before they came to Stafford County? Or has your family always-

A: Always been there.

Q: In Stafford County.

A: About a mile from a place we called the old place--that was the home--there was a log house. You know where Mr. Minor Jett used to live?

Q: I certainly do.

A: It's on the hilly side.

Q: Which would have been close to the old Sim Peyton(?) farm and the Stapleton Chinn(?) farm.

A: That's... almost next door.

Q: That's correct. What kind of work did the women of the family do? Did they stay in the store, did they go outside of the home to work?

A: This here store? No, he was chief, cook, and bottlewasher. He said there wasn't much business--he had time to study.

Q: That's good.

A: So he did that, and then taught.

Q: Taught school.

A: He had an orchard here--had a big orchard. It was one of the biggest around here at that time. People didn't have much orchard of any size.

Q: Did the family raise their own food? Raise their own crops?

A: Yeah, we raised everything that we used. We had the place--see this place here and the old place-- the home place and then a place down near Mr. Johnny Catlett(?)--what we called Potomac. It was about half open and half woods.

Q: Do you remember approximately how many acres did the family owned?

A: In all of it?

Q: In all of it.

A: It was 40 down on the Potomac and 928 hundredths acres here and the old place, I believe, was 66.

Q: That's a considerable amount of land. Do you think the land was worked with mules or any kind of tractor?

A: Horses.

Q: Horses of some type. Were there any kind of farmer's organizations in the county?

A: Not that I ever.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: I had one brother and two sisters and three half brothers and three half sisters.

Q: That was a good size family. Were you the oldest? Or the youngest? Or in the middle?

A: I am next to the youngest.

Q: Next to the youngest.

A: You see, Esther was the youngest.

Q: Are you remembering back to your years as a single man--did you go to school in this area?

A: I went to school to my daddy, mostly. Whatever he--then, you know, they

would get rough on a teacher and throw her out, Mr. Jim Ashby would come around and ask him if he'd take over the school the next year and he would do it. He would have to whip a few... and that's the way he did it--where ever be taught, I went with him. Sherwood Forest, Stageroad, New Hope, and White Oak.

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Q: Do you remember when White Oak School was first opened, Mr. Chinn?

A: 1913, I believe.

Q: 1913. Did your family contribute the land that that school is on?

A: Yes, uh-huh.

Q: I think the deed does say that that was Chinn property.

A: Yes--it was my mother's property.

Q: That was your mother's property.

A: It was left here by her grandfather. We still keep it--should have sold it, but just haven't.

Q: Do you remember how many years you went to school, Mr. Chinn?

A: Well, I just went to school when I could. My older brothers left home when I was 15 and I took over the farming and I would have to do the farming and go to school after Christmas. That was the schooling I got.

Q: That was good timing. Do you know if you have any of your old report cards? Do you remember keeping report cards?

A: No--I don't guess I was proud of them.

Q: I found my grandmother's old report cards and they are dated 1856. I will share them with you sometime and let you see the teacher's handwritings for the old report cards. Do you remember the date of your marriage, Mr. Chinn?

A: It was August 1923, but I don't remember the day.

Q: August 1923--that's quite alright--the year is good. What was your wife's

maiden name?

A: McCalley, M-c-C-a-l-l-e-y.

Q: Did she work prior to you all getting married?

A: Yes, yes--she taught Stafford Courthouse her first year.

Q: And do you and Miss Nattie have some children?

A: Yeah--got four--three boys and one girl. J.T., Ralph, Johnny Mac, Janet. She's ... a Le Couteur now.

Q: And did they go to school? Some of the same places that you went to school?

A: Well, they started out here, but they all went to college except J.T. He wanted to get married, so he got-

Q: Got married. Where do your children now live?

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A: J.T.'s in Spotsylvania County. He's retired from the Post Office. Ralph is in Atlanta, Georgia. He taught Psychology at Emory University and now he has quit teaching--got tired of papers--and he's Research at Emory where he has been. He done that partially... all the years--he later loved--medical research.

Q: That's Ralph and J.T., and where does Johnny Mac live?

A: Johnny Mac's in Richmond.

Q: In Richmond.

A: Janet... excuse me--... next to Doctor Kennedy's place up there.

