

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, Linda Overman, in view of the historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the interview with Stevens Arthur Penfrew 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.

Linda Overman
Interviewer (signature)

O.H. 1977-05
Interview Number

May 12, 1977
Date

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW AGREEMENT

You have been asked for information to be used in connection with the Oral History Program at Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi. The purpose of this program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

A tape recording of your interview will be made by the interviewer, and a typescript of the tape will be made and submitted to you for editing. The final retyped and edited transcript, together with the tape of the interview will then be placed in the oral history collection at Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi. Other institutions or persons may obtain a copy. These materials may be used for purposes of research, for instructional use, for publication, or for other related purposes.

Stevens A Renfrow

I, _____ have read the above and, in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, and in return for a final typed copy of the transcript, I knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University, Jackson, the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all my rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Stevens A Renfrow
Interviewee (Signature)

Date

INTERVIEWER: STEVEN A. RENFROW

INTERVIEWEE: ~~K~~LINDA OVERMAN

SUBJECT: CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, FARM LIFE

DATE: MARCH 18, 1977

L. This is an interview with Mr. Steven Auther Renfrow, of Jackson State University of Oral History 301. I'm Linda Overman, the interview was conducted at 1636 Kentwood Drive, Jackson, Mississippi on March 18, 1977 at 11:00 a.m.

S. My early recollection of experience go back to the late 1890's. I recall the assassination of President McKinley. I recall that my older brother was going to take part in the Spanish American War and I was ~~distrubed~~ ^{disturbed} because I didn't want to see ~~he~~ ^{him} go away again and not come back.

L. How old were you about that time?

S. I was about 7 years old. I was born in ~~92~~ ¹⁸⁹².

L. Did he end up going or

S. Huh?

L. Did he go to war?

S. No he didn't go. My early school experience was in the one teacher school.

When one teacher handled all grades, one through eight. It was a very crued building at the time. There were no ceilings + walls. The floors were made out of board, cracks in them, cracks between them. The fireplace was used for ^{the} heat and our games were on the outside. The games of those days, children have never heard of today. "King, King, Calaco, you come and I'll go.

Did you ever hear of that?

L. No, I never have.

S. Dare base L. What kind of game was that?

S. Well, dare base, each side had a base and ~~their's~~ ^{they dared} limited the ^{members of the} other team to come near that base and ^{Men} if ~~there~~, they ^{would have} were apt to be captured and become a part of that base. Then another game we played was stealing wood. We ^{drew} ~~frew~~ a line, long line on the ground and we had sticks and things of that kind on either side. We had two sides and we tried to ~~stick~~ steal each others wood without being caught and if we were caught, we had to become a part of the other team. That was some of the early games that we played. Another experience I had as a boy, ^{that} I recall on the farm was my eight brothers and sisters who are all older than I except one sister would go fishing in the little creek that ran through the woods not far from my home.

L. You were living around Webster Mississippi.

S. Around Webster Mississippi. One of my earliest recollections as a fond memory even to this day is my oldest brother said to me and to my mother one day, I ^{should} ~~otta~~ carry Steve down to the creek when I go fishing. She gave permission and I went down with him. I can see him now. He cut me a small pole, tacked some fishing line and baited my hook and tole me to drop it in the water. After a little while, he said, pull it out! pull it out! and when I did I had a little small fish. That was the first fish that I had ever caught. That in all these years, are very fond memories that I think he carried me down in the woods to go fishing. The other games that we played were ^{should} ~~were~~ ^{in school} other _____ brought to the Puttnum public schools located on a public road and back in the air path in the woods where it was a considerable distance down the public road. The other children came by path ^{also} ~~also~~, from their home.

L. About how far did you have to walk to school?

S. About a mile and a half. After I passed the eight grade, I went to what you call a high school, three teachers. Each had ten grades for six months school. That school was almost about two and a half miles. The other two grades I went on to Webster where they had a standard high school. Standard for those days are those

grades. ^{for six months of school.} That ^{school} was almost about two and a half miles. The other two grades I went ^{on} to was Webster ^{where} that had a standard high school. ^{for} Standard high school in those days ^{they} are those grades only and I finished the ^{high school there} the rest of my high school there. There were very few four year high schools in Mississippi at that time, very few.

L. What year did you finish high school?

S. I graduated from ^{Webster} high school in 1912, after graduating from high school, I was fortunately enough to ^{be able to enter} get, well in Mississippi it is at that time after finishing four years at Mississippi State I graduated in 1960.

