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U.19 Long Civil Rights Movement: Breaking New Ground

Interview U-0649
Bishop Henry Epps
2 August 2011

ABSTRACT – BISHOP HENRY EPPS

Interviewee: Bishop Henry Epps
Interviewer: Catherine A. Conner
Interview Date: August 2, 2011
Location: Living room in Epps' home in Kingstree, SC
Length: 73:05

This interview covers the life of Bishop Henry Epps, a former farmer and current religious leader of the Lake City-Kingstree community. Epps' family history reveals how African Americans gained land after the Civil War and how some of his family members, including his father, lost land from the 1920s and 1940s. Epps' life is both one of struggle and hope that reveals the various opportunities and obstacles for rural southern African Americans. Throughout his adult life, Epps was one of the many working poor in the rural South. Topics include: black farm ownership from the late 19th century to the 1930s; slavery; sharecropping; tobacco farming; farming practices; gardening for family sustenance; food pathways; community dinners; born-again Christianity; ministering; public school; public-housing; the Great Depression; Works Progress Administration; and the Second Great Migration.

FIELD NOTES – BISHOP HENRY EPPS

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Location: Living room in Epps' home in Kingstree, SC
Length: 73:05

The Interviewee: Bishop Henry Epps is a retired farmer living in Kingstree, SC, with his second wife, Geneva. Epps was born on March 28, 1926, near Cades, SC, about ten miles from Kingstree. His grandfather, Henry Epps, was born a slave. Both his grandfather and father, Rueben, owned small farms, approximately twenty to forty acres. His maternal grandfather, Howard Presley, also owned land. By the time Epps reached adulthood, neither he nor his father owned land. Epps was a sharecropper for local white farmers until 1978. After that, he became a hired farm hand until he retired in 1991. In 1950 Epps became a born-again Christian, first in the Baptist denomination and later in the Pentacostal denomination. He currently ministers to seniors at the Lake City Community Day Services in Kingstree, SC. Epps met Geneva in church, and they married in 2004. Epps is her third husband, and they live in her house in Kingstree. Geneva was born on May 23, 1923. She sat in on the interview and helped her husband understand the questions. Epps is hard of hearing.

The Interviewer: Catherine A. Conner was a research associate for the oral history project, Breaking New Ground, and is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She worked on the project from May to August 2011.

Description of the Interview: Conner first met Epps's nephew by marriage, Nathaniel Wilson, and communicated with Wilson over several weeks. During this time, Wilson's wife contacted Breaking New Ground directors Mark Schultz and Adrienne Petty requesting that her great uncle (Epps) be interviewed. Conner first met Epps to interview him at the Lake City Community Day Services. He requested that the interview be scheduled for another time. When Conner arrived to interview Epps on July 28th at his home, he asked to reschedule again. On Conner's third visit to his home, Epps agreed to be interviewed. Conner entered the house through a side door connected to the main bedroom. Mr. and Mrs. Epps led her to the living room. It had bright red carpeting and was decorated with family pictures and religious items such as figures, crosses, and paintings. Conner initially sat in a chair perpendicular to Epps. Epps spoke softly and is hard of hearing. Conner eventually moved to the floor, sitting next to Epps to hear him better.

Epps recalled his family history, which revealed that both his father and grandfather owned land. Some of that land remains in the family. Epps' father Rueben, however, lost his land. He then became a sharecropper. Epps was the seventh of eight children, and his mother died in childbirth. He spent his childhood working for his father, but he also spent time on his maternal grandfather's farm. As an adult, Epps became a sharecropper for various white farmers in the area. In the late 1960s, Epps moved off of the farm and into public housing. He continued to sharecrop. He stopped in 1978 when he could no longer find hired hands. His children, nine in all, had moved away. He continued to work on farms until 1991. Epps is a man of strong faith, and he enjoyed talking about his conversion and experiences ministering. He and Geneva both

recalled with joy gathering with local community and church members for large dinners. They both spoke about the types of food they ate, such as potato poon (a type of pie). After the end of the interview, which was about an hour and fifteen minutes, Geneva showed Conner various photographs of her and Epps' family she had hung on the wall. Many of their children and grandchildren entered the military service.

Interviewee: Bishop Henry Epps and Geneva Epps

Interviewer: Catherine Conner

Interview date: August 2, 2011

Location: Kingstree, South Carolina

Length: 1 disc, approximately 1 hour and 13 minutes

START OF DISC

CC: Hello. My name is Catherine Conner. I'm here with Geneva and Henry Epps. It's August 2, 2011 and we're in their home in Kingstree, South Carolina. Just before we begin our interview, do I have your permission to interview you?

GE: Yes.

CC: Yes, okay. And Mrs. Epps will help me in speaking with her husband, Mr. Epps, Bishop Epps, actually.

GE: Right.

CC: So Bishop Epps, can I get you to tell me who your father was?

HE: Reuben Epps. His name was Reuben Epps.

CC: And do you know what year he was born in?

GE: What year was your daddy born in?

HE: 1890.

CC: Okay, and was he born in South Carolina?

HE: That's right. He was born in Cades, South Carolina, Cades, Cross Road.

CC: Kings Cross?

HE: Cades, Cross Road. It's out on 52 down ten miles.

GE: Cades, South Carolina.

CC: Oh, okay.

HE: Cades, South Carolina.

GE: I'll be right back.

HE: And he (**1:27**).

CC: And did your father's father have farmland?

HE: That's right.

CC: He did?

HE: (**1:46**) My grandfather had forty acres of land and some of my relatives still own part of that land.

CC: Do you know how your grandfather got that land, sir?

HE: No, I really don't know who he bought it from, no.

CC: Okay. Was he a former slave or was he born a freedman?

