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Bertha Holton

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ORAL HISTORY

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Date 8-4-74

Ellen Stephens
(Signature - Interviewee)

5290 E Gate House Dr.
Address

Columbus, Ohio 43213

Date Aug 4, 1974

Geraldine H. Ewing
(Signature - Witness)



Bertha Holton

This interview of Bertha Holton is being conducted by Ellen Stephens on August 4, 1974. Mrs. Holton's son, Tom Holton also participated in the interview.*

ES: . . . how far you had to walk.

BH: Well my, uh, the first school I was 8 years old when I started to school and that was up on Slaughter's Creek. I was up there further than that but it's Slaughter's Creek. I walk, oh way down the hill and then from, oh pert near as fur as from here to Pleasant Hill, barefoot, cold feet barefoot and then, where did I go to school at then. Oh, I went to Coalburg School, I reckon that's Coalburg yet I don't know and I went to, uh, I left Robert's that was, and I went then to Uncle Ike Bradley's and went to school with his daughter, Hedy was her name and, uh, me and her went to school together and she had on a pair of, well they was boy's shoes way too big fer her but she put um on she said, "They keep my feet dry." And, uh, when she got to the schoolhouse she'd pull um off at the door, she's ashamed to go in with um. Oh we's, well I's 9 that's how old, I was 9 years old and well I finished out, went to that school now that was on Slaughter's Creek too right where Robert and Murphy lived and I left there I went in the fall, uh, yeah, well it was in the wintertime I went back up towards my mother's but I never did go to my mother's after she got married for a long time. And then I went to there, let's see that made me about, I was 10 I went to East Bank, you've heard of East Bank, ES: Yeah. well we use to live there that is when ma was a widow but we never lived there after that. She married and went off with her old man and me and my sister, Iris, she's dead now and, uh, we, we went up, no she was staying at East Bank and she said, "Now Berthie, I know where you can get a good place to stay if you'll stay at it and do the dishes and all, you know, different things."

ES: You were just 10 then, BH: Huh? you were just 10 years old?

BH: I was just 10. And, well how I come to leave Roberts,

*Introduction provided by transcriber, Brenda Perego.

her sister come and she was suppose to stay with Marthie or Ishmore was the right name, Robert's oldest child and she went to sh-, or Idie went to, uh, Miss, uh, Benedict and asked her if she wanted somebody to stay with her. Sh-she kept a store and she made hats, oh I don't know what all but, uh, anyhow I went right there and I stayed there, oh I don't know till she got so hateful that I wouldn't stay with her. I went over and I said, "Idie, you can stay just as much as you want to with Miss Benedict but there's one that ain't gonna stay." Well Idie said, "Well where you going?" I said, "I don't know where I'm a goin' but I'm a gonna go somewhere." I said, "This world is too big for me not to get somewhere to go." Well Idie said, "You just suit yourself," she said, "Miss Benedict is hard to get along with," said, "I could have told you that." Well I said, "She, she's just giving me 50¢ a week that don't, ain't worth my time a fooling." And, well I left there and I went up Cabin Creek to Uncle Jim's Stone, my oldest brother's well he said, "Now Berthie," he said, "Uh, you ain't got no place to go." He said, "Your mother's forsaken ya and got her another man," Uncle Jim said. I said I know and, uh, he said, "Well now you can stay here just as long as you want to but I, I can not promise you too many clothes." I said, "Don't want no clothes, I said I got as many a rags as I can carry." Well he said, "That's good," he said "Maybe I can get you something a little later on." You see he had 5, I believe, no 6 boys, he didn't have no girls. Well I stayed there at Uncle Jim's oh I don't know maybe, maybe a week, I don't, just can't remember how long I stayed. But, uh, they was, uh, Miss Williams oh she was the sweetest old thing now, uh, well she wasn't very old. But, uh, I loved her, I liked her awful she, uh, she come up there to Uncle Jim's and asked Uncle Jim if I could go down there and stay. Well I was 11 years old when I went down there to Miss Williams. I stayed there oh I don't know, maybe I stayed there 3 or 4 years and she was just as good to me as my mother. Well she got, her girl got up, you know, great big, big enough to help her and then when I left her I went up, uh, on