L. Can we go back and talk about your school, what kind of subjects did you take, what kind of classes did you take, in grade school?

S. High school ^{had} is basic studies, English, some form of mathematic, algebra, geometry, and history, ^{which was} we took history of Mississippi, we took history of United State history and Ancient, ^{which they call} as think that is what the what they called it, History of World, and we also took science, we took general science, and physics, ^{use} they were basic subject, they ^{There was} were very ^{no those about it} about it and you had to take it over. If you ^{if} you didn't ^{anything. we didn't have a wide range of curriculum in those days} take it then ^{where children could} where children ^{sorts} take all source of things. Hoping the _____ was not thought of in ^{those days we} and we had a small number of children who live^d on a farm in

Mississippi had the opportunity to go to high school. I walk four miles just to get to high school and I had one younger sister who graduated from Brookhaven High School and she live^d with ^a the older sister ^{there} their, My parents were education minded for that ^{day and} many of times, they made an effort to give us an opportunity, three of my older sisters ended blue mountain ^{College} located in _____ Mississippi during the time they were growing up. But that was unusual for the girls in ^{rural} a community who go through any ^{to have enough to go to} source of educational ^{sort}

institution, ~~It wasn't~~ ^{my who had} ~~for our~~ ^{who} parents, had any ~~to~~ speak off, it was just about the _____ good _____ at his bed time he goes at that _____ good hickory stump, and had a smoke house full of meat, which kind of prosperity in those days. Farmers were not such a good farmers, he didn't have those things, he didn't have fat horses, he didn't grow his meat, he had to buy feed for his stock, that was the time in those days when farmers taking his time with the things he had.

L. Could you ~~tell me~~ ^{we talk a little bit} about your brothers and sisters, I thought their were twelve children in your family originally. You were the eleven. th

S. Yes, ^{sr} I was the eleven of twelve children. Four of the older children th had _____ when they were smaller, but eight of ~~us~~ ^{lived to} to be adults.

~~That all~~ ^{none of them} ~~passed away~~ ^{they} before there were 69 years old one brother pass away ^{at that age one} one sister pass away at 65, one pass away at 88, one 87 and one 93. Two

brothers pass away at 69 and 88. One sister didn't live, she will be 89 in a short time, ^{her husband still} The times we had in those days on the farm were ~~something~~ ^{what}

we grew. ^{what we in} We grew the garden or ^{we} what you grew in the feilds. ^{father} My brother told us that we had a good garden, ^{the} that garden was fenced it was five

foot thick pickets sharp to the top with a _____ ^{so there chickens could fit up on it} sitting high above it or ~~upon~~ ^{sort} it jumping over in the garden. We source of cultivate it

_____ natural ^{organic fertilizer from the} order equipments in the barn and the hen house, ^{droppings from} all jumping up in the hen house ^{were} to save the ^{to put in} other garden.

L. Now were ^{trying to get back to that in some places} During the season we had a bunch of vegetables, such as we grew in those ^{We had good?} days we ^{abundance} had beets, lettuce, squash, cabbage, beans, orka, things of that kind ^{nature.}

In the feilds, ^{field crops, tatoes} irish potota, we grew enough for seven month supply. Sweet ^{once a year. We grew enough} potota, ^{for several months supply} also grown in a bunch, peas that we called black eye peas, which

is known today, always have big patch of black eye peas, crowder peas, and what we called feild peas today. ^{ie} Feild ^{were the that were} peas are peas that was plant

in the corn crop. In the corn are to grow and you will pick it,

^{Come up together}
 many times those are there even so the skunks can get them, after climbing the trees. My father also believe in during his own meat, when I say meat, I think that what you called it today. Ham, shoulder, and so on. We would cure it, ^{by} smoke it in the smoke house, dissolve it, and ~~can with smoke from~~ ^{the} fat of the hog. Cans of it and also put it in the _____ . That is what you called a five gallon churns. ^{That's what they were made} You ^{for} can use it for many purposes, ^{my mother use to churn lard} use lard for it in the churns, nothing to it and occasionally every once in a year we will kill a pig. The young animal ^{just a} of the pig, we had no way of preserving it, we had a _____ at a short time.