Q: Argyle Heights?

A: Argyle Heights--I told you I'd forgotten more than I ever knew.

Q: No, you didn't. That's good. Janet lives at Argyle Heights and do you have a number of grandchildren, Mr. Chinn?

A: Seven.

Q: Seven grandchildren.

A: One great.

Q: One great-grandchild. That's interesting. How did you get back and forth to work when you first started to work?

A: On a horse.

Q: On a horse.

A: Rode a horse for two weeks then as bad weather came on, I stayed in town. Then after I went in the Army and got back home, I had to go to John Gouldman and borrow money to buy an automobile. A Jalopy to get back and forth.

Q: What year was it when you bought your first car, Mr. Chinn?

A: 1919.

Q: 1919. And you had already served in the Army in World War I.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: I that correct? Do you have a dependable type of automobile at your recollection of automobiles?

A: I had one I don't believe you ever heard of. Called Briscoe.

Q: You are right--I never heard of that.

A: Sold for \$957 and that was a lot of money. In 1919.

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Q: Yes, it was. Was there much crime in your time of growing up, Mr. Chinn?

A: No, I would say it wasn't. You felt safe anywhere you were. I didn't feel very safe in the Argonne Forest (World War I), but I got out of that.

Q: Did the children of the community have a fairly good society to grow up in? Did you feel that the society was not only crime-free, but?

A: I felt that it was a very healthy situation.

Q: Were the people of your area moving in and out a lot?

A: No.

Q: Or were they stable?

A: No, they were stable. Everybody knew everybody.

Q: That's correct. Were there many community activities that were going on in your neighborhood?

A: Very little--mostly schools would have parties sometime to make a little money. Webb Midyette(?) and John Midyette(?)--do you ever know them?

Q: I remember the Midyette brothers, yes.

A: They lived... and we all three loved to sing. So we'd go the school parties and most always got a free shuffle for entertaining.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: John and Webb were fine boys. Webb, you know, married Eula Rollins.

Q: That's correct.

A: I didn't know if you knew that or not.

Q: Yes--yes, and I remember Harry Rollins and the Midyette family and I do not meet them too often.

A: I think John Midyette was the best lead for a quartet or a trio or anything that I ever heard. He could--when he pitched, you could sing it--he had it right there. He had a wonderful voice.

Q: Mr. Chinn, were most of the activities and the money raisers community things situations associated with either your schools or your churches? Did the churches sometimes have little gatherings?

A: I don't believe, I don't remember any real money raising with the churches, but the schools, of course, would have the parties and sell what they could, you know.

Q: I can remember more from my time frame when the churches used to have little suppers or get-

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A: Yeah.

Q: Togethers to sell food in the summertime--ice cream gathering, or so.

A: I don't know whether you remember the quartet that Stuart Grizzard and... Howard Lloyd, I believe his name was and Carned(?) of Fredericksburg--we had what we called the Hour of Prayer Quartet. And it was sang over WFVA.

Q: On the radio. I remember.

A: We had a good time.

Q: Do you remember the first radios in this community, Mr. Chinn?

A: I was--I believe, Jimmy Lee had the first one. I think he made it.

Q: He built his own radio.

A: I'm pretty sure--if not the first--one of the first.

Q: One of the first. What church did your family attend?

A: Bethel.

Q: Bethel Baptist. Do you remember your father talking about organization of that church? Do you know how long that church has been organized?

A: I know Miss Mary Lee, I remember her--that was the main one down at Bethel.

Q: Miss Mary Lee--that was Doctor Lee's sister?

A: That was Mary Lee.

Q: Mary Lee.

A: Miss Mary and Miss Fanny.

Q: I suspect that church is getting close to 100 years old, isn't it?

A: I believe it was built in 1890, wasn't it?

Q: I believe the building was--yes, I believe it was built around 1890--1



think you're right. What kind of medical facilities do you remember being available for Stafford County residents?

A: What do you mean, medical facilities?

Q: Did you ever have a hospital to go to, or did the doctor come to your house?

A: Well, the doctors came to your house then. Doctor Pratt was our mainstay. What the doctor told you, that was it.