Armstrong Creek and, uh, I had done quit school, I got as fur as the 3rd grade that was plenty enough education for me, I didn't need no more I didn't go, you know, they wouldn't make children then go. And, uh, well any way I left Miss Williams her girl got, oh she's pretty good size girl she could help her enough. I went up Armstrong Creek to my, uh, ma's sister Aunt Cindy Petrie. I went and stayed with her oh bout 5 or 6 month and then I went to George, hum, I can't think, I know it, know it as well as I know my own but I forgot it now just let it go at that (laughs). And maybe after, well any way I thought was George Bayes that was his name, George Bayes, I stayed with them on maybe a couple of months and she didn't need me any longer well where did I, oh, uh, my brother, Manson he come over after me said he had some furniture and in the house. He wanted me to go, me, him and Sam all go and keep house. Sam couldn't, he couldn't go in the mines but he could stay there with me, you know, Mance work. Well you know how young is they, they wasn't altogether like they are now but any way Mance took a notion to leave the things in the house what we had, I said no there's some thing in here I want that are mine. Well he said, "Alright." I got um that evening and, uh, I just can't think, oh I went back over on Armstrong and I went to stay with, who was it I stayed, Laurie Parsons, Rube's cousin.

ES: Did you know grandpa then, had you met him yet?

BH: Huh?

ES: Had, had you met grandpa yet?

BH: Yes, I had met him I believe twice, yeah I had met him twice and, uh, he got his arm broke and he went home then we kind of got separate you know, it wasn't, oh it wasn't too long though till he come back up there. And I was staying at Laurie Parson's and he come in, that was the, the first time that he ever kissed me was that evening when he come back. And, uh, he wanted to kiss me in the mouth and I wouldn't let him, I said you're not going to kiss me there.

ES: How old were you then?

BH: Huh?

ES: How old were you then?

BH: I was 16 and, well he fooled around there all that evening, you know, he and me set out on the porch and talked. And he asked me he said, "Can I come back to see you?" Well I said, "You can if you want to, I don't care I don't hinder ya." And, uh, he said, "Well you talk like you don't want me." I said, "Well you know I don't care about it." Well I never thought I'd get that over to Rube. I, I never thought, you know, about it at the time. And, uh, he said, "Well I'm coming back to see ya." I said, "Allright, help yourself." Well oh, on Wednesday evening he come, he come back.

ES: Where, how far did he have to walk, where was he living then, did he have to walk very far or wha . . .

BH: He was living up here on Smith Creek.

ES: Oh that was a long ways to go, wasn't it?

BH: Uh, huh, yes.

ES: How did he go, did he walk or ride a horse or what?

BH: No, he rode a train, ES: Oh he . . . he'd walk over to Springhill and then caught a train there and rode it.

ES: Oh, okay.

BH: And then when he got off of that place he just took another train that went up ES: Okay. Armstrong. Well he just kept coming course I, I didn't think too much about it, well he asked me over there that night I believe it was, he come, come well he stayed till after dark and he asked me that night if I ever thought about marrying him. I said no, I haven't. He said,

"Well wouldn't you like to get married and have a home of ya own?" Well I said, "I don't know whether I could keep a home or not." Well he said, "That's alright," and uh, he said, "we both could keep it together I reckon." I said, "I don't know whether we could or not," I said, "maybe we better wait a little while." He said, "No," he said, "I want a home."

ES: How old was he then?

BH: He, he was 5 years older than me.

ES: Made him bout 21 then?

BH: Um, mmm. And, uh, he said, any way he said, "I'm a gonna ask you conscientiously do you want to marry?" Well I said, "Now I haven't never given it very much thought." Well he said, "We'll talk about it." Well the very next time that was the first thing he said, "Now," he said, "I mean business." He said, "You may not mean business but," he said, "I mean business." I said, "Well I'll tell ya the next time." Well the next time he come I think he said, "I knowed you'd get rid of that puke," / Unknown voice: Grandma! / and I told him yes. We's married (break in tape).

ES: Okay, where'd you all live when you got married?

BH: Up on Armstrong and come to Charleston was married in Robinson's Hotel in Charleston. Preacher Workman married us, uh, 19 and, (coughs) 19 and 8 I believe me and him was married, yeah 19, no, yessir, no 19 and 4 we / TH: Yes. / was married and, uh, (clock chimes) well let's see what next, yeah we, we, we was married there in Robinson's Hotel. We come then that evening down here right up on Smith Creek to his mother's that evening, walked from Springhill down to there. Well we stayed there 3 or 4, no bout 5 days we stayed there. He went to Charleston, he bought all the furniture (coughs) and, uh, put it in the house, he went up on, clear up on Armstrong put it in the house then he come back after me. He said, "Well I've got your house ready." I said, "Who've

you got to go in it?" He said, "I've got you and me."
Well we left the next morning I believe.

ES: What kind of work was grandpa doing then, was he working?

BH: He was working in the coal field.

ES: Where was the, where was he working, where was the field?

BH: Huh?

ES: Where was the coal field that he worked at?

BH: Uh, on Armstrong, / ES: Okay. / um, mmm. Yeah he worked there I don't know how long in the mines and then he left the mines and we come down here on, at, uh, Horseshoe / ES: Right. / there I spent my days.