HE: My grandfather was born in slavery and I don't know whether he got a grant from slavery. You know when they come out of slavery, they grant some of them. We checked on that and they said my grandfather got it from slavery. My grandfather was named Henry Epps.

CC: So you're named after your grandfather?

HE: Yes, Henry Epps.

CC: Do you know if any of his siblings got land as well?

HE: Who?

CC: Do you know if any of his siblings, like your great aunt or your great uncle, got land as well?

HE: That I know of?

CC: Yes, that you know of.

HE: No, they passed. They have some grandchildren still living.

CC: Okay. So how many children did your grandfather have?

HE: Seven, I think, yeah, seven.

CC: And was your father—

HE: My father and mother had eight.

CC: Your father and mother had eight kids.

HE: Yes.

CC: So your dad, was he named after your grandfather?

HE: No.

CC: Oh, that's right. His name is Reuben. So do you know how he spent his childhood? Did he work on the farm?

HE: On the farm, yes.

CC: Okay.

HE: But my grandfather worked also on the railroad.

CC: Okay. Do you know what railroad?

HE: This railroad.

CC: Oh, the one right there?

HE: The Atlantic coastline there.

CC: Do you know how your grandmother, what did she do on the farm or for your family?

HE: She worked also on the farm.

CC: She also worked on the farm.

HE: Yes.

CC: Did she work in the house or did she work in the fields?

HE: House, house, and the fields, also in the fields.

CC: What kind of farm crops did your grandfather—

HE: Tobacco and cotton and corn.

CC: Do you know—

HE: And also peas.

CC: Peas.

HE: Yeah.

CC: Okay. And that was about forty acres, right?

HE: That's right, forty acres.

CC: Did your grandparents have a small family garden?

HE: Yes, that's how we survived, on the garden.

CC: Right. Do you remember playing or helping your grandma tend the garden or your grandfather?

HE: Yes, I do remember.

CC: What was it like? What was in it?

HE: It was hard work doing the garden, but we would have to work the garden and every family had a garden. You also had to raise our own chicken and get the eggs. That's how we survived, by having the chicken, the eggs, and raising our own hogs and you would kill hogs every year, have what we called a hog killing. We would help each neighbor. Each neighbor would help each other.

GE: Turkey.

HE: Huh?

GE: Had turkey.

HE: We had turkey and guineas, what we called guineas and ducks and all that on the farm. We had raised potatoes.

GE: Sweet potatoes.

HE: Sweet potatoes and also white potatoes and collards. Everyone, we didn't have to went to the store because we were living ten miles from the store. We weren't at the store but every weekend and we also had a country store that we would go to if we needed something.

CC: Okay, so did you grow up on your grandfather's farm or did you just visit?

HE: I just visited my grandfather. I grew up on my father's farm.

CC: Right. And how did your father get his farm?

HE: He got it through his second marriage.

CC: Okay. Do you know those details?

HE: That land belonged to Bessie Newland, from her four children, but he farmed on that farm for twenty years, twenty-five years.

CC: So the garden you were talking to me about, that was your grandfather's where they had to go ten miles away to the store or was that your—

HE: Right, yeah.

CC: Okay, alright. I just wanted to make sure.

HE: And on my mother's side, I have some land. Well, some of my relatives still live on the land on my mother's side also. I'm a Presley from my grandfather was named Howard Presley, but I don't know my grandmother's name. But then my step-grandmother was named Annie Presley, but I didn't know her family.

CC: Okay. How many acres was that farm, the Presley farm?

HE: That farm, I think, had been about sixty acres.

CC: Okay.

HE: Yeah.

CC: And did they also grow similar?

HE: Yeah, grow a garden and peaches, peach trees and pear trees.

CC: Was this in another part of the state?

HE: No, that's in (**8:28**) in the same state. That's in the (**8:33**) community on 527 (**8:37**).

CC: Okay. And did you also go there as a kid to the Presley farm?

HE: What was that?

CC: Did you also go to the Presley farm as a kid?

HE: I would visit, yeah. I would visit. Every year, we would visit our grandparents.

CC: Did you look forward to those visits?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Why?

HE: What?

CC: Why did you look forward to those visits? What was at grandpa's farm that you liked?

HE: We would visit when they'd have bus days and that's where you actually had a bus. He raised my baby sister when my mother died in the year 1931 and my baby sister was just a baby. So he did raise, my grandpa, Howard Presley, raised them up and put them through school, through college. She became a teacher.

CC: Okay.

HE: Yeah, in South Carolina, I mean, Columbia.

CC: So you mentioned that your mom died in 1931, right?

HE: Right, yeah.

CC: Did she have an accident or did she have poor health?

HE: No, she died through child bearing.

CC: Oh, child birth, okay.

HE: Yeah. She was at the age of just thirty-six years old.

CC: Wow. Did your dad remarry?

HE: Was he married?

CC: No, did he remarry after your mom's passing?

HE: Oh yeah.

CC: He did?

HE: Yeah, he (**10:25**).

CC: Did he have more kids with his second wife?

HE: More what?

CC: Did he have any more children with his second wife?

HE: No, no, no, ma'am.

CC: Okay. And how many children overall did your dad and your mom have? How many sisters and brothers do you have?

HE: By my mom? Eight sisters and brothers.

CC: Where do you fall in the line?

HE: Me, I'm the seventh child.

CC: You're the seventh one.

HE: Yeah, yeah.

CC: And did your siblings also work in the field too on the farm when they were kids?

HE: Yes, yes, they did, yeah.

CC: Can you tell me what you did on your dad's farm or on your grandfather's farm?

HE: I just helped my grandfather, but I farmed on my dad's farm.

CC: Okay. So what were your chores and duties on the farm?

HE: What we called a (**11:32**) cotton and other crop, and plant the seeds.

CC: Can you describe a work day for me?

HE: What kind of seed?