Q: Did he bring the medicine with him when he came, Mr. Chinn?

A: A lot of times, yeah.

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Q: And then after Dr. Pratt, do you remember was Dr. Lee a community doctor?

A: Yes.

Q: Dr. Lee helped out with the family problems and illnesses? Do you remember there being any dentists? That took care of the teeth?

A: The first dentist I ever remember was--what in the world was his name--Doctor something lived down here and he drove around in a two-wheel road cart from house to house--pull a tooth and then go on.

Q: Had a pair of pliers with him, huh?

A: I don't why--it'll come to me after you leave--but I remember him very, very well He used to call... us boys... horse.

Q: Did he come at meal time and pull your tooth and he sat down and ate a meal with you, I bet.

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: Lunch or dinner, or whatever.

A: I've often talked about that. As poor as people were, I don't care whose house you went to if it was meal time, you had the meal.

Q: That's correct.

A: And you can't do that now because--

Q: They can't fix the food for you, can they?

A: Times is so different.

Q: Times are very different, Mr. Chinn.

A: Old Dr. Pratt, you know, drove a horse and buggy first in his practice. Then he made some money, then he got a, I think, he got a Buick. And he was the most wonderful man I ever knew. He was a good doctor and he didn't have to have all these x-rays and things. He'd look you in the eye and ask you a question, too. He knew what was wrong with you.

Q: Had Dr. Pratt grown up in this community, Mr. Chinn?

A: Yes, right down here where Agnes Gayle lives. Do you know where she lives?

Q: I certainly do.

A: That's his--that was his home place.

Q: ... the area?

A: John Lee Pratt.

Q: John Lee Pratt.

A: And Henry--all of them. ...over here lived there for years and worked for them.

Q: He did?

A: He cut their hair and did everything...

Q: And your good friend, Mr. T. Benton Gayle, was kin to Mr. Pratt?

A: Mr. Pratt was his uncle.

Q: Mr. Pratt was his uncle. He was a doctor from your own community--a man you'd known for a long time.

A: Never sent me a bill in his life.

Q: Oh, my goodness. That's interesting.

A: He took care of Nattie and the four children and when her time was up, she'd come on home and it was ten days and next time I'd meet him on the street, I said, "How much I owe you, Doc?", and he'd say, "What for, boy?", and I tell you and didn't get any receipt. That was 'cause all of us didn't want any receipt. Never sent me a bill in his life and I reckon other people the same way--if they didn't pay him, that was it.

Q: That's correct. It was sort of an honor system--you paid him when you could pay and whatever you could afford to pay.

A: If they couldn't afford, he wouldn't take it.

Q: That's very interesting.

A: I remember Mrynne Monteith(?), Jimmy Monteith's sister, she had bone cancer and lived, I don't know, two or three years... I understand that Mr. Pratt (Doc Pratt's father) asked him when it was over with, "Did you charge that woman?" He said, "No, sir". "Well, son, I'm glad you didn't." He said when he got through school, he told him, "Now, look, if you treat anybody and they are not able to pay, I don't want you charging them," and he never did it.

Q: That's very interesting. That was a good philosophy for him to live by. Perhaps that's why his brother was so successful as a financier he went certainly a long ways in this life. Do you remember there being any midwives? Anybody in the community?

A: No. There was mostly colored people were midwives and as a boy, I don't remember, I believe, Julie Dickerson that lived out over on my daddy's place on the Potomac. There was a little old log cabin--he let her live there as long as she wanted to live and I think she was. I know I used to hear him talk about so-and-so and being midwife, but I don't remember the names.

Q: It seems to me, Mr. Chinn, do you think maybe Sally Cully might have been a midwife?

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A: I wouldn't be at all surprised.

Q: She had many children--

A: I think then most any colored woman knew how.

Q: That's correct. Most of the colored women did act as midwives in our community.

A: And they were good.

Q: They were good. They birthed a lot of children out this way. Do you remember when electricity came to Stafford County?

A: Let's see--it was about--you said Stafford County--do you mean down this road?

Q: That's correct--down this road.

A: The first electricity we had was 1928. I bought a Kent(?)--the first radio I ever bought and that's when we bought it.