TH: That's River Bend now, what's known as River Bend.

BH: No, it's a horseshoe.

TH: I know but the name of it is River Bend.

BH: I don't care how many bends it's got it's a horseshoe to me.

ES: Now grandma, when you all lived there / BH: Uh, huh. / you all lived off the farm, didn't ya, you didn't do any other kind of work?

BH: No, we just lived on the farm.

ES: Well did, did you sale some of what you raised like tobac-, sold tobacco?

BH: Oh yes we could sale, we sold alot of / TH: Truck farm, took stuff to St. Albans. / trucks full yeah we, we . . .

TH: Had to haul stuff in a wagon didn't ya, horse and wagon to St. Albans, / BH: Yeah. / watermelons, cantalopes and

corn, [BH: Yeah.] bean, cucumbers.

BH: Cucumbers, tomatoes, oh just about everything.

TH: Peddle it on the street, didn't he?

BH: Uh, huh, no, some of the stores would stop him and take ev-everything he had.

TH: Oh is that right?

BH: Yeah. Everything he had on it and then some days they would, they didn't see you.

TH: Sold watermelons for how much, 5¢ a piece?

BH: No-o-o, just anywhere from 25 to 30¢.

TH: A piece?

BH: Uh, huh and that was pretty good money.

ES: That was good money.

TH: Yeah, that was good money.

BH: Yeah. And, uh, then we were, I raised all my children right down there everyone of um.

ES: Who was your closest neighbor down there grandma, when you lived, who was your closest neighbor when you lived down there?

TH: Mathius Emmons (?) I imagine.

BH: Yeah.

TH: And then Miss Sullivan.

BH: Miss Emmons and Miss Sullivan was you might say the only neighbors I had. And Russ Edmonds family.

TH: Lived at Ferrel (?), [BH: Yeah.] they lived up

at Ferrel (?) up on the bottom.

BH: No, he lived up in the bottom on that same farm we lived.

TH: Yeah, right next to Ferrel (?).

BH: Yeah, uh, huh. Well I believe I told ya bout all I can think of.

ES: Well grandma when you lived down at, in, in Horseshoe who owned that property in through there?

BH: Uh, Fraizer owned it when we lived there till just before we left and then, uh, Julius C. Edmonds.

ES: Right, well when you lived, did you all have to pay Fraizer anything for living there or what, how did they . . .

TH: Sharecrop.

ES: Sharecrop, is that why you did.

BH: Yeah.

ES: He got so much out of what you all . . .

TH: Third and they got two-thirds of everything that was raised.

BH: Yeah, that's what they, we did. And then the last year that we stayed there he, I reckon maybe he had figured up what we had got, you know, the year before and he said, uh, "Well," he said, "how would you like to cash farm, pay cash?" And Rube said, "Well I don't know." Now where was it, Tom, I told you?

TH: He wanted \$1200 a year [BH: Yeah.] rent.

BH: Yeah, that's what he wanted. Rube, Rube said, "Mr. Evans, you can keep your farm, I've got a farm up yonder." He was a fishing for this farm too but he didn't get it. He said, "Why you can give me a mortgage on your place

up there." Rube said, "The "H" I will." I can hear Rube say that right now, my imagination. Get her food, Tom / TH: Alright. / and take it out there and set it on the porch.

TH: Alright.

BH: I don't want to chase her out.

ES: Well when you, how many of the kids, were all of um born down in Horseshoe?

BH: All but, uh, Garnet and Ray, they was borned on Cabin — Creek. Now there we moved to Cabin Creek / ES: Yeah. / you see. We moved from Cabin Creek there.

ES: When, when you had your babies you probably didn't have a doctor, did ya?

BH: No, not till . . .

ES: The closest doctor would have been in St. Albans?

BH: Huh?

ES: The closest doctor would have been in St. Albans?

BH: Yeah. Yeah I had Doc Thompkins and then Doc Thompkins sent, well that man's dead now, he, he sent him to docotr, lived at Doc Thompkins place. Doc Thompkins I believe his mother died and he had to stay at home and he sent him out there, he was a right good little doctor. And Thompkins was the one, that's who named Tom but we put Thomas Warren but now Tom is his, just old plain Tom now that, that's his birth certificate.

ES: When, when you lived down on Horseshoe did you all, where'd you all go to church or where'd the kids go to school?

BH: Up here at, well they had a little schoolhouse out there on the hill they called it Amway (?) Schoolhouse.

ES: That's where daddy and some of the rest of um went to school?

BH: Yeah, yeah Ray and Lee, Garnet.

ES: Well that, did they have very far to walk to go to school then?

