

Jackson State University
Third Annual Mini Workshop
On Oral History
"Community Oral Histories Focusing on Clinton"

Interviewee: Mr. Charlie Peterson
Interviewer: Tom Hardy

Subject: Child Rearing

Date: May 27, 1977

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Palce: Mr. Peterson's home in Clinton, Mississippi

Mr. Charlie Peterson was born in 1891 and has been a life long resident of Clinton, Mississippi. He lives in a house that he remodeled for his family in the 1940's.

The interview began with the discussion of Mr. Peterson's family history. The discussion and questions centered on that period in our history known as slavery. It is next followed by stories of the Clinton Riot and the murder of Charles Caldwell, both of which are not filled with much detail.

Education and Christanity are two topics, which played an important part of the Peterson Family's life. The school is described and teachers are remembered. During the interview Mr. Peterson gives an overview of the curriclum of his school during the turn of the century.

Other subjects discussed are: Baptisms, Crops, clothing, etc.

TH This is an interview of May 27, 1977. We are interviewing Mr. Charlie Peterson of Clinton, Mississippi. Mr. Peterson resides at 420 Dunton Road in Clinton. We are interviewing Mr. Peterson at his home.

Mr. Peterson I would first of all like to ask you if it is alright to use this interview, which we are taping, in our library?

CP Yes, it will be alright with me.

TH Mr. Peterson, when were you born?

CP I was born in 1891.

TH Now, thinking back, let's look back at your parents, and talk about them for a second. Were your parents former slaves?

CP They were born in slavery, but they were too young to do any work. My father said that he was 10 years old at the time of the Civil War and my mother was about, I reckon about 8. That's the way they told me.

TH So your father then...

CP Was born in slavery. They was that age, you know, when the Civil War was.

TH Did they tell you anything about their parents? and how they were brought up as children?

CP No. I didn't ever hear them say anything about their parents and how they were brought up. They told me about their parents, but they didn't tell me how they was brought up.

TH What did they tell you about their parents?

CP Well, they just told me their names. Who they were.

TH Could we have those names, maybe?

CP Well if I can remember...Now, my father's father was named Anthony Peterson. (And, ah,) my mother's father...I can't think of it (first name), but he was a Robertson. I can't think of his other name.

TH OK. I believe, when I asked you a question in our little pre-interview discussion, you said your father was around when they had the Clinton Riot.

CP Oh yea.

TH Did he ever talk about the Clinton Riot and tell you anything about it?

CP Well, he...(pause) Now, he didn't tell me as much about it as other people. The other people told me more about it than my father did.

TH OK. They told you about this; well, I'm sure it was as a boy, right? When you were a boy growing up.

CP Yea. Small real....

TH Can you relate to us some of these stories about the Clinton Riot that people gave to you, some that even your father gave you?

CP Well, the Clinton Riot was over here...They call it Moss Hill (pause) Riot, Clinton Riot was over here at a place called Moss Hill. They said there was shooting and so on and so forth. I don't know if I heard of anybody getting killed. I think some got wounded, so they told me. That's about all I know about it was just the shooting and rioting, fighting and going on broke out.

TH Well, did they tell you anything about a man named John Caldwell, who was killed shortly after the riot?

CP No, wasn't John.

TH It wasn't?

CP Charles!

TH Charles! That's right! I stand corrected.

CP Charles Caldwell. He was in that riot and he got killed after the riot.

TH Why do you think he was killed?

CP Well, they told me, because...Well, he was a pretty bad fellow they say. I mean he just didn't take nothing. Most everybody, the way they told me, was kind a shy of Charles Caldwell. They...(pause) Right up here in

Clinton where the bank is now, there was an old hotel building and that's where (pause) they shot him-in the basement. He was in there with another man, a white man, and they shot him through the window-Charles Caldwell. They didn't kill him right...I think he died from it, but it didn't kill him in there. But they shot him in there. He died from it alright, from the way they told me.

TH Did they have any idea as to who shot Charles Caldwell?

CP I never did learn who it was. They told me him and a white man went in there. He was called Buck Calver.

TH Buck?

CP Buck Cabbler. They went in there drinking. He went in there drinking and somebody through the window of the basement, but you could see him in the window. They shot him through the window. But I never did hear who it was. I don't know whether they ever found out who it was or not.

TH Now let's talk a little bit about your childhood. As a small boy, growing up in Clinton in the late 1890's and early 1900's, what were some of the things that your parents taught you ?

CP Well, they taught me...They seen that I went to school and Sunday School-Church and Sunday School. I had to do that.

TH So they placed a great deal of emphasis on education and religion?

CP Yes, that was my father's method. He believed in education and Christianity.

TH Now I believe you said that you had a brother who taught at Jackson State?

CP Jackson State-William McKinley Peterson.

TH What department did he teach in?

CP He taught English. I don't know what department. I never did go to Jackson State.

TH To what grade...How far in school did you get?

CP I got to about the 7th grade. Something like that. I never did get high in school. I had to farm. At that time...At that time there wasn't but 6 months schooling a year. Then, back then, my folks were farming and I had to get out of school and go to work in the field. And, therefore, I didn't get high in school.

TH Did most Black Children at that time have to leave school to work in the fields?

CP Most of them had to leave school. Wasn't many schools in these twons, you know, was just farming about. Most of them had to quit school early in March.