Q: That was almost 60 years ago.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And you still got the radio and do you play it once in a while?

A: No--I guess it is so rusty, it wouldn't play now. We just left it there.

Q: That's interesting. You could remember those utility poles being put up and the electricity lines being run?

A: Oh, yeah. Johnny Hudson worked with Judge Emory(?) for a long time, I remember, trying to get people to sign up to put the poles up on their land, you know.

Q: The right-of-way process. That's interesting. Do you remember when telephones first came down in this area--Monteithsville and White Oak?

A: Doctor Lee had the first line, I reckon. His own line--he built it. And that was shortly after he started doctoring, anyhow. But-

Q: You reckon that was close to World War II?

A: No, that was way before World War II.

Q: That was before World War II--maybe in the '30's somewhere.

A: ... we put in our first telephone--I don't remember the date--but I think it was roughly 1925.

Q: Good.

A: Had an old crank on the wall. Half the time, you couldn't get through.

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Q: You remember the old operator--the first operators with the telephone company?

A: Yeah.

Q: Who had the first farm tractor in this community? Do you remember the first farm tractor?

A: I guess, I would have said the Silver boys.

Q: Probably Isaac(?) Silver family. I can't even remember how long they have been farming, Mr. Chinn. I guess they were always farming with horses, and implements, weren't they?

A: Yeah. Oh, yes.

Q: We will certainly have to ask them about that purchase of the first tractor. Where do you think the first paved roads came? Did it come down White Oak Road?

A: This road from Fredericksburg down to just about where you live in the bottom land, was built the year 1936 and '37.

Q: Before my time, Mr. Chinn.

A: I remember that--men--the men from orange that was building the road stayed here. He slept here and ate here. While they were building the road.

Q: Was it a state effort at that time, Mr. Chinn? Was it a state highway or was it a local effort to pave there roads?

A: No, that was state.

Q: State paving the roads.

A: Yeah, they--I know that was a terrible winter up on White Oak Hill and threw all that dirt, down in the road in the fall and they went through that winter--you've never seen

such a mess in your life. Terrible, but they got it finished in 1937 and I bought myself a new automobile in December of that year--a good clean one.

Q: I bet you had to go through the running board coming up with mud.

A: Oh, yes, I never went to work that winter, especially '36, without an axe, grubbing hoe, and a shovel. 'Cause when I got on White Oak Hill, I knew I'd have to cut a pole somewhere and pry it up and put something under it to get it started again. Didn't have any rough tires then, you know.

Q: How long--do you remember how long the time it would take to get from your home to work, Mr. Chinn? It was approximately seven miles or so that you lived from town--how long do you suppose it would take?

A: You mean that winter?

Q: That winter.  
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A: I usually got up a 2 o'clock, in order to get to town at 5.

Q: Oh, my goodness. What a rough journey.

A: It sure was. You never knew what to expect, you know. You had to give yourself enough time. Get up and go by that little donut shop on William Street hill that was open early in the morning and any of us who worked at the post office stop in there and get donuts and coffee. Carry us over until breakfast time.

Q: That's good. I'm glad you told me about the coffee gathering and... three o'clock or four o'clock or five o'clock in the morning and you all could visit there, huh? That's where they were making the donuts.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's interesting. I thought these donut makers were just recently opening that early in the morning.

A: Well, this was a Greek fella.

Q: Do you remember his name, Mr. Chinn?

A: Uh--I believe either Doonus(?) or Calamos.

Q: That's interesting. Where did you first do your shopping in town? Do you remember the first shopping?

A: Grocery?

Q: That's correct.

A: Mr. A.C. Wooding--he had a store where Dan Jones was--do you remember that?

Q: Yes--Commerce Street.

MRS. CHINN: YOU'RE TAKING A CENSUS OR SOMETHING?

Q: History project.

A: Well, ... so many hucksters in town before coming home, we'd go to Woodings and get groceries for the evening, bring them on home.

Q: How often did you all do your grocery shopping?

A: Usually, their main groceries on Saturday.

Q: Once a week.

A: About once a week. And... Jones had the millinary store up there on lower Caroline. I think it was in the either 900 block--goolrick's Drugstore?