L. You can't smoke these.

S. No, some of the system different farmers in the community took turn about killing the young beast. Whenever a man kills a beast, he send out the ^{word} ~~world~~ that the man is going to killed the beast. In time those who are going to kill the beast will go and buy ~~enough~~ enough for two or three days, and then ^{another} ~~the next~~ man ^{the next week he'll} will kill a beast and maybe the way we had beef ever once in a while. Bacon was cured by salting down ^{and the hanging it in the} in the smoke house and smoking it, it what we use to call fat back. The fat back was use for cooking purposes, we didn't eat much of that, we use it for seasoning beans, butterbeans, green-beans, tunip green, what ever you are having to help you to seasoning. My ~~two~~ ^{had an opportunity} older brother never ^{go to} went to school because they were always helping working in the fields making food for the family . They never got old enough or big enough to go to the railroad, that is about the only source of employment for young men , foot work railroad footwork never came back to the farm. Hopefully , very suddenly the boy ^{where I grew up in the community} ~~doesn't come~~ ^{that I grew up} left the farm; they didn't stay. back to the farm. There was no offensive their, _____ was advance at the railroad, I have to remember where I lived source of employment for young men they were working on the track, they on the transportation in from of it then they left up in the moment, a few other

gentleman work in the sawmill an other places that particular public work missing.

L. That would be a big interest to me.

S. That is kinda of _____ on the way it is such a hard thought, keep in mind that my experience and to the other you received of it that Mississippi _____.

L. I want to go back just a minute back to your grade school you went to, you told me once ^{before} that you _____ the writer.

S. In grade school we had a back in those days very few students had a ~~test~~ ^{text} book and paper to write on, do their arithmetic on, do ~~do~~ ^{and slake pencils.} their spelling on and things of that nature we had slakes. Every child had ^{a slake.} ~~one.~~

L. Every child, what did they write on them with?

S. You will write with a slake pencil.

L. What was it made of?

S. It was a hard material, sort of like a slake. If not we have the same composition, I don't know what it was but it was a hard thing, I don't know whether it was manufacture or made out of some nature material. But ^{a slake} the pencil was ^{an industrial} ~~efficiently~~ ^{because they always had more}, but when you wrote on your slake, you erase it.

L. You just ^{wash} was it off?

S. Of course, one of the things I like ^{about it} we just sit down to prove and to think about things, we though no better, You know what a slake board is. We had a large wash cloth wipe it of and let it dry and start over again. ^{never really hurt anybody} We had blackboards in the room, and we had what we called it, chalk, crayon and now they called it the _____.

L. Chalk I guess, these are blackboards.

S. We went to the _____ and work out arithmetic on the

board and show how much we knew, but it had to be erase for the rest of them. Not the kind of eraser that we use today, it was a type of ^{Sheep wool} ~~sheet wood~~ use up a side of your hand. Made a fine eraser That how different they are, I was known some year in the 990 I guess I was in high school when I saw eraser that was manufacture and the kind they use today are not made of ~~sheep~~ skin. Some form of sheep, you just cut of the children from the farm, and you make the eraser from the sheep skin. And ^{Our water} ~~I water~~ the Supplies. And it was cool in those days as many arm full _____ will fix you a nature spring, well they didn't have to ~~put it on~~ ^{down} a ~~web~~ ^{well}. During those early days was upon a hill was a spring sweet _____ supply of water and we had a water bucket, the boys took turn about bring up a fresh bucket of water, we had ten dippers to drink out of. Come in there once and drink out of the same one. Sanutation for drinking out of the same cup, I never heard such of a ^{thing} think, I don't reacon anybody else have.

L. Do you have an out door ~~bathroom then~~ or an outdoor toilet?

S. An outdoor toilet, the girls went down one hill and the boys went down another hill, there are a lot of bushes down there, that was also the thing that they bought nature. In that day and time _____ had enough for a toilet in their home and in those days they called it the _____ in those days, and the school I went to didn't have any setting facilities and when I went to high school they had outdoor facilities build and maintained for the _____. I don't know how old I was when I saw those, I don't think I even saw one when I went to college, I don't think I even saw one, I never saw much _____
 h. That was 19 what 1912?
 when I went to college. That was in 1913, that was the first time that I have ever saw light, the state was Mississippi State which is Mississippi State now. I remember the first concrete book I ever saw.

RENFROW

Well, some ~~part~~^{body} in _____ ~~they build a brick in space~~^{dug of the brick walk in front of his place} of business and aboard concrete. That is strict in any kind of _____ I remember ~~when~~^{Very well} the first telephone ~~line was~~^{I ever saw} ~~before~~. I remember the first kind I ever saw. I was a child. I was just twelve years old. I never talk to anyone about teenagers and I see ~~ra~~^{ran}ilroads right beside my father farm, but I ~~remember~~^{don't know if I} very well the first time I ever rode on a train. There was an occassion when my mother carried my younger sister and I to visit another sister down in _____ Mississippi. We got on a train and rode.