TH Where was your school located?

CP It was called Sumner Hill, its out here now. (pointing northwest) I don't know whether you've ever been there or not. It's out here...

TH Sumner Hill School? I know about where it is.

CP Where it is, on Northside Drive. Now it was right up here; just up the hill ofve them houses you see right there. (points to the east)

TH In other words, it was located here on Dunton Road?

CP Not on Dunton Road. This road wasn't cut through here. It was called Old Cynthia Road. They, they threw it out. Cynthia road is way out over yonder, but this here in Clinton...they condimned it and threw it out.

TH So they don't use it anymore?

CP Don't use it anymore. It was called Cynthia Road.

TH Has it grown up?

CP Growed up, went into pasture and what not and so...

TH As a boy; the Dickie Institute, had it been started when you were going to school?

CP Yea. It started fro females. It had students out there, but the students that stayed in the building were nothing but females, girls! Boys could go out there day school. Of course I didn't go out there any. I had a sister to go out there.

- TH How long did she go to Dickie Institute?
- CP She went-I don't know she went a pretty good while, maybe two or three years.
- TH Do you remember when the school burned?
- CP I remember it, but I can't remember what year it was.
- TH Did it cause much excitement?
- CP Well, a right smart, so far as I know of. Nobody got burned in it or nothing. I don't know-I couldn't tell how it burned. What caused it to burn. But it got burnt down and they never did build it back.
- TH Going back to your childhood, where did you go to as a small boy?
- CP The Baptist Church over here now. It's on Northside Drive. That's my church now. It's called the Holy Ghost Missionary Baptist Church.
- TH When was it established? Do you remember?
- CP I can't remember when it was established. It was established since I was born, but I was too small to remember anything about that, you see.
- TH Right. Ok.
- CP But I think I was born when they organized that church and built it over there, from what my parents say.
- TH I have interviewed a man this morning, my next door neighbor, and he told me that when they were small children and even on up as teenagers, an this was in 1901, he said that they were supposed to be in by sun down.
- CP Oh, yea! Yea, that's true! Children...You didn't go into your parents' house all times of the night like children do now. When you were teenage you had to be at home and in the house, especially when dark come.
- TH What reason was this done for?
- CP To keep you out of mischief and keep you... Back then parents trained their children, and seen after them, see where they was, but they don't do it now. Children have they way, you see, now. I couldn't go in my father's after I got grown at no 8 or 9 o'clock at night, he

didn't allow it. Now if I was grown enough to be out at 8, 9, or 10 o'clock at night I had to stay out, somewhere else; don't come in there all times of night.

TH In other words you were locked out?

CP If he didn't lock you out... His command was to stay out. You didn't go in there; then he probably would beat you, you see.

TH That brings us up to punishment for different wrong doings as a child. What were some of the things your parents did to punish you and your brothers and sisters?

CP Well, say what was what?

TH The kind of punishment?

CP Well, they would... If you were under age they would whip you. That's the punishment they used. They would whip you. If you were told not to do a thing and then you went and did it; they would punish you with a whip or switch or something.

TH They would use a whip?

CP A lash or something, you know, or somekind. A belt or go out there and cut them a switch. That's the way they would punish you

TH Would they ever deprive you of anything, instead of whipping you?

CP No.

TH The biggest punishment was to use the whipping as

CP For disobedience. They wouldn't whip you for nothing, but if you did anything they would whip you. They would caution you good "Don't you do so n so n so, cause if you do I'm going to whip you." And then they wouldn't tell you a tale either; they would whip you to.

TH
TH When I was coming up I would always hear the term that when something happened with a Black Person in the community they said, "If he had stayed in his place it wouldn't have happened." This brings me to a question. When you were growing up, I'm sure you heard all of that. Now, when you were growing up did your parents ever do anything to teach you as to what to do to stay in your place as they called it?

CP Yea.

TH Would you mind relating that, because we are very interested in finding this out.

CP Well, relating it about what they would... Explain that again.

TH Ok. I'm wanting to know how your parents taught you to, when you were around whites at that time, how to stay in your place, as they would say. That's what I want to know.

CP Yes, they would tell you how to treat them and what to do. How to treat white folk and a lot more than that - how to treat your color.

TH Ok. Would you relate that. Tell us how they did that and some of the things they told you about that.

CP Well, they just said "Stay in your place. If it's a white person stay in your place and tend to your business and so on. Not only would they tell you that about white, they would tell you that about your color, you see. Tend to your business and let theirs alone. That's the way I was raised by both races and what not."

TH Do you recall any clashes between the Black and White Community? Any misunderstanding that may have resulted in someone being injured in Clinton?

CP I have heard of some difficulties between the White and Colored at different times and so on. They had little troubles now and then and so on. I don't know if any of it was true... I had a cousin that was accused of something and I am satisfied that he was not guilty. About attacking a white woman. Of course the lawyer got him out of it. They couldn't prove that he was guilty, you know. That's the biggest thing I've known in growing up as a boy. It was just before he was grown, but he was older than I was.

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, John J. Hardy, in view of the historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the interview with Mr. Charlie Peterson knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University, Jackson the full use of this information, and hereby grant and assign to Jackson State University, Jackson all rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized or contemplated.

John J. Hardy
Interviewer (signature)

Interview Number

7-18-77
Date