Q: Goolrick's Drugstore.

A: Willis' Drug Store.

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Q: Willis'.

A: On the other corner.

MRS. CHINN: WE HAD WONDERFUL CORN IN THE SUMMER.

Q: They were all the first stores where you all made the purchases. Were there any kind of clothing stores?

A: Yeah--B. Goldsmith(?).

Q: B. Goldsmith and Sons?

A: And Mr. Chancelor(?) was a farm man.

Q: Did he sell hardware kinds of things?

A: He sold any kind of farm wagons, buggies, plows, anything that went along with them.

Q: Do you remember a firehouse? Any kind of fire equipment?

Yeah, I remember when they pulled it by hand.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Where was the closest fire department? Was it in town?

A: Uh-huh. Right--out next to the courthouse.

Q: Real close to the courthouse.

A: Between the courthouse and Masonic Lodge.

Q: That's correct. What we call the old firehouse. Old fire station. On Princess Anne Street.

A: Yeah, that bunch of men would get out there--the two wheels and reel the hose off that and take it down the street.

Do you remember when the firehouse was built, Mr. Chinn? Or has it always been there?

A: No, I don't remember when that was built.

Q: Maybe that was from the olden days.

A: You'll have to see Sam Perry--he can tell you.

Q: Okay. Who was the first postmaster you remember?

A: Mr. Jim Rawlings.

Q: Was he in Fredericksburg?

A: Yes.



Q: And was he the one you worked for? Was he the first man you worked for?

A: He was the first one I worked for.

Q: Do you remember a postmaster being out in this area of the county?

A: My daddy.

Q: Your daddy. Was he always the postmaster?

A: He was the only postmaster who was ever here. I believe he told me he had it 21 years.

Q: Do you remember the dates of those times when he was the postmaster, Mr.Chinn?

A: About--let's see that's--what does that show up there? 1879?

Q: That's correct.

A: Well, it was 21 years before that. No, I mean--after that.

Q: After that, it would have brought it up to about 1900. 18 and 79 would have been about 1900.

A: Just a minute. We had a post office then has a room on the front of the house--it was called the post office room. And it had a section paneled off and you had to be very careful then about mail and that was the post office room. Had a slot cut under the window in the side of the house where people come there at night and drop mail in.

Q: Mr. Chinn, do you remember the old letters being marked with the marking called Monteithsville?

A: oh, yeah.

Q: Why do you think that they named the area Monteithsville?

A: I never did know. I don't know why--I can't imagine.

Q: It must have been just because of the McKeets family had lived here.

A: But you would've thought that White Oak would have been--

Q: The post office. There were two or three old McKeets cemeteries. The old James McKeet cemetery-- must be they named it from the McKeets family.

A: Probably was.

Q: And then, do you think, that when the post office closed down out here, did everyone have to go to Fredericksburg?

A: Well, no, you see, they had a--what they called a star route then--not a rural route. The star route delivered mail to individual boxes and to post offices from here then down to Mathias Point. That was the end of it.

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Q: Do you know when that home delivery was first started? When was the first home mail delivered to people?

A: Oh, the first rural route we had was Howard Johnson's came through here and I really don't remember just what year that was. But it was way back then-I just can't remember the date.

Q: It was an old star route that first started putting the mail out?

A: Yeah--Fredericksburg would make up little baggies of mail for the post offices and they would leave it--would drop it off--one for here, one for Passetanzy, Goby,... and then on down to Mathias Point.

Q: Did the citizens come to the post office to pick up their mail then, Mr.Chinn?

A: Some did.

Q: Some did?

A: At first--when my daddy first had it, they had to--that was the only way to get it. Then when they had to open up the star route, of course, people put up boxes on their land and put it in the family box.

Q: That would be interesting to know if we had any of those first mail boxes-if anybody had been able to preserve the first mailbox with a star route written on them.

A: Andrew Burchell was the first mail carrier that I ever knew here. He rode horse back from Fredericksburg to Mathias Point. Then he got himself a road cart.

Q: Were they able to be in out of the weather some with a road cart, Mr.Chinn?

A: No.

Q: It put them right out in the open weather.

