

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Oral History Study of:

Senior citizens  
OH. 77-10

Interviewee: Ray Bozell Converse  
Interviewer: Joel Robert Converse  
Subjects: Childhodd Depression, W.W. II  
Date: 3/20/77

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY  
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, Joel R. Converse, in view of the historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the interview with Ray B. Converse 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.

Joel R. Converse  
Interviewer (signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interview Number

5/4/77  
Date

Consent Form

I, hereby release my taped interview for use by researchers subject to the following conditions:

- 1) Use by researchers only
- 2) Open to public
- 3) To be made of use to researchers and/or public only after \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Special conditions: Released to Jackson State University  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signed  
Ray Cornwell  
interviewee

Signed  
[Signature]  
interviewer

Date 5/1/07

My first interview was with my father. He gave me an interesting account of a trip he took to San Antonio in 1917. They traveled by car., and on the way had to ford several rivers because of lack of bridges at that time. In speaking of the depression he cited the basic reason as agriculture. The farmer is the largest of steel, rubber, and fuel in the U.S. Because of the low price of farm commodities before the depression the farmers were unable to buy equipment for the farm. This had a definite effect on industry and eventually the stock market. I also found out that there were Germans subs patrolling off the coast of Mississippi during World War II.

My second interview was with Mr. Crawford. He was raised on a share-cropping farm which his dad owned. His family and the people who live on the farm basically lived the same, both ate the same food, cooked on wood burning stoves, used fireplaces for heat, and worked the land. I found his remarks about our involvement in Vietnam very interesting.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF INTERVIEWEE

Ray Bozell Converse was born in Isabel, Oklahoma on Oct.15, 1912. He is the second son of Herbert and Georgia Anna Converse. Mr. Converse graduated from Capitol Hill High School in May of 1931. In 1939 he graduated from Oklahoma State University with a degree in Agricultural Economics. He remained at Oklahoma State to do his graduate work in Statistics. He completed all of his graduate work except for his thesis paper. He worked 34 years for the Department of Agriculture and retired as Head Statistision for the state of Mississippi in December, 1974. During those 34 years he was transfered to several places; Gulfport, Ms. 1942; Montgomery, Ala.,1944; Raleigh, N.C., 1945; and Jackson, Ms., 1955. Mr. Converse is now coordinator of Government Programs for the Diocese of Natchez-Jackson.

## SUMMARY INTERVIEW

My conversation with Mr. Converse took place in his home at 1109 Adkins Blvd. Mr. Converse talks about his life on the farm as a child. When he was nine his family moved to Oklahoma City; he discusses the transition. The most extensively topic is the depression. He talks about opening a produce business, and the economic effect the depression had on his family. The interview ends in a discussion of life in Gulfport, Ms. during W.W. II and gives us his reaction to the atom bomb.

INTERVIEWER: Joel Converse  
INTERVIEWEE: Ray B. Converse  
SUBJECT: childhood experiences  
DATE: March 20, 1977

Joel Converse, Advanced Oral History Project spring 1977. Today is 3/20/77. It is 7:00 p.m. Now the first question we need to ask is about your childhood and I guess the best place to start is where were you born?

R. Well I was born at Isabel, Ok., which is a real small town, if it's still there, in the northwest part of Oklahoma. I was born there, not in a hospital but in the home, southwest of Isabel on October 15, 1912.

J. What part of Ok. is this in?

R. This is the largest town near there, It's Enid, Ok. about 30 miles southwest.

J. How many people were in your family? Kids and everything?

R. There were 10 children and of course mother and father.

J. Okay, tell me, or could you think back, what your earliest childhood memory would be?

R. Oh, I think one of the earliest memories of course I have a lot of memories on the farm when I was quite small of having sheep and cows and even a horse. One thing I remember quite vividly was a trip we made to San Antonio, Texas during W.W.I in a model "T" Ford. My uncle was in the army there and my mother and father and grandmother, my brother and I drove to San Antonio from Akeem, Ok. to visit him at the camp in San Antonio; then I remember fording the Cimeron river and the Red river since there were no bridges. I remember seeing my first dust storm, which left a very vivid picture in my mind when we stopped in Wichita Fall, Texas. The skies turned red in the west with the sun shining through the dust and dirt.

J. How long did it take to get from Okeem to San Antonio?

R. I don't remember Joel, just how long it took. Probably I would say something like three days.

J. Now your talking about fording a stream, you mean just.....

R. Yea, you drove through ah across the sand and down through those rivers then up on the other bank. Of course those rivers out there only run deep during the rainy season, the other times they are pretty well dried up, just pools.

J. Let me ask you ah, let me see, during the war, you're talking about around 1917.

R. About 1917.

J. So your first memories you knew there were cars around?

R. Well there weren't many. My dad traded a team of mules for this model "T" Ford, it was a 1914 model. We were one of the few people I guess in our section that had an automobile. You didn't have to move for automobiles, you had to watch for the horses and mules, buggies and wagons.

J. Well what about electricitiy, telephones?

R. No, we had no electricity, no, we did ~~not~~ have a telephone but it was on the wall, and you it rang through the handle. Your calls were not numbers they were one long and two short, two short and a long and a short. You always had several people on a party line, no one had a party line then, so if you made a call you could always hear the other party line members lift the receiver and listen in on your calls.

J. You didn't have a private conversation?

R. And I guess we used to listen in a little bit too.

J. Alright, you had, let me see, ten children in the family. how did that break down in brothers ans sisters?

R. There were three boys and seven girls. The boys were all the older.

J. You all got along pretty well?

R. Oh we has our usual scraps, but on the farm, as long as we were on the farn all the children weren't there. We moved to Oklahoma City in 1921 or 1922 and some of the girls were born in Oklahoma City. But on the farm you always had a lot of space and place, things to do and go.

J. What kind of games did you play on the farm?

R. Well, I don't know as we played a whole lot of games. We played hide and seek some, but we played in the barn on the hay mound and in the wheat fields on thestraw stacks after the wheat was thrashed. But as far as games right there, we didn't have to many.

J. What kind of chores did you have to do?

R. Oh, we had to feed the chickens, slop the hogs, go get the cows for dad to milk, and maybe bring the sheep up. We had sheep and cows and hogs of course, chickens, turkeys, and horses.

J. What did you raise?

R. We raised primarily, it was a wheat farm but dad always had some cattle and some for beef purposes and of course some for milk, which we milked.