

SPOTSYLVANIA PRESERVATION FOUNDATION , Inc.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript of Interview with Mrs. Agnes Whitlock

September 24, 2000

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Today is September the 24th, 2000. My name is Christine Walsh. I'm with the Oral History Program of the Spotsylvania Preservation Foundation. I'm at the home of Agnes Whitlock Spotsylvania County, and Agnes has offered to do an interview for our Oral History Program. So, tell us about your family background.

Well, my great-great-great-grandfather purchased this land somewhere in the area of 1680.

We do not have definite dates on that. It was a land grant from the King of England. Somewhere along the line ... there has been some mention, but it has not been really distinguished ...

that they had created some land from what is now Fall Hill. They had owned a portion of what is Snow Hill, or whatever it was, and this property over here. Originally, I believe there was about three thousand acres in this tract. It has never been deeded out of the Stewart family.

Gradually pieces have been sold off. The heirs sold their piece off, and others sold their piece off.

The remaining fifty-nine acres I own now from my dad. My dad was born and raised there, his father was born and raised there ... straight on through. They've all lived there.

The house was used in the Civil War as a hospital for the North. My grandfather was a young boy, probably seven or eight years old at that time, and the family were moved down into the basement.

They stayed in the basement while the war was going on and the Northerners were upstairs.

According to my grandfather, they probably had life a little easier than some of the people

because his mother was a good cook and she cooked the food that they brought, which they had

stolen from somebody else, I suppose. And she cooked it for them and the family kind of shared

in the food that she cooked. That went on, and after the war was over, the family moved back upstairs. And part of the house blew over in a terrific storm in the early ...

late 1800s or early 1900s ... one wing of it. And up until possibly fifteen years ago, it was still standing and we had it destroyed. My son built a house back on the spot.

Which is really nice, because it's a beautiful view.

It is a lovely view.

When it was a hospital... passed down through the generations, what were your family saying about having the Northerners there? Were they friendly?

No. I have laughed and said many times that I was sixteen years old before I knew that the words

"damn " and "yankee " were two separate words! My grandfather could say it together so rapidly!

You never knew there were two words there. No, he didn't look kindly on them. Well, they lost everything,

except that they did have the house left and I suppose the slaves were still there up until the end of the

Civil War, when they were freed. I understand that some stayed on. But he eventually got over it,

but he was never happy.

Well, someone taking over your house, I can understand why.

They were burying the dead there in the yard but after the war, the Daughters of the Confederacy or someone, came back and removed all the bodies and carried the bodies elsewhere. I don't know if it was to the Confederate Cemetery at the Courthouse or where. But the bodies were taken up and carried away. There are none of them buried there now. The graves are not marked, but there is one grave there for a relative, a young boy who died in the Civil War. He was a soldier but he was just seventeen or eighteen years old.

What was his name?

Churchhill, Stewart.

You are living on the land you acquired from the King of England. How many acres are you actually on now?

I'm on sixty-three acres. It has been divided off, and divided off, and divided off. I recently divided off nine acres and gave it to my daughter. I gave three acres to my son, over there on the hill. So, it's actually fifty-nine acres now that I own of it.

And originally it was?

Oh, three thousand acres. From Todd's Tavern to Piney Branch and back up.

Nice view. Nice area. Tell me about your ... I know you have been a life-long resident of Spotsylvania and you've lived in this house?

Right. Since 1947. We moved in.

You've been here a long time.

Yes.

Tell me about your education.

Always in Spotsylvania County. Originally, I went to the little one-room schoolhouse up at Todd's Tavern,

about a mile and a half up the road. Then to Chancellor Elementary School, which is now the community house.

And then, I was in the first graduating class in Spotsylvania High School, which is now the Marshall Center.

The original high school, the first consolidated high school in the County.

And when you left school?

I went to work. I lived with my mother and daddy until after World War II was over.

When my brothers

came home we built here. I grew up on a dairy farm. My dad ran a dairy farm. So I was a

country

girl at heart, from start to finish.

And it was all dairy farms in this area? So everyone knew everyone?

Yes, sure. No strangers. None of those foreigners came in! I still feel that way, a little resentful.

Like the open spaces.