CC: No, can you describe a work day for me? Like what time you got up, when you had your lunch.

HE: Oh we would get up from six to six, so a twelve-hour day. In this time of the year, we would have to barn the tobacco, what we call crop tobacco. We'd grow tobacco. You might see it. They don't hardly have tobacco, but the main crop was the tobacco crop. We would have to get up at two o'clock in the morning and take the tobacco to the barn, what we call unloading the barn in order to put the barn up the next day. So we had to do that every day for a week, for six days of the week. And beyond that, all the children, we used to cut the firewood in the wintertime. We couldn't get it real cold. That's why we didn't get to go to school because in the wintertime, we would have to cut the wood, cure it, and have to stay up all night to cure the tobacco also. (**13:05**)

CC: So in the summertime, you had to gather the tobacco, cut it, right?

HE: Yeah, cut it, what we called "break tobacco."

CC: Break tobacco.

HE: We just called it crop tobacco, but it's to break tobacco off the leaves, leaves off the stalk.

CC: And then you smoke it, cure it in the winter.

HE: Yeah. You cure it and put it on a stick and either drag it on a trailer and take it to the barn and then we would have a stick to string it, put it on a string. They clamp it on a stick now.

CC: And then hang it in the barn, right?

HE: Yeah, and hang it up, yeah. And we called it "heist the tobacco." We had big barns all over the country and we called "heist it up," hang it up.

CC: Yeah. Who did the lifting, your older brothers?

HE: My brothers. The men do it. They climb up on the tables because they have to have the tables there to spread tobacco and hang it up, but the ladies hand it to them from the ground, my sisters and brothers. I was a small one.

CC: Okay. So your sisters were involved in the process?

HE: Process what?

CC: So your sisters also did work within the—

HE: Yeah, they did it too also. They put the tobacco on the sticks.

CC: And all of y'all worked in your dad's fields?

HE: Yeah, yeah.

CC: Okay. So you mentioned that sometimes you'd miss school to work.

HE: Oh yeah, we missed. At that time in 1935, we didn't go to school in the backwoods, we called it, but four months of the year and we would have to miss school as long as it was dry enough to get to work on the farm here. We had to miss school because we'd have to what we call plow the land to get the land ready to farm and that's the reason why we'd miss school. We

used to go in the woods like for pine straw and pile it up in the mule stable, we called it the mule stable, the horses' stable, and mix it together with the (**15:58**). But we'd call it manure and it was mixed together and had to be stored up before the crop to grow the crop because we didn't have the money to buy the fertilizer. So that would be like fertilizer. So that's how we survived and tried to make it.

I remember a little bit about what we called a "Hoovertown," when President Hoover was in the chair and everything in the Depression. I know a little bit about that. I was three or four years old and people didn't have the money to pay the taxes. So that's why a lot of us lost our farms. That's why part of the farm that my grandfather on each side had, also my father, lost that land because they couldn't pay the tax on it.

CC: Okay. So all of your family lost their land in the 1930s because of taxes?

HE: Not back in 1930s. Some of them lost it.

CC: Some of them lost it.

HE: Yeah. They had more land that that, but they lost part of it trying to save the other part.

CC: Did your dad also have to sell some of his acres?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Do you know how many he sold?

HE: How many acres?

CC: Yeah. Do you know how many?

HE: I don't know exactly how many acres that he really sold, but I know he sold part of it. But my grandfather, he sold part. I think he had forty acres of land and he sold twenty acres.

CC: He sold twenty acres.

HE: Yeah.

CC: Do you know, and was this Grandpa Epps or Grandpa Presley?

HE: Presley, they're still living on their forty acres of land, sixty acres of land.

CC: Do you know how your grandfather felt about selling his land because of the economic depression?

HE: No, I don't know too much about him. The older people didn't talk too much to the younger people back in that time.

CC: Right. Tell me a little bit more about how your dad and your grandfathers tried to just make it in the 1930s. What other kind of measures did they have to take so they could survive?

HE: Like I said, they had to went out and dig ditches and went on the railroad or either on the highway to have enough money to pay all around the farm. And like I said, they had to eat up from the garden.

CC: Did your mother before she passed or your grandmothers, did they ever have to go out and get public jobs to help the family?

HE: No, they worked as housewives.

CC: Okay, housewives.

HE: They helped the boss man out.

CC: Alright. And do you know if your family worked for WPA projects?

HE: WPA?

CC: Yeah.

HE: My father did.

CC: Your father did.

HE: Yeah, my father. I don't know about my grandpa. My father worked. That's what I was saying. He digged ditches because of the WPA.

CC: Right, okay. Do you know if he liked it?

HE: Liked it?

CC: Yeah.

HE: No, he didn't like it, but he had to survive. (laughs) He had to do it to survive.

CC: So he'd rather be farming, huh?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Did your dad like farming?

HE: Huh?

CC: I said did your dad like farming? Did he really enjoy it?

HE: Oh yeah. He liked farming. He did like farming. He farmed as long as he was able to farm.

CC: So was there any improvement for your family during the war or after World War II?

HE: Was there any what?

CC: Was there any improvement for your family economically?

HE: Yeah. After World War II, the farm got better.

CC: The farm got better.

HE: Yeah. It got better. He was able to rent extra land and farm a whole other land outside of the land he was on, the forty acres. He was able to rent much more land. There was improvement, yes.

CC: And that was your dad, right?

HE: That's my dad, yeah.

CC: Did your dad ever hire any extra workers or did he just use y'all, you and your brothers and sisters?

HE: He had hired hands, yes, he did.

CC: He had hired hands.

HE: Because we was too small, my brother and I was too small to plow the crops. So he hired extra hands until we got old enough. My sister had to plow too. My oldest sister had to plow.

CC: Who was the better plower?

