

Audio File Name: **shankleville_interviews_12**
Transcription by: Rachel E. Winston, 2020 April
Interviewer: Lareatha Clay
Interviewee: Trogie Shankle, Larutha Odom Clay
Location: Shankleville, TX
Interview Date: 2004 September 4
Duration: 33:16

Speaker Identification:
Lareatha Clay: LC
Trogie Shankle: TS
Larutha Odom Clay: LOC

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

TS: Who was we talking about was a Harris?

LOC: Thelma.

TS: My wife? She was a Sibley. Her mama was Harris.

LOC: Now that makes her kin to Wash Rollins(?).

TS: I done told you! I done told you—everybody's kin!

LOC: You would know that.

LC: So that means that you were related to your wife—a long way off.

TS: Let's see—no. Let me see—wait a minute now. Old Man Steve come here when Grandma Winnie had her. When she come here. Old Man Steve and Old Man Pergie(?) and—what's the McBride's name?

LOC: Steve wasn't her child—wasn't Winnie's child. Mary was Winnie's child. Mary.

TS: Yeah. Yes that's right.

LOC: John McBride is saying that Steve's people worked up in Forestville and that's where Steve came from.

TS: That's right.

LOC: But we don't care where Steve came from—we interested in Mary.

LC: But she's McBride so she is interested in where Steve came from.

CROSSTALK: That's right. That's it.

LC: But your wife—so how is Sibley related to Wash Rollins?

TS: Let me see. Thelma—Gilbert Sibley was Thelma's daddy.

LOC: He was?!

TS: [Laughs] Well I better hush. You've found out too much!

LC: Why'd you say he was like that, Mama?

LOC: Because I'd heard of Gilbert Sibley. I can't think of his wife's name when he moved up there to Shankleville. His daughter was called Pick(??) Sibley and she married—

TS: Yep. That girl y'all called her Pick but her name was Gerald. She married Hubbard—Willie Hubbard that's who she married.

LOC: She married a Hubbard. And your wife was Pick Sibley's half-sister?

TS: Yeah. They were sisters. You might remember Aunt Addie Smart. That was Gerald's mama. She ain't have but one kid.

LOC: You see that's kin to Aunt [inaudible]—[inaudible]'s mama.

TS: [Laughs] This is something there to worry about. You hear me?

LOC: And she was married to Gilbert Sibley at one time.

TS: Who?

LOC: Addie Smart.

TS: That's who he died with—her. And then when he died she married a Hines. On that end here. You know Eddie Gaskin? He was married to Old Man Hines girl. Leon and them father and that's where he got kin to. She married Old Man Hines.

LOC: So how is Sibley kin to Wash Rollins?

TS: Well let me see. I don't see where these Sibley's dropped in here. But Wash Rollins—

LC: Do any of y'all remember him? Wash Rollins. Or he was too old by the time y'all were going.

LOC: See there's a Bull Wash and a Little Wash.

TS: There's three Washes—I know three!

[Laughter]

LOC: Okay.

LC: What three do you know?

TS: I know two dead and one still alive.

LOC: They lived between here and Jasper on that 190—

LC: So you knew the original Wash Rollins?

TS: Sure!

LC: What did he look like?

TS: Looked like an old man! People done a helluva thing back then!

[Laughter]

LC: What do you mean?

TS: He made out like—Eleck Harris found a horse and the horse [inaudible] and the gun went off and shot him in the leg. You know Eddie Harris a cripple leg man. Old Man Wash Rollins he got one of his legs shot. Old folks back there done so much there won't never come to light. You don't know where it come from.

LOC: You don't know how his leg got shot?

TS: No.

LOC: But they said Eddie Harris was sleeping with a horse?

TS: No. The horse was sleep and he toting his gun and it went off and the horse made the gun go up and shot him in the leg. But they said somebody else shot him. You understand me?

LC: So what's the real story then?

TS: I ain't got it!

LC: You don't have it or you not going to tell it?

[Laughter]

TS: You know one thing—it's one book in the Bible stayed with me and I never will forget it—James. A man tongue is never tamed. A man tongue can cause his head to be soft right quick. Do you believe that?

LC: [Laughs] Yeah.

TS: Okay.

LOC: I tell Lareatha we have to be careful with what we write down because it might hurt somebody.

TS: What you say. Sure! You can put too much in there.

LOC: That's right. There's a saying that say, Let sleeping dogs lie! And it's no need in bringing up a lot of this stuff.

TS: Why you wanna dig up old dead dog [inaudible].

LOC: I didn't know Wash Rollins got his leg shot. I remember that Eleck Harris—

LC: Because they make interesting stories.

TS: What did you say?

LOC: I said, I remember Eleck Harris was a crippled man. That's all I remember. But I didn't know Wash Rollins was crippled.

TS: Right. Wash Rollins.

LC: Do you remember Old Wash Rollins?

LOC: No. I don't remember him.

TS: You right surely don't?

LOC: No.

TS: He stayed with Aunt Edie Bennett.

LOC: Edie Bennet?

TS: She was a old Black woman and she carried snuff with her all the time. You understand me? And Henry—

LOC: Who were Edie Bennet's children?

TS: Huh?

LOC: Not Pauly. Paul Bennett—we called Pauly Bennett.

TS: Wait a minute. Jack Bennett, Tone Bennett, Luce Bennett, Edie Bennett—they sisters and brothers.

LOC: And their mama was Edie Bennett.