I know I do like the open spaces, too. So your dad, your father, did he talk much about the area

when he was growing up? And when you were growing up, was there a big change?

Oh, sure there was. My dad went to a little school right down here, Number Nine School, they were numbered.

And I don't actually know how many children ... I'm going to guess, maybe fifteen or twenty ...

local children who could walk to it. That was his education. Daddy had a very limited education.

He was from a farm, was needed at home and worked at the sawmill as a young guy.

When he got enough money, he bought the property up there and a few cattle.

Up there?

Just up the road a little bit. Eventually worked up into a grade A dairy. He kept that up until daddy was about ... oh, in his early seventies. He was at a point where he couldn't do the work any more. He sold the dairy off and then went into beef He kept that, probably for

about ten years, and then he sold it off. He gave my two brothers the property over there and

I got this over here. And they sold it. I kept mine.

Where the Tavern is now, you purchased that land?

We purchased that land in 1951.

And you've given what, a half acre?

Just about. I believe it was a half an acre, maybe a little bit more, but not very much for the Lee Jackson Trail.

So you gave that to the county?

The deed went to the county. It was done partially ... well, yes, to the county. They maintain it and the deed is to the county. In the event that it ceases to be that, it is supposed to revert back to me.

And this is where a lot of the fighting occurred?

Yes, that's where the battle of Todd's Tavern was fought.

Did you find anything on the land?

I don't think there are any relics there now. We've kind of clamped down on it because people were very abusive. They'd dig holes and leave the holes. I think, overtime, that a lot of it has rusted out and all. My husband was a Civil War relic hunter and had quite a good collection. He got most of his up there.

Did he find something of significance?

He found some nice pieces, yes.

What were the pieces?

Well, it would be buckles, money, horse shoes, saddles, relics from the saddles, and guns, bayonets. Bullets, bullets, bullets, and more bullets!

And do you have any of that?

Yes. He never sold any of it. He gave it to the children if they wanted it.

With me being from the Spotsylvania Preservation Foundation, we have taken over the old jail at the courthouse and we are trying to restore that... we are in the process of restoring it. Do you know anything about that old jail? Do you have any recollections of it?

No. I know when they remodeled it that last time, from the time before that. I can slightly remember when prisoners were kept in there, it's just a vague memory of knowing when they were in there. That would have been way back. Then it was used for an office part of the time. I believe maybe the extension service was in there. And then it's been vacant for a long time.

Yes. We've been trying to restore it so that it can be an attraction in Spotsylvania. So, now I know where you went to school. It was pretty much in the same building, with the same people you grew up with, and so what did you do back then when you were growing up besides working?

You had to entertain yourself. On the farm, there wasn't a lot of spare time, You could always find something to do. I had horses, I rode a horse a great deal. Of course we had... all three of us ... a pet cow and we kinda... .. we had chores to do. There wasn't a lot of ... there weren't any close neighbors to play with. Didn't have but one Model T and daddy drove that, so it wasn't a matter of ...

So you never really left Spotsylvania? When you heard of other places, did you have any desire of going, or were you content to stay?

Content. This is God's green spot! In the last several years I've done quite a bit of travel overseas, but always, at the end of thirty days, come back home!

This is your home.

Yes. I'm alone here by myself , but that's alright.

And today, the changes?

You know, the American society is such ... and I'm amazed ... in some of my travels ... I went last year to Spain and I was amazed ... this year I'm going to Turkey ... and I was amazed to see the cathedrals, the temples, the monasteries, and those buildings that were before Christ still standing, beautiful buildings... and they talk about how they were all hand carved out of these rocks and what have you ... and we build a house and in fifty years, we bulldoze it, build another one!

Which is really sad. The Harris House, do you know anything about it? Down at the courthouse?

You mean the hotel?

Where the Doctor lived. Opposite the old post office.

No, not really. You mean Dr. Harris' residence? I've been in it, but that's all ... not as far as the history of it is concerned. The Crismonds and ... Dr. Harris ... I've been in it to see him, but other than that, no.

Was he your Doctor?

Oh, yes.

What's happening to that house is awful, isn't it? It's just falling apart.

Well, I thought they were going to restore it? Bill Vakos owns it? Does he?