HE: Huh?

CC: I said who was the better plower?

HE: Yeah.

GE: Who was the better plower?

HE: Oh the men, the hired hands was better and then I became a better plower too.

CC: Yeah, okay. And you said that your dad rented his forty acres and then he also rented more acres?

HE: Yeah. He was able to rent more acres to add to the ones he already had.

CC: Did that land adjoin his farm or did he have to travel?

HE: Some of it adjoined his farm, what we called the "government land," that was adjoining his farm, yes.

CC: Can you tell me what the government land means?

HE: Oh that means it belongs to the West Virginia Pulp Wood. Yeah, West Virginia from (**22:17**) owned the land, what people didn't farm, the woodlands, and then they had some land near the woodlands also.

CC: Okay. So do you know how much—that's timber, right?

HE: Yeah, timber.

CC: Do you know how many acres of timber your dad--?

HE: No, I really, I really don't know exactly how much wood. I don't know much woodland that he owned and I don't know how much timber wood was near the land. But there was a whole lot of land that belonged to the government, what we called it, West Virginia.

CC: Alright. And so that was the West Virginia Pulp Wood Company?

HE: Right, yeah, out of (**23:08**), South Carolina.

CC: Right. Did other farmers get to rent some of that land, do you know?

HE: Yeah, some of them farmed. Some of them still got that land if no one bought it, some of the other farmers.

CC: And so when your dad started renting more land to farm, he still stayed with the same crops of cotton and tobacco and corn?

HE: Yeah. He still planted the same.

CC: Do you know how many total acreages?

HE: No, I really don't know exactly offhand.

CC: Okay. You don't know. Alright. Well, can you tell me how long your dad continued to farm his own land?

HE: I think he farmed that land about twenty-five years, I think, on that land, yes.

CC: Okay. And what was that ending year when he stopped?

HE: What year?

CC: Do you remember?

HE: He farmed from 1931 until 1953.

CC: And why did he stop in 1953?

HE: Why did he stop?

CC: Yes.

HE: Well, he got ill and he had to leave. When my sisters grew up, they went north to Philadelphia, my older sisters. So he went up there to live after that and he had to sell the farm, I think in 1953.

CC: Okay. Do you know how much he got for his farm?

HE: Oh no, I sure don't, I sure don't.

CC: Okay. Did he sell it to a black farmer or a white farmer?

HE: A white farmer, yeah.

CC: Okay. Did he know that white farmer?

HE: Did I know him?

CC: Yeah, well, did your dad know him?

HE: Yeah. He knew him.

CC: Do you remember his name?

HE: Do I know him?

CC: Yeah.

HE: Yeah. I know his name is Herbert McCatchen.

CC: Herbert McCarthy.

HE: McCatchen.

CC: McCatchen, okay. Did your dad have a good relationship with that Mr. McCatchen?

HE: Yeah. Later on after I got married, I farmed for him for about twenty years.

CC: Oh so you farmed for him for twenty years.

HE: I also farmed and had sharecrop with him. So I sharecropped with him and I farmed the same land later on.

CC: That your dad owned?

HE: Right.

CC: What did that make you feel?

HE: It was alright.

CC: It was alright?

HE: Yeah. You had to make a living because I have nine children.

CC: When did you get married?

HE: When?

CC: Yeah. You said you had children.

HE: When did I get married? 1947.

CC: And how many children did you have from that?

HE: Nine children, three of them deceased and six still living.

CC: And so you moved with your wife to the McCatchen farm around what time to farm?

HE: Yeah.

CC: What year was that?

HE: Well, I got married in ’47.

CC: Right, but when did you start farming for Mr. McCatchen?

HE: When did I start?

CC: Yeah.

HE: I started in 1953, yeah.

CC: When you started farming in 1953, about how many acres were you in charge of?

HE: Oh I had about two acres at the time.

CC: Three acres?

HE: Two acres of tobacco, but I had about ten acres of cotton.

CC: Okay.

HE: Yeah.

CC: Which was harder?

HE: Come again?

CC: Was there one that was harder?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Which one was more time-consuming for you?

HE: You're talking about if it was the same when I farmed it?

CC: Yeah.

HE: Yeah, it was the same man, yeah. It was the same person.

CC: So did you work with other sharecroppers on the McCatchen farm?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Okay.

HE: Sharecropping.

CC: Do you know about how many there were of y'all?

HE: With sharecropping? Oh it was at different times, different years, it was different people, but it was just most of the time, it was just me and my brother.

CC: Okay.

HE: My brother and I.

CC: And what was his name?

HE: Albert Epps. He's deceased.

CC: Albert, okay. So it was you two basically.

HE: Yeah.

CC: Okay. Can you describe what your home was like on the McCatchen farm?

HE: What my home was like?

CC: Yeah. Was it near the road or was it further back in the fields or--?

HE: Back a little bit off the road, about from here to the driveway back off the road.

CC: And how many rooms did it have in it?

HE: Three rooms.

CC: Three rooms?

HE: Three bedrooms.

CC: And so you and your children all lived in that house?

HE: Right, right.

CC: Did you have electricity or a water pump or--?

HE: At that time, yeah, I did have electricity, but no water. I had an outdoor toilet, an outhouse, we called it. We had to went out the door, built a little toilet out the door.

CC: Okay. How long did you live there in that house on McCatchen farm?

HE: Oh I lived nearly ten years. It was ten years.

CC: Fifteen years?

HE: Yeah, but I did move out of that house and I did move another house, but I lost that house. I couldn't keep it. I built, what we called, the government helped me get a house, but I couldn't keep up the payment on it for awhile and then I started renting. I rented until I married and my first wife died. Then I married (**30:32**) was seven years ago.

CC: Oh, Okay. So when you said that the government helped you buy a house, can you tell me what that means?