A: Just sitting in the seat. He'd come in blowing his hands. Sometimes when the roads were real bad, he'd go down one day and didn't get back until the next.

Q: Oh, my. That was a long route, wasn't it?

A: It was then.

Q: Do you ever remember there being a postmistress anyway along the route? Do you remember any women running the post office?

A: No, I don't. No then.

Q: No, it has probably been much more recent. If there was ever a postmistress, I suppose.

A: My mother was really the postmistress here. She took care of the post office.

Q: Especially when your dad was teaching school or somewhere else.

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A: Uh-huh. Yes.

Q: Do you remember who the first minister as you were a young man growing up? Was your first remembrance about the minister at the church?

A: Mr. W.W. Owens. He lived down in King George--way down there. He'd drive up--he'd come up on Saturday night and I think we kept all the preachers that ever was. And White Oak(?) also.

Q: You had to provide a little board and a little room for the ministers as they caught in this community.

A: Mr. Norton in Washington, he was, I believe, he was a lawyer, anyhow, he had a daughter who was a lawyer, but he was a well-educated man. He had some real good preachers there. And when the roads were bad, none of the White Oak people were in town, Mr. Norton(?) would walk from Fredericksburg out here and just come on down to the house just like he was supposed to--have supper, spend all night, have breakfast next morning, go to church.

Q: And he didn't even to the same church you went to, did he?

A: No. Of course, my daddy was brought up in this church. He led the singing in this church from the time he was sixteen years old. What was called then "pitching the tunes".

Q: Mr. Chinn, I have read some about the Chinn family history. I understand the Chinn men always liked to sing and had good voices. Have you heard your family talk about the singing?

A: Yeah--there were a lot of it. Tim Chinn in Fredericksburg, I don't know, of a place that I've heard anywhere to equal it. It was the mellowest bass you ever heard and it's... but he was really some kind of good. He sang at the Baptist choir in Fredericksburg for years. He had a habit of drinking a little bit too much and every now and then he would get off and... but when he got straightened up, and got his suit on and waxed his moustache, went back to the choir, they'd be glad to have him. I'll tell you.

Q: Had a good voice and enjoyed singing.

A: Oh, boy, he sure did. My daddy taught him music--he taught a class here when he was a young man. Tim and Liz Chinn Green--you remember Jess and Myrtle?

Q: Yes.

A: Their mother. I think he had a class of about 15 of them. And every year they had this meeting here--a three-day meeting. All of them came back and I tell you, you could tell they were in church when you be there. They could make your hair stand on your head. Lynn had an alto voice--just the sweetest alto you ever heard and you could sit next to her and it was nice

and quiet or you could sit across the house and her voice was over there. It just carried everywhere.

Q: My grandmother, Iva Cox, thought there was no grander time than to come to White Oaks Baptist Church.

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A: Uh-huh.

Q: To help pitch a tune, some chairs and do some singing with the Baptists. That was a fun day.

A: Well, my daddy taught himself music as well as he taught himself to read and write and do other things and long as he lived, when they had church services there, he was there. And he always "pitched a tune".

Q: Pitched a tune--yep. They still do not sing with music, do they, Mr. Chinn? They have no piano or-

A: No, that's what caused the split, you know.

Q: That's what caused the split in the church.

A: That's caused a split when it was built. Somebody bought an organ in there.

Q: I see.

A: It was a little, small organ, you know, and it--that's when they organized--that's when my daddy was a charter member.

Q: It says in the Bible, "Praise the Lord with singing; be joyful." He thought that meant with music, didn't he?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: So he went with the group that enjoyed the music. Do you realize that the White Oak Baptist Church is going to be celebrating their 200th birthday?

A: Is that right?

Q: Very shortly. They are about 200 years old. Can you remember some of the other families that helped to organize Bethel Church? You mentioned the Chinn family and the

Lee family.

A: The Lee family. The Farmer family.

Q: Farmer family. Coxes(?) I suspect were--

A: Yes--oh, yes.

Q: Maybe the Monteiths? Were the Monteiths instrumental in helping with that church?

A: I doubt it. They were not much church goers.

Q: I was trying to remember what the families were. Were the Midyettes close enough to this community?

A: No, they were not here then.