L. When was that?

S. Well, I was about _____ and on the trip when I ~~was~~^{Saw} my first telephone. I went to town. They say folks in town never saw a telephone, ha ha ha.

L. Were you in your teens then or you don't remember how old you were?

S. No! I wasn't in my teens. Those things all seems very primitive today and were in their way, but we must remember that all the citizens of transportation, communication all those things go to make a person's country in a way of transportation, highway, communication, construction, machine, modern farming methods all that business had come about in the last, much of it in the last fifty years.

L. Its staggering that such a _____ all that time.

S. Its a, I'll I'll _____ ~~know nothing~~^{seen all that before} about. Say I remember the first radio I ever saw. I remember the first _____ I ever saw.

That's that's some family reading history. That was less than fifty years ago and many ~~here~~^{People living} today were adults before they ~~was~~^{Saw} a television, but the radio came along and _____ in that period of time.

L. Remember when you ever went to your first movie? Did _____ have a movie theather?

S. Nooo! _____ wasn't big enough to have a movie. Brookheaven had a, had a movie.

L. You were at silent movies then

S. Oh yah they were silent movies.

L. Yah, when they started _____.

S. I saw my first movie in Brookheaven and it was a _____.

Brookheaven would just have what they call trade day _____ just off they kept it on the part of business being down. They get people to come to town and see what was happening down there and all their entertainers would come down there at times and I went to all _____ after I was a teenager and _____ Tractors was a show about the Settlement Agricultural Department and that was the first picture show I had ever seen, and I thought I could go to it free, without paying. Part of that thing was bad. That was the first picture show I ever saw. The next picture show I ever saw was when I was a student at _____ Indiana. We had a show on the campus school's auditorium on Saturday night for the students. _____ it cost a dime ~~dime~~ and we didn't know when it was advertised and that sound funny, strange to people in this day and time but there was times you can't have a dime to go to the show it's not a dime anymore but

L. It's like a dollar today _____

S. And then there was these boys, didn't have a dime regularly and I was one of them.

My room mate didn't have a dime regularly. I _____ never saw a silent, I never saw a _____ movie until maybe late 20's and I drove to my _____ in Brookheaven and there was a _____ movie. Part of the time I drove to _____. Now, I can't think of _____ star in it. One of the stars _____ was a singer and he sang Billy Boy

L. _____

S. _____

L. Eddy Cannon

S. Not Eddy Cannon

L. No no no _____

S. _____ late comer. He was one of the ones who sings gotta grow old _____ and he was the star of the show and he ~~sang~~ sang Billy Boy.

And it was very effective that was the first sound picture I ever heard and thats _____ late summer. It was a summer _____

L. I've got to _____

L. But, when you were _____

S. _____ L. _____

S. Boys and girls _____ up in a barn in the time I grew up.

They didn't have a lot of private homes they were kept busy. Boys in the fields until they were old enough to either do the hoeing, pick cotton, gather vegetables or what ever the job might be at that particular time. They were required to be a part of it.

And the girls would be with their mother in the house doing the cooking and the laundry and the laundry was done in a _____ wash pan

L. Did they have a wash board or _____

S. A wash board, and that was weekly choars usually done on Monday and they washed pots in that _____ water that was a big _____ apart

I _____ throw their work clothes and _____ in the boiler _____ little dirt _____ clean

clothes and they _____ girl worked in the fields along with their brothers, many of them and _____ the girls used the _____

_____ boys and there were boys who worked in the fields. Now, my father along with the company's boys _____ boys were eight dozen of us in the

_____ vegetable crop, _____ the

niggers to the market so that he can have one, two or three acers _____
 and _____ pockets in the Northern _____
 customers worked tired and _____ ago during the _____
 _____ they had to be _____ fields and they had to be
 what they call _____ they had to be _____
 they had to be _____ that's all _____
 _____ ago. _____ I never had to tie a knot
 on a croker cack or pull a _____ (NOLUMP went out on tape)
 They had a servey a regular servey that was in the ~~far~~ farm work _____
 We had a ~~n~~ chicken farm they gave us chicken eggs _____.
 By farming that was the only thing to do it never would help but survey it
 you had to pay _____