HE: That meant a low income house with lower rent.

CC: Right. So that was around 1968?

HE: That was 1972 when I bought the house, yeah.

CC: Okay, 1972. And where was your house?

HE: Was what?

CC: Yeah, what city or town was your house in?

HE: Oh right in Cades, right in Cades.

CC: Okay. At that time, how many of your children were living with you in that house?

HE: How many children?

CC: Yeah. How many children were still living with you?

HE: Six.

CC: Six of them.

HE: Six, yeah.

CC: And your first wife was still living at that time period?

HE: She was, yes.

CC: Did she do any public work?

HE: No, no, she just attended to all the children, six children at that time.

CC: And how long were you able to keep your home there?

HE: How long did I keep that home?

CC: Yeah.

HE: Oh for ten years and then I had to let it go.

CC: For ten years.

HE: Yeah.

CC: And you were still farming at that time?

HE: Yeah. I was still farming, yeah.

CC: Were you farming on the McCatchen farm?

HE: I was farming on his farm. Yes, I was farming on his farm.

CC: So when did you stop working for him?

HE: In 1978, yeah.

CC: Was there a reason why you stopped working for him?

HE: No, I was unable to farm any longer because I didn't have no force to work with. All of my children had grown up and went to school and joined the army. And that's the reason I didn't have no one.

CC: So did any of your children ever return to the farm as a farmer or did they all go to service and school?

HE: No.

CC: Did you say some of them went to college?

HE: No, none of my children, no.

CC: Okay, but some did go to the service.

HE: Yes, the service. They went to the service, the Air Force. My youngest son went to the Air Force.

CC: And do all of your children live in this area or have they moved like your sisters did?

HE: My children?

CC: Yeah, your children.

HE: One of them lived about eight miles from here, yeah. They live in Lake City, the eldest. One lives in (**33:40**) and then the rest live in Lake City, South Carolina.

CC: Okay. So after 1978 when you left farming, what did you do for work?

HE: At that time, I just worked on the farm, helped someone on the farm, was a helper on the farm.

CC: And did you continue to do that into the 1980s?

HE: I did that until 1991.

CC: Oh wow. That's a long time.

HE: Until I retired.

CC: Right. Did you work on different farms?

HE: Different farms. It was different farms, yeah.

CC: Were these people you had known as a kid or your father had known?

HE: Yeah. I had known them (**34:33**) then.

CC: Were they black farmers or white farmers?

HE: White farmers, yeah.

CC: And so I know that you're a bishop. I know that you preach at the day center.

HE: Yeah, yeah.

CC: Can you tell me how that you decided you wanted to do that and become a minister or some sort or a preacher?

HE: Well, I did do minister work too, a little bit (**35:13**) because I just did Baptist work and then I became a client there myself to have some place to be and I started ministering to the nursing home and the day care center. So that's why I'm there now and I minister there three times a week.

CC: So you've just been doing this for the past—

HE: Yeah. I do free work. It's volunteer work.

CC: Right. You said that you started going to the day care service.

HE: Right, yeah. Plus, I (**36:06**) home (**36:11**) prior to this built in order to be at the home. And then later on, I started out where I would go out to the center I'm at now, yeah.

CC: And about what time period did you start doing that? In the 90s?

HE: When I started out there?

CC: Yeah.

HE: Oh I started out there, let me see, nine years ago. That was 2002.

CC: Okay. So then when you quit farming altogether as a helper on the farm in 1991, what did you do with your time?

HE: Well, see, I didn't have a farm then. So I just left the farm, just left the farm that I was sharecropping. I was just helping. After '78, I just was helping on the farm.

CC: Alright. Can I ask you about your wages?

HE: How much was I getting?

CC: Yeah, yeah, for the different time periods.

HE: Oh like twenty-five dollars a day.

CC: And what time period was that?

HE: What kind?

CC: What time period? Was that in the 70s or the--?

HE: That was in the 80s, yeah, 80s, yeah. But in the beginning, in the beginning, it wasn't but three dollars a day.

CC: When you first started farming?

HE: Yeah. In 1953, it was just two dollars or three dollars a day.

CC: Right. So three dollars a day in 1953 and twenty-five dollars a day in 1990.

HE: Yeah.

CC: Yeah.

HE: That's right, something like that.

CC: Now when you rented your farm, did they garnish your wages for your rent of the farm, like the three dollars a day that you had? Because you said you were—no, no, I'm sorry. You were a sharecropper.

HE: No, I didn't rent it, no. Yeah, see, I was working for someone else.

CC: Yeah.

HE: I was sharecropping and I worked on the farm for three dollars a day, just help them out, just as a helper for three dollars a day, yeah.

CC: Okay. Did you have any debts to Mr. Catchen?

HE: Any what?

CC: Did you have any debt to Mr. McCatchen?

HE: Debt?

CC: Yeah, debt, like did you owe him any money?

HE: Yeah. I borrowed money to live off of until I made the crop and then I paid him back.

CC: Did you find that a fair deal or did you not like it or what did you think?

HE: It was alright. You had to pay a lot of interest on it, but then this was alright.

CC: Do you remember the interest rate?

HE: Huh?

CC: I said do you remember the interest rate?

HE: Yeah. I don't know how much the interest rate was back then.

CC: Yeah, but it was high?

HE: Kind of high, yeah.

CC: It was kind of high, okay. How did Mr. Catchen treat you and your brother, Albert, who worked on the farm with you?

HE: It was a little bit than the slave industry. (laughs)

CC: Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about that? I'd love to hear your—

HE: You had a chance then. You didn't have to get up when they tell you to get up, but you know that you would have a time to get up and a time to quit in the evening. Back then, you had to have a bell to wake up. They had a bell that rang and everybody in the community would know to wake up and go to work. And they would, at twelve, ring a bell. You would quit for an hour and then after one o'clock, you'd go back. They'd ring the bell again and we'd have to go back to work again. So that was the system then. So we had to like it.