Q: They were not here at that time. The Cliff family--was the Cliff family here?  
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A: That's right--Aubrey and Howard Cliff's people(?).

Q: That church will soon be celebrating its 100th anniversary.

A: I guess my daddy was the first clerk of the church, I guess.

Q: Did they have an administrative kind of meetings or was it a deacon's group that ran the church? How was the church organized?

A: Well, I suppose that's the point--anybody that would who would do it. I wasn't old enough to know about that.

Q: Maybe they had like a board of trustees or as you said, a clerk of the church.

A: They had deacons.

Q: Deacons.

A: Treasurer.

Q: Yep--a treasurer. And do you think in those olden days, perhaps they paid the minister with room and board sometimes? Or perhaps in products--food products rather than money?

A: Anyway they could get it.

Q: Anyway they could get it.

A: Bring a chicken home.

Q: Take a chicken home with him--that's correct. Go back a little bit, Mr. Chinn, did the schools have any superintendents when your dad was teaching school?

A: Oh, yes--Mr. Jim Ashby(?)--old man as we used to call him--Jim Ashby. Young Jim.

Q: And was he the superintendent of more than the Stafford Schools?

A: No, just Stafford.

Q: Just Stafford. Did he live in this area?

A: No, he lived up at Stafford courthouse.

Q: Stafford courthouse area.

A: That section.

Q: Was there mostly like one-room schools, Mr. Chinn?

A: Oh, plenty of them.

Q: Plenty of them. One--

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A: See, everybody had to walk--they had to have a lot of schools.

Q: That is true. Do you remember when people stopped walking and maybe rode horses back to school? Did the children ever ride horses to school?

A: No, I don't believe I ever saw any children ride horses to school then.

Q: Probably the days of walking--maybe the next way they got on school buses, huh?

A: Oh, children had a rough time then.

Q: Yes, they did.

A: They'd have to make it best way they could.

Q: I believe I'm going to see if I can find a school picture of the old White Oaks School in the teens sometime. Do you remember ever taking school pictures?

A: I think... children had one. I'm pretty sure she has a picture.

Q: Good. I'll ask Mrs. Fines(?)--see if she has a picture of the first school children--the first school age group. Can you remember there being any type of birthday parties or any kind of anniversary celebrations, Mr. Chinn? What's your first recollection of a social get-together?

A: Well, even when I was a boy, we--different families, you know, would gather and would have... of different kinds--dances.

Q: Okay, Mr. Chinn, tell me about your birthday celebrations.

A: Well, always I said to my mother, I always had a--usually a coconut cake--that was--had a cake and limonade for your birthday.

Q: That was interesting. Did you ever have a hot drink since you were born in February?

A: Well, my daddy drank coffee and I thought everything he did was alright so I drank coffee. He didn't put any sugar in his coffee and I never have put any in mine.

Q: That's interesting. I think that makes for good healthy men. Do you remember a railroad crew or who worked on the railroad? What do you remember about the history?

A: No, I don't--I know there's some railroad men in town, but I didn't know of them, personally. I've heard of different people, but I don't remember the names now.

Q: The railroad really did not come close to our community, did it?

A: Uh-uh (no).

Q: Can you remember anything about airplanes--the first airplanes?

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A: Oh, yeah. You'd hear a plane coming, you'd run outside and watch them. To see what the heck was going on.

Q: Besides your father, Mr. Chinn, can you remember any other school teachers who taught you?



A: Let's--Dora Shelton taught--Mr. Rawleigh Shelton's daughter. She taught school and then, of course, Miss Mary and Miss Fanny in this neighbor and Lee, you know who I'm talking about?--Miss Fanny Lee.

Q: Was there--

A: And then, I think in the upper part of the county, they had some different women teaching, but I didn't know them.

Q: Do you ever remember a Mr. Lee Wallace?

A: Oh, yeah. You should have said so. He used to come up the road early in the morning, you could hear him whistling by the time he got down to where you live, he was either going down to Sherwood Forest, to teach school.

Q: He must have been a school teacher for a long time.

A: They say he was a very good teacher, too. With what he had to do with.

Q: He taught at New Hope School. My uncle said he was a stern school master.