BH: No, not that far. They just had to go up the hill just out the road a little piece they didn't have, they didn't have very far to go. But oh, how I recall my life back over the years.

ES: Did they had, when you had your babies grandma, the doctor couldn't, didn't they have midwives, did you have a midwife in that section, or just some of the neighbors would come in?

BH: I had 1 midwife but after that Rube never would let me have a midwife he'd always get a doctor course when I lived up on Cabin Creek the company doctor doctored, deliver.

ES: When you was with the mine?

BH: Uh, huh.

ES: Grandpa didn't like working in the mine?

BH: Huh, uh, nope.

ES: What sort of hours did he work when he worked in the mine, how long did he work?

BH: Oh he worked, he had to work 9 hours for a day's work and one, now Rube did, he made good money. He run a machine that cut th coal, he made good money all the time we stayed on Armstrong. We didn't make much up there on Cabin Creek, it was a scab place, you know, they didn't have no union there, they burnt the union.

ES: Did gran-, did you all get into any of that trouble they had with the union then trying to organize the miners?

BH: We lived in Horseshoe [ES: When all that happened.]
uh, huh. Uh, that was a holy fight I reckon.

ES: You all probably had it hard making a go of it down,
did you have a hard time making a go of it down at
Horseshoe, living off the farm?

BH: Oh, I had to work they ain't no question about that.
Now farm work is . . .

ES: That's when you started your tobacco?

BH: Huh?

ES: That's when you started raising tobacco, wasn't it?

BH: Yeah, uh, huh, yeah we, we raised the second, no, we
raised tobacco that first year we moved down there.

ES: That was probably your biggest money crop, that's
the one you made your biggest money off of.

BH: Uh, huh. Yeah, yeah the, one crop Rube got \$1500 for
and you know that was good for off the farm. But
Mr. Fraizer owned the place then.

ES: And you had to give him a third of that?

BH: Yeah, had to give him a third of that. All but my
garden stuff, I didn't have to do, have to give him
that. Just corn and if he, if he raised any potatoes
he'd offer us work and, uh, dig's um and he'd come
and get um. But we'd get a third for that you know
and he could furnish the seed but now that was bout
all we raised for him.

ES: Had you all saved up enough money then working off
that farm to buy this one?

BH: Uh, huh. Yeah, we just owed 500, yeah, \$500 on it.
No we didn't either we didn't owe a nickel on it.
We had paid every penny on it but you know then land
was cheap [ES: Yeah.] and there wasn't no house on

it, this place. Or nothing only just little old log house and these boys, well they's men grown were down there making moonshine.

ES: Where were they making that at?

BH: Huh?

ES: Where was they, where were they making that at?

BH: Down there in that old house wasn't nobody, ES: Oh, okay. ES wasn't nobody living in it. Well Rube thought he'd rent it, maybe he could get a little something out of it. Lee begged him and I did too to move on up here. Oh it was, it was a log house . . .

ES: Oh, you all owned the property a long time fore you moved up here?

BH: Huh?

ES: You owned the property up here a long time fore you moved up here?

BH: Oh yeah, yeah, I couldn't get him to move, Lee just begged him to and he said, Rube said, "Why it, that's just an old log house." Well Lee said, "What are you a living in?"

ES: That was a log house you all was living in, wasn't it?

BH: Yeah, yes it was. But it was awful good and warm in the wintertime.

ES: How'd you all find out about those boys making moonshine in that house?

BH: Well you know most always Rube keeps to himself but now Rube come there and went out down there in the house. There they was sitting making moonshine, Rube said, "Now look a here boys."

ES: Did they have um a still fixed up?

BH: Yeah.

ES: They had the whole works, huh?

BH: Yeah and, oh I don't know how long they'd been making it. Rube said, "Now listen you all get that stuff our of here, get it over there in the, down the road." See that was fore the state took over. "Get it over there in the road and you'll never hear no~~th~~ing about it from me but I want it off of my property." Well Rube knowed the boys but they, he never did tell me who. But they got going half a ransack and they done it on the double, well getting. And, uh, Rube he said, "Well," he said, "I'm going to rent that house." Well I can't think of the name of the man but any how he rented it, we put windows in it, boys had broke all the windows out, you know, and he put new windows in it, don't know whether they was new or not might have got um out of an old house I don't know. But he put windows in it and he was a going to move in it the next day and I don't know whether they done it for_spite to Rube or what but they set the house a fire, / ES: Oh. / it burnt down. That man never got to move in.

ES: You think it was those boys on account of that moonshine.

BH: I wouldn't doubt it. They'd make moonshine, oh did they (laughs).

ES: I think you're getting tired of talking grandma (break in tape).