CC: Yeah. You had to like it.

HE: Yeah, but we done pretty good. We survived. (**41:12**) we survived.

CC: What do you think is your biggest success in terms of you said that you survived? So what do you think is the biggest success that you've experienced that way?

HE: By just trusting in the Lord, yeah, trusting in the Lord, and working, just working. Do what you're supposed to do because you know you have to work and you have to eat. You have to buy a little clothing for your children and also for yourself. So that's the reason why you have to really work. But I did enjoy the farm. When all of my family scattered about, I couldn't. I would have to hire people to do it. So it was better for me to quit then.

CC: Okay.

HE: And then I just worked by labor on the farm. I did that just myself until I retired and then when I retired, that's when I stopped.

CC: When you retired, did you worry about how you were going to survive without farming?

HE: Yeah. I used to worry, yeah. I used to worry about how I would be able to survive without farming, yeah. But I had put my trust in the Lord and everything, he made a way.

CC: What happened to your brother Albert who was working on the farm with you?

HE: Yeah. He passed away a few years ago.

CC: Okay. He passed a few years ago.

HE: Yeah.

CC: And did he quit the McCatchen farm at the same year you did?

HE: No, he was two years younger than me. He quit a little bit after then.

CC: And did he become a farm helper from time to time after he quit the farm permanently?

HE: Yes, he became a helper.

CC: What did your other brothers do? Did they leave? You've mentioned your sister went to Philadelphia.

HE: Yeah, yeah. My older brother, he was a sharecropper. (**44:01**) he was a sharecropper. He also sharecropped, not on the same farm, another farm.

CC: Okay. So you had two brothers altogether?

HE: Two brothers, yeah.

CC: Okay. And did your sisters, the other four sisters, did they stay here or did they leave?

HE: They left and went to the North.

CC: They left. Did they move with their husbands?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Yeah, okay. What kind of employment did they have when they moved to the North? Do you know?

HE: I think they did housework up there in the North. They still were housewives, helping in the house, but they got more money in the North. Some went to Jersey and others to Philadelphia.

CC: I'm going to turn back to your dad. Did your dad have the right to vote when he was alive?

HE: He did what?

CC: Did he vote when he was alive?

HE: Did he what?

CC: Did he vote, like on November third when you vote for the president? Did he ever get a chance to vote?

HE: Oh vote?

CC: Yeah.

HE: Yeah. I think he did, yes.

CC: You think he did.

HE: Yeah, he voted, voted, okay, I understand.

GE: He couldn't vote (**45:36**).

HE: Yeah, he did.

GE: He voted for president?

HE: He was able to vote in the early part of the 60s.

CC: And what about you?

HE: Yeah, I did.

CC: Yeah. When did you get registered to vote?

HE: I got registered in 1965, yeah, '65, I think it was.

CC: Did you have a federal register register you or did you go to the courthouse?

HE: The courthouse. That's in Kingstree, South Carolina. That's my hometown, yeah, Kingstree.

CC: Was there opposition to you going to go register to vote?

HE: What was that?

CC: Did anyone try to stop you from registering?

HE: No, no, not really.

CC: When you voted, did you vote in local elections and national elections?

HE: National and the local also, yeah.

CC: Both, all of it.

HE: Yeah.

CC: Did you ever vote in elections for the US Department of Agriculture and their county representatives—I'm sorry, the state agriculture offices and the county representatives to the board?

HE: Yeah. I voted for them.

CC: Yeah, you did vote for them, okay. Did you have any relationship at all with any of the county extension agents?

HE: No.

CC: No. So your relationship with kind of county and federal government is basically as a voter, right?

HE: That's right, just as a voter, yes.

CC: Okay. (pause) I just want to review my notes real quick. So I kind of do want to get back to your farm life, either yours as a sharecropper or your dad's as a farmer.

HE: Yes.

CC: You mentioned that earlier y'all made homemade fertilizer.

HE: Homemade what?

CC: You made homemade fertilizer.

HE: Yes.

CC: So what else did y'all have to do kind of by yourselves to get the farm going? What other kind of strategies did you use to farm?

HE: We used homemade fertilizer and that's about all we used. We didn't have a planter to plant the seeds. We had to sow it by hand, the corn by it, drop the corn, and had to sow it, yeah, sow it by hand, yeah.

CC: And where did y'all get your seeds?

HE: (**49:27**) They had a store down there in Kingstree, a fertilizer place.

GE: You saved your own corn seed.

HE: But what we really used to do, yeah, let's back up a little.

CC: Okay.

HE: We used to save the seeds. Like you plant the corn and they would put the corn in the barn and then we would take it, shuck off the corn, and then we would shell the corn and save the best ears. And one more thing, instead of going to the store and buying the grist like we buy now, we had a grist mill and we would go take it to the grist mill to grind it up. That's how we survived also. With the corn, we had to go to the grist mill and also they had a flour mill and we would plant our own flour also.

CC: Okay.

HE: And at one time, rice, we'd plant our own rice.

CC: Yeah?

HE: And we had to take it. This was way back. We'd take and beat the cull, the rice chaff off the rice. You had to beat it off until you'd make it and we would do that just once a week. Like on Saturday, we would do that before Sunday dinner because we didn't eat rice every day like we do now. We would eat it just once on Sunday.

CC: So tell me about Sunday dinners.

HE: Sunday dinner, we would have and she can kind of tell you also that we would have rice and string beans and chicken.

GE: Chicken off the yard.

HE: Yeah. And also we would have like ham, yeah.

CC: Ham on occasion.

HE: Ham, yeah, ham.

GE: You owned hogs. You raised your own hogs.