I don't know who owns it. Anyway, it's just dilapidating. So that was the hotel that was at the courthouse, you come to a dead end and right in front of you was the hotel?

Yes, that's where my husband's office was for ... probably twenty-five years ... in that building.

And then they moved over in the Gardner building, but he had retired at that time.

Do you remember it being a hotel?

I remember when it was just apartments upstairs and there were two offices downstairs, on both sides of the hallway. He had one side and the County Agent had the other side, but not when it was a hotel as such, but when it was rented apartment.

That's a beautiful building. I can just picture it being a hotel. Which is something we need. Is there anything you would like to add?

No ...

You enjoyed horseback riding?

Oh, absolutely.

Do you have any horses now?

My daughter hasten or twelve hereon my property. She loves the horses. She got that from me,
She loves the horses and they have them. My two granddaughters out there, they ride and they love them. The older girl, she's out there now. She has done well in horseback riding. As a matter of fact, she went to the international and placed. Not high up, I mean, but to get there is an honor. She won in Texas, I don't remember which ribbon she won, but she went down there and she went to Ohio to the international. She didn't do so well, but it was an honor to have gotten there. Last year she didn't ride. Her horse had thrown her, kicked her, and she didn't ride any at all. She says that she's going back into it now. Her horse went to college for quite a while.

Now, going back to when you finished your education, did you get married right away?

No, I worked at International Tractor Company. I left there and went to the Department of Agriculture.

It was there that I met my husband and we were married. I worked for him, but one of us had to go, so it was me! Then I went home and raised the four children. I went back to work for the John Deere Company.

When they were grown up?

Yes. And I stayed there until I retired.

Are you enjoying your retirement?

Yes, certainly.

You have your grandchildren to keep you busy?

Oh, yes, and great grandchildren!

Are your children around this area?

Yes. One daughter lives up in the second house, my son over here and the other daughter up at

Todd's Tavern on the property. All three are on the property. So, I have a lot to be thankful for.

They didn't get very far from home. They are right there!

Can you tell me what Todd's Tavern is like. The original? Do you have any photographs, do you know how many people it held?

Well, I think it was more or less a livery stable. People... just like any of the other taverns along the road, you know, they would just go along the road, traveling from place to place and would spend the night here and kept their horses and what have you, and went on the way. But I have no idea, really. I've seen pictures of it and it was very crude looking, typical long building with a big porch on it. The pictures I've seen all had horses and buggies, horses and wagons, or whatever, tied to the posts.

That was the means of transportation?

Sure. From place to place and stayed over.

I'm sure they were quite weary when they arrived somewhere.

I'm sure of that! They would just stay the night and then be on their merry way, I assume.

After they had their ale.

I'm- sure they did. That was the accepted thing, I believe. Or hard cider. I'm sure that whatever they served was home produced. Certainly no alcohol was imported from overseas then, so it had to be. The stills and their distilleries within their homes, where they made their wines and ... things of that nature. It would be interesting to go back, just for a week.

I think so, too. Just for a week. It's a shame that in Spotsylvania there is no tavern that is really around. In Fredericksburg they do have the Rising Sun Tavern, so it would be nice, also, to see a tavern in Spotsylvania.

Well, there were several taverns in the county. There was one up at Good Hope Church ... what's the name of that one? I don't recall the name of it. There was Spotswood Tavern, down in Hanover ... there were a lot of taverns around And I'm sure they were all very similar.

Did you have this house built for you when you first moved in?

Who built it?

Mr. Joe Harding, who is deceased now. A local carpenter. He drove every nail. This is a stick

built house. Not a manufactured one.

And your house that your son ... where he lives now ... the original house that stood there. Do you know how that was set up? Who built that house?

Oh, well, I know the bricks were made there on the farm ... and it was log, so I would assume the slaves. I don't really know, because it was log ... and later on, weather boarding had been put on it, but it was log. Well, there was, on the first floor, it was high up ... it had a half basement out of the ground- which was brick. And the rest of the building was frame.

What year was that built?

On the chimney was " 1791.

It's a shame that it's not here.