A: Oh, yeah. Willie Redman up here said he learned more from Mr. Wallace than anybody he ever went to school to.

Q: Do you ever remember women school teachers? Other than Miss Fanny and Miss Mary Lee?

A: Well, Dora Shelton.

Q: Dora Shelton. That's correct.

A: And--and then coming along in the 1920's, I guess, we got some in from away from here. I know the best school teacher I ever went to was Miss Florence Ryland(?). She was a Ryland from King and Queen County. Her brothers--two or three were doctors, judges, and I don't know what all and they were an educated family. But she was a wonderful teacher. She didn't stay but one or two years. I wished she had stayed longer--I could've learned a little more. I... going to school the same time over here and then when they had class then they'd line up the history class all the way around the room and... big enough to know any history and, of course, the teacher would ask you questions about the--after you read your lessons to see what you knew about it. We were standing there one day having the class and all of us--suddenly, Miss

Rawlings asked me a question as I said--luckily, I knew the answer to that one, but in the meantime, Benton had gotten himself set with a stick pin and jammed it to me and when I answered it, I screamed the answer and jumped up high out of... She looked at me and said, "Dick, what's the matter with you?" Well, I didn't say a work--I wasn't going to tell on him. But she was smart. She said, "Benton, did you do anything to Dick?" Said, "Yes'm--stuck him with a pin." So I said, "Benton would always tell the truth." I don't guess it would 20

(A: continued)

hang him. But she was really--she knew how--just knew how to make you study. 'Cause if you didn't do it and know it, you just felt terrible.

Q: Mr. Chinn, do you remember approximately what year she was here? What years did she teach school?

A: Umm--I don't--as long--the school hadn't been built long--just a year or two.

Q: Close to 1914, probably, wasn't it?

A: 1914, '15, '16, somewhere along there.

Q: That's good.

A: As I said, I worked the farm and went to school what time I had and I--just had to take advantage of it because I hadn't had the chance to get any education.

Q: Well, was education compulsory at that time? Mr. Chinn?

A: Oh, no--

Q: Only those that went that wanted an education.

A: Wnated it--that's right.

Q: You and Mr. T. Benton Gayle were classmates? Do you remember some other classmates of yours?

A: Yes--Joe Chinn and George Chinn, and Inez Chinn, Nimmie Monteith, Fanny and Kate Cox--a whole gang of them. Eula Rawlings(?).

Q: Was Fleet Cox too young to go then or--?

A: No, Fleet was in there. Fleet was 4 years younger than I.

Q: Were there any Monteiths school age at that time?

A: Paul.

Q: Paul Monteith. That's an interesting class. I am sure Miss Rawlings had her hands full.

A: She sure did.

Q: Did she eventually get married or did she leave here to teach somewhere else?

A: She went to John Morrison in Richmond and taught there the rest of her life. As long as she could teach and never married.

Q: And never married. I think the teachers were married to the profession and their career, Mr. Chinn.

A: Uh-huh.

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Q: They taught for all their lives. But do you remember Miss Marion Andrews?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: When she came to this community to first teach?

A: She--I think she--I guess she stayed at our house until they were married. (She married Fleet Cox; Mr. Chinn's neighbor then and now.)

Q: And that would have been maybe by the early 1918 or 1920 or somewhere in there?

A: About--yes--it was about 1918 or 1920--I think she was here the winter that I was in France. And then afterwards, too.

Q: And then do you remember what year did your wife start teaching school? Did she--do you remember a time frame or when she started working with the schools?

A: Let's see--the year of the Nickerbocker Theatre was what--'22? That was the year she taught at Stafford Courthouse.

Q: That's interesting. Mr. Chinn, you can tell us a lot about the history of the schools in Stafford County. I bet you and Mr. Gayle are walking history of schools in Stafford County.

A: I guess we used to be well what we can remember.

Q: Well, I want to thank you for this history interview today and if I need another chance or get another chance to sit down and do some more history, are you willing to talk some more?

A: Yes, indeed.

Q: Well, I certainly appreciate you helping us out. I want to thank you so much.

A: I'll tell you all I know--my brother used to tell me when I talked too much. He said, "Tell all you know--it won't take long."