HE: And we would have potatoes. We would have potatoes. What we called—

GE: Potato pie.

HE: Potato pie, yeah.

CC: What is potato pie? I've never heard of that. It seems like a secret.

HE: Red potato and she's a (**51:52**) cooker. So she knew about that.

GE: Potato poon. We used to have potato poon.

CC: Poon, okay. What is that?

HE: A mixture.

GE: You take a potato and peel it and then you have a hand grater and grate it up and mix it all together and put a little bit of flour in it and some eggs and some sugar and some nutmeg and flavor and stuffing and put it in one big container and put it in the oven and bake it. It was good.

CC: It sounds great.

GE: I wish I had some now.

CC: I do too. It sounds really good.

GE: And put it in the oven and bake it.

CC: Wow. I'll have to try that.

GE: We called it potato pudding.

CC: Okay, potato pudding. Was your mom a good cook?

HE: Yes, yes, she was. Yes, she was.

CC: Good home cooking. You said that you had ham on occasion on Sunday dinner.

HE: Right.

CC: Right. Because you earlier mentioned that you had a hog killing day, a hog day, a hog kill every year.

HE: Hot dog?

CC: Yeah, the hog kill ever year.

GE: Killed hog every year.

HE: Oh hog killing, yeah.

CC: Yeah, a hog kill.

HE: Yeah, a hog kill, yeah, every year. That's where you get the ham from the hog killing. Every day, we would kill five or six hogs at a time when it's real cold where the meat won't spoil and that meat was supposed to last you all year, that whole year, and we didn't have to buy it until later on.

CC: Okay. So one pig would last you the entire?

HE: That's right, yeah.

GE: One what?

HE: Killing.

CC: One hog kill would last an entire year.

HE: The hog killing, yeah.

GE: You kill more than one hog.

HE: Yeah. That's why I said we'd have five or six hogs, yeah. And we would cook, what's it called, chitlins too, with the hogs.

GE: Chitlins.

HE: And we would eat that too.

GE: People eat that now.

HE: (**54:06**), what they call chitlins, yeah. We survived on that too. Then we cooked, we made our own lard by cooking the hog, the side of the hog, cut the hog, and we'd cook it. We would cook, we called it cooking hog crackling.

GE: In the washpot.

HE: In the washpot. We'd cook that and that makes the lard.

GE: Outdoors.

HE: Yeah, but it wasn't good for us because it caused a lot of us to have high blood pressure.

CC: What did y'all use the lard for, like for frying chicken or for making cakes or biscuits?

GE: From the crackling?

HE: Yeah. That's what I mean. That's the lard. Yeah. You used that.

GE: Yeah. You used that.

HE: You used that for cooking, yeah.

GE: You fried the grease out of it and then you'd save it and put it in the frying pan and fry your chicken.

HE: Yeah. That's what you use.

CC: So Sunday dinner was like your family's big event?

HE: The family would come together and eat. Yeah. That's the main thing. The family, each family within the community, your family would come and have dinner after church every Sunday and they would enjoy it, eating together and praying together.

CC: Now this was all your family or people in the neighborhood who are your family?

HE: People in the neighborhood and then sometimes just the family would come together.

CC: Okay.

HE: But if you have anything, you would share with your neighbors. Let's say the neighbor next door, anything you had if they didn't have it, you all would have it because you would share with them.

CC: So take me through a typical Sunday in which you went to church and then you did sharing and then you had eating, right?

HE: Yeah, yeah, something like that.

CC: Yeah. So for example, I guess my question is if you knew neighbors needed help, did you see them at church or did you invite them to your house or did you go to them?

HE: You invited each other to their houses.

CC: Okay, right. So on a Sunday, for instance, after church, would one family in particular say, "Hey, come to my house?"

HE: Yeah. Sometimes it'd be like that, yeah. Most of the time, (**56:53**), "Come to my house," and next Sunday go to their house.

CC: Right. So it just alternated.

HE: Right.

CC: Right. And what kind of church did you go to?

HE: Baptist, mostly Baptist church, yeah, Baptist church.

CC: Baptist churches. How big was the congregation?

HE: It was kind of a large congregation, I don't know, about a hundred, a little better than a hundred heads back then.

CC: And all of these folks were in farming?

HE: Yeah. All of them were farming back then, yeah.

CC: So who were your closest neighbors when you were on your dad's farm?

HE: Willie Evans.

CC: Willie Evans.

HE: Yeah. And Dan Mays.

CC: Did they own their land?

HE: They owned their land at that time, yes.

CC: Did they have children you played with?

HE: They had some children, yes.

CC: Did y'all ever get to go be children and play and not have to work in fields?

HE: Yeah. We would help each other on the farm. Sometimes we would come and help them put in their, gather their crop, and then they would come back and help us gather our crop.

CC: Did y'all ever run off and play pranks or go to a pond or a swamp and play instead of working? Did you ever just do some kid stuff?

HE: Did I ever went and play?

CC: Yeah, to play.

HE: We had a little place we would play baseball in it.

CC: Oh yeah?

HE: Yeah.

CC: What was your favorite position?

HE: Batting.

CC: Batting?

HE: Batting the ball, yeah.

CC: Did you have a baseball hero you looked up to?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Who?

HE: My older brother, yeah. His name was Joshua.

CC: Okay. Did you do any other games besides baseball?

HE: No more than boxing. At that time, it was Joe Lewis.

CC: Where would y'all go to play these games?

HE: We would go in the community.

CC: The community had a—

HE: A little place in the community at the little church school that we used to go. We would go there on a Saturday.

CC: Did you have most Saturdays off or did you have to work?

HE: You had to work.

CC: You had to work.

HE: And we would get off on the Fourth of July.

CC: Earlier you mentioned that you didn't get much schooling and I was wondering if you completed high school.