That brick was stolen. We don't discuss that! Somebody went upstairs, and out of the window, they were able to chip it off the chimney. Same way with the doors. They were all handmade doors and they all had those hinges. And I'm amazed now when you go in so many of these historical homes, now, the grand tours and what have you ... very, very few of them have those old hinges. It was known as the "T" and "H" hinges. They came down ... there were two pieces. This piece came down here and went over here... and this piece came down here and went over there.

Like two "L" shapes back to back.

Yes, and some of them had the "T," a piece that went in the middle. That and all the doorknobs, they were all stolen. A great deal of them.

Did your house have a name?

No. This road here, we've renamed it. It was always known as the Old Stewart Road, so when 911 came in, we asked that they rename it Stewart Road, but Stewart Lane is what it was always known as and they named it Stewart Road, which is o.k..

So, you didn't actually have a name for your house?

No, not to my knowledge.

The farm back then, was it known as Stewart Farm?

"Stewart Place " is what I think they referred to it as.

Going back to having three thousand acres, how much of that was taken up ... how much was useable?

I have no idea. It certainly ... I am sure that a lot of it was woodland. I'm assuming that. I don't know,

But as I said, each generation, the heirs sold it ... divided it. And then of course, the heirs passed it on and then they sold it, or what have you. And got out of it ... the farm. This is the only piece ... and I don't really know how many acres are here. It's never been surveyed.

We know what Bobby's acre came off of ... three acres ... we know what Linda's came off

of. .. those were both surveyed. But we don't know what's left. My five acres were surveyed,

but what's left? We don't know. It's just a matter of how many acres there were when my grandfather had it. His father had so many acres ... how many did James get?

James had one hundred and two acres and then he had a hundred and sixty-six acres, which was his

mother's. So, he and two hundred and sixty-eight acres. That was my great great grandfather.

Then, of course, that was divided three ways. Part of it was over on the other side of the road and my grandfather got this section, which he sold off part of it and that's how it ended up.

The amazing part of it is how the deeds refer to the sections... the identification in here... the "C " represents a hickory and a sassafras stump. The "D " is represented by a forked red oak,

the "E " is a pine tree on the south side of Mahonka River, near to Ni. And this tree, the sycamore tree, and the pine tree have all died. There's a persimmon stump, two gum trees,

white oak trees, a red oak, and another red oak. They refer to rocks, staked corners ... who knows where that is now?

What we are looking at here is the estate of Thomas Stewart, who died October 1859. He had

"eight horses, two oxen, three colts, two beeves, seven cows with calves, five cows, all yearlings, two buck steers, two buffalo steers, a type of cattle without horns, fifteen hogs, five sows with pigs, four shoats, nineteen sheep and twenty-two geese. Then it says cotton,

wheat, Irish potatoes, corn, hay, fodder, straw and rawhides. Wagons, carts, harrows, barrels,

bottles, grindstone and workbench, farm equipment, tools and supplies. Timber. Four beds and furniture, small bedspread, spread with furniture, and then, another one ... two walnut dining tables, two settees and twelve chairs; a small table for books and five chairs, two pair of cards and table. One press and one desk; one set of drawers and one press; one small press. Kitchen furniture, coffee mill, two pair of iron crickets, and clamp; four spinning wheels, other furniture and miscellaneous items." And that was his estate. Is that the only copy you have?

There are other copies here. Now, here's the certification on one of these that came in 1952 ... from the records...from Book T, page 402, the third of May, 1952. Is when she made a copy of it from the clerk's office.

In Spotsylvania County Court, May 3, 1852, this division of the land belonging to the estate of Thomas Stewart was this day returned and ordered to be recorded. Do you have any photographs of your great grandfather?

Somewhere!

It would be interesting for you to have that.

I do have one, as I say. I have my dad, of course.

So your father was a dairy farmer?

Yes, all his life. Sun up until sundown. Three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

That's what I'm hearing. I'm hearing that it was just one day after another. I'm sure they must have loved it.

Had to have. I can remember when he tilled fields with nothing but mules. And it was probably in the early forties when he bought his first tractor, which I have down here in the barn. And it

would run, except the gaskets and everything have dried out on it. I just could not see it sold. It sits kinda cock-eyed ... and I could just picture daddy in the fields on it. It's down there.

And even Sunday, you were busy on the farm.

Absolutely. There was not much spare time when we were children. We grew up ... we had our chores and we did them. Even after he had electricity, if the current went off, those milk trucks were coming, and those cows had to be milked And daddy would root us out of the bed at four o'clock in the morning ... the whole family went... because the cows had to be milked.

Gordon was telling me about the big snow storm ... and how many cattle he lost because they couldn't get to the...

Yes, They couldn't get to this road. There were quite a few days until they finally brought a piece of equipment in from somewhere and opened the roads so the milk truck and the mail truck could get through.

What year was that?

Oh, goodness. Early ... I would say between '35 and '40. Somewhere along in there. We children walked on the fence posts, it was so high where it drifted so bad.

And was that the only year you can think of it being that bad? I'm sure that you lost...

I don't recall that we lost any cattle, but daddy didn't have as large a dairy as Mr. Hilldrup, and I know they had a lot of them in barns way over ... so, I'm sure that they did lose cattle.

After your father was through being a dairy farmer, it wasn't passed on?

He gave it to my two brothers, but he had sold the cattle, he had sold the equipment ... all of that he had sold. The equipment ... the tractors and all that was still there, but he had sold all of the dairy equipment. All of that was gone. He had sold that. It went with the cattle when he got rid of them, because he was not able to take care of them any more.

He worked until he was seventy?

Oh, yes.

And that was hard work.

Oh, yes. But he loved it. It was the only thing he knew. He was very gentle with his cattle.

He didn't ... they were very special with him. Some, you know, had the reputation of being pretty rough with them, but daddy was very protective of his cattle. He loved his cattle. And, of course, he and mother married right after World War I. He came back from World War I. And they were married about sixty-five ... I believe it was sixty-six years.

That's a lifetime. Sixty-six years.

Yes. Daddy died in June and mother died the following April. He was ninety and she was eightyone.

Longevity is in your family!

And then, I lost a son who was just twenty-eight years old.

Oh, that's tough.

One of those things. It wasn't an accident. It was just a one of those freak things of nature. Similar to ... sudden death. You know, the athletes and what have you that... ? Just the picture of health. He was six foot two and weighed, probably about two-thirty-five ... very athletic.

He jogged, he swam, he ... I remember the rescue squad, I remember the fire department ... all of that. That didn't save him.

No, seems like when it's your time ... so, tell me about your grandchildren and their horseback riding.

Oh, heavens! I have fifteen grandchildren and step-grandchildren ... and I have ten great grandchildren! I have a granddaughter living in Michigan, a step-grandson and his wife in South Africa, and all the rest are around in the general area.

Do you have big get-togethers?

Oh, yes. Everybody laughs, we have at least thirty-five, forty here. Well, we divide them. Easter is always here and then Christmas, Thanksgiving and the 4th of July are divided between the three children and they rotate back and forth. But, it is understood that Easter is always here.

We like to hide eggs in the yard and we always have an Easter egg hunt, egg tosses, and those things. A very close family.

That's very important. It's how you're brought up.

Yes, sure.

And how you work together.

Yes, I think so. Now, the two girls went to California, left their husbands there and came back here! They wanted no part of California. And I said, fine! I've gotten everything I wanted from California and they can throw the rest of it in the ocean! When they came home they would agreed that that was the best move they'd ever made ... to come home.

So you had two that came back. And they just loved this area?

Yes. It was home. They've both since then married and all, that's how I got my stepgrandchildren.
That's part of it.

And in all of your travels, you've been to different countries? Is there any other place you'd like to live?

Oh, heavens no! I guess the first time that I ever flew out to California to see the girls, they lived in Downey and it's a world of fantasy and the prettiest sight I ever saw was when the plane circled over Dulles airport. When that plane came over the hills of West Virginia, and I saw the green trees and the green fields, I never knew the fields were so green! I've laughed about that so much. Since then, I've been to Ireland ... I said, "That's the greenest fields I've ever seen. "

They said, "No, Mama, you said that the greenest green was up at Dulles airport! " I usually treat myself every year to a trip.

Which is nice.

This year it's Turkey, I'm leaving the 9th of October.

We'll have a good trip.

Thank you.