HE: No, I didn't went no higher than eighth grade, but I went to another school after then, night school.

CC: And what did you do at that school that you went to after eighth grade? Was it like a community school?

HE: Yeah, a community school.

CC: Was that when you were much older in life?

HE: Much older. I was married and thought I'd get a little bit more schooling, yeah. Then I studied in the ministry too.

CC: Yeah. So you went to divinity school?

HE: Yeah.

CC: What divinity school did you go to?

HE: It's a school that we had in the community in Lake City.

CC: Oh okay.

HE: We would meet at the church, but the books would come from what we called a Bible study.

CC: Yeah, okay. Did you have a family Bible that everyone had to share when you were growing up?

HE: Yeah.

CC: When did you get your own personal Bible, do you remember?

HE: After I got married in 1940, 1950.

CC: Did you preach to your children?

HE: Oh yeah and people in the community also.

CC: Can you tell me when you preach, what do you emphasize?

HE: What's that?

CC: What do you emphasize when you preach, like what do you like to talk about?

HE: Oh repentance, repentance, repentance.

CC: Repentance.

HE: Yeah, repentance and giving your life to God.

CC: Have you always had your faith ever since you were growing up?

HE: My faith?

CC: Yeah. Have you always felt your faith since you were a kid?

HE: No, I was raised up by my father, but I was like the prodigal son. I went (**63:09**). I didn't take no drugs, but I did a lot of things in the world, like drinking, tobacco. But I changed my life to the Lord and to God in 1950.

CC: And what happened to make you change your life?

HE: I listened to other ministers preaching faith, listened to my pastor, and then I wanted a family not like the family now. I wanted to raise children under the best teaching that they could. So that's why I had to set an example myself for them to come up and I did have three preachers and a grandson preaching now.

CC: Good for you. When you decided to change, do you remember what the preacher was talking about that made you feel like you had to change?

HE: Yeah. The main thing that (**64:35**) that preacher, the way the rich man died and went to hell and in hell, he lived with fire and torment and the poor man, Lazarus, he went to hell and looked up his eye and saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and he said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Let him come and bring me some water and cool my tongue because I'm tormented." The topic was "What in hell you want." So I don't want nothing in hell. So that told me to change my mind.

CC: Yeah. And you've always been a Baptist?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Yeah, okay.

HE: But I changed later on after I was called to the Pentecostal order.

CC: Okay.

HE: But I still work in the Pentecostal and work in the Baptist now. I visit each one of them. The main thing is the body of Christ and not what name.

CC: And these places where you now work out, that's your example of giving to others and leading by example?

HE: You're talking about the church?

CC: Yeah, like what you do now.

HE: Oh yeah. They give to others, yeah. They give to others. They give to the needy.

CC: And was that something that your father emphasized or did you just develop that on your own, that idea?

HE: On my own.

CC: Are there other differences between you and your father in terms of your temperament or what you did in your daily life?

HE: Was there any difference?

CC: Yeah. What other differences to you between you and your dad and how y'all lived y'all's lives?

HE: Well, my daddy didn't have transportation to go around these places and later the Lord blessed me with transportation that I could go. My daddy used to have to walk to every place. He used to walk down there near the timber mill past the church over there.

CC: Oh really?

HE: But he would have to stay over and come the next day over the weekend at his church, at someone else, some of the brothers' or sisters' house. It was better in my day than in his day. That's why the collection plate was better, a little better in my day.

CC: Any other changes that you see?

HE: No.

CC: Between then and now?

HE: There's not really no change no more than people now don't accept what you preach about like it was in my father's day where it'd be like the Lord bless you. Now (**68:50**). Like I was saying that they used to fellowship with each other after dinner. Now they don't have time for each other. They've got to do their own thing, everybody for self now. And the churches, like I said it was a hundred heads. Now those same churches that used to have a hundred heads got about five or ten in each church. About five or six churches come out from that one church. So they're not really together. So that's a change from that time as it is now.

CC: So back then your life was more full with Christian community and giving than it is?

HE: That's right, yeah.

GE: Tell her about the children going to church.

HE: Oh yeah.

CC: What's that?

HE: That's what I was saying. Our children now, they'll go to Sunday school (**69:49**), a change in that way, but it changed every generation. Every twenty years, it makes a change.

CC: Out of all your years, what is the best time period for you in your life?

HE: Well, really the best time is now.

CC: Yeah?

HE: Yeah.

CC: Can you tell me why?

HE: Yeah, for the last ten years.

CC: I know that you married in the last ten years.

HE: Yeah.

GE: Seven years.

HE: Seven years, yeah.

CC: How did you meet your second wife, Geneva?

HE: At church.

CC: At church?

HE: At our church, yeah.

CC: And what brought you to this house in Kingstree?

HE: Huh?

CC: What brought you to this house in Kingstree? Was it yours or was it Geneva's?

HE: Yeah. We met at church and then began to court each other.

CC: Okay.

HE: Because I was single for eleven years after my first wife passed and so I was living with my son and my daughter.

CC: And they're the ones in Lake City, right?

HE: Right, right.

CC: Is there anything else you'd like to contribute about the topics we've discussed or any final remarks you want to make about farming and what that was to you?

HE: Farming was really good at that time because I didn't get no formal education. So that's the best thing that I could make a living and I had a large family. So I enjoyed it. I didn't make a whole lot of money, but I was able to survive. That's the main thing. I have grandchildren in college now. They're doing fine.

CC: So your faith and your family is your survival.

HE: That's right. My faith and my family will make me survive. That's right, faith in God, yeah.

CC: Okay. Any other last remarks?

HE: Yeah. I think that's covered everything.

CC: Okay, alright. Well, thank you so much.

HE: Yeah, okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Emily Baran. August 2011