TS: I said this here Wash Rollins was living with Edie Bennett when he died. And they never did marry.

LOC: Who was Wash Jr.'s mom?

TS: Now I can't remember back there. But I do remember Wash Jr.'s daddy was named John Rollins.

LOC: Then how you gon be a junior! I thought when you were a junior you had the same name your daddy had.

TS: [Laughs] Well you heard what I said. Listen to me good. Did you hear what I said? Old Man Wash boy was named John. And that's where junior come from. Wash. You understand me?

LC: So they skipped a generation.

LOC: Oh okay.

TS: Yeah. You see what I'm talking about?

LC: Maybe that's why she couldn't find Wash Rollins. Remember she kept saying she couldn't find Wash Rollins? She kept asking us, are we sure that's his name? No—she couldn't find Tole(??) Perkins that's who she couldn't find.

TS: Well y'all got a job. I don't know what you gon do with it!

[Laughter]

LOC: I don't either. It's too much! We'll find some direction though.

TS: Listen now y'all—I ain't trying to put no strings on nobody.

LC: We're fine with our job.

LOC: Yes. We just need to know this. Some things we need to know. Oh I don't see how these people supported all these families!

LC: Yeah what did they do? That's a good question.

LOC: Two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen—Lord Jesus!

LC: What did Houston Shankle do for a job to support all that big family he had?

TS: Well back there then he had a wood full of hogs, wood full of cows. And he growed cotton. He growed sugar cane over there in that—

LC: They grew cotton in this area?

TS: Oh girl. Shoot.

LC: Do you remember that Mama?

LOC: Yes. But we just had little patches. We didn't have—

TS: I helped grow cotton. Nine bales since I've been here. That's sixty years ago.

LC: Okay. So he grew cotton. What else did he do—Houston Shankle?

TS: He had woods for cow—

LOC: You notice he's saying woods. That means he didn't have them in a pen. They just graze out there in the woods. The hogs too.

TS: And he had a pen out there. They call it a shoot.

LOC: A shoot?

TS: Yes.

LC: And what's a shoot?

LOC: Make the hogs go up in there.

TS: Make the hog go in there deeper. You remember?

LOC: Okay yeah. We used to have to take the cow everything—

TS: Every month wasn't it? Or week?

LOC: Every month. Some disease or some tick or something.

TS: My wife got Uncle Pate's horse and drove her cow—our cow from the old place right up there where Chicken Powell live to dip. And Aunt Lisa wanted to claim our cow. Thelma say, No that ain't your damn cow! Thelma was kind of tough. Thelma was over there dipping when they got the argument—Thelma say, Come on Moody and the cow went on there. Say, that must be your cow!

LOC: And they had some kind of a paint or something and they'd mark the cows to show that they had been dipped.

TS: Yes to mark the cows.

LC: So it was the government that came in?

TS: Yes that's the government. And otherwise ticks and flies got so bad once they couldn't hardly plow. They had a muzzle over the horses nose and had it covered with wire sack so flies couldn't get in there, gnats couldn't get in there and make 'em sore. Yeah. We've had some pests in this country. I remember the government got rid of them ticks though.

LOC: But you see what he's saying there now—they improvised this masks that they used. See they used grass sacks. See now a day we go to the drug store or someplace and they have gauze made up for that. Them days you had to make do. You just learn how to make do! Use what you had.

TS: That's right.

LC: So the government person—how did that work? They would say, Okay we're going over to a certain person's house? They would pay that person to let them set up dipping at their house or on their property?

LOC: They built it—it was a big hole in the ground. To put the dip in you had to make them go through there.

LC: Who owned the land where dipping was?

TS: Didn't make no difference. Wherever spot they wanted one that's where they put it at. They had one up there. They had one there in Shankleville right in there back of the Holy Church. You remember?

LOC: Oh yeah.

TS: Over there close to Al Baby(??)'s home.

LOC: And Junior White and them had a old stubborn mule he wouldn't go in there! They beat him and beat him and the people over the tent would just push him in there and all of them would cry. Cry because they were mistreating that old mule!

[Laughter]

LC: Mr. White would cry—he was a little boy?

LOC: Oh yeah! And we didn't have school that day. The whole school was out. Everybody had to get the cows.

TS: Well Thelma would go out there—I had one cow. I couldn't care to dip.

LOC: Why?

TS: I know one thing—her mother died when she was young. And she ate with my horse.

LOC: Well the horse had to be dipped too!

TS: I'm talking about how I couldn't do nothing with her! When she got out of that lot that was it. As long as she was in that lot you could walk up there, rub her—do anything to her. But you better not come up in there with no rope. She's gone!

LC: And you could get away with not dipping her?

TS: No. Me and Percival went over there one morning we laid off from work. And we went over there and penned her up. And when we went in that lot she come out between that old house and the Sibley place over there—I caught that cow by the tail and throwed her down on my feet. And we caught her and dipped her and when it come time to dip her again she was dead. We made beef out of her!

[Laughter]

LC: Why because she wouldn't dip?

TS: She wouldn't drive! I put her in the lot and go around every which way I want to. And she was round—fat as you ever seen a cow. But when she seen that rope that was her moving time.

LC: So if she obeyed she might not have been eaten.

[Laughter]

LOC: Well I'm afraid we might've got on to something! I'm saying we—back in those days when they kill a cow everybody would come and go buy some beef from them you know—

TS: Everybody would eat!

LOC: The whole community ate the cow.

TS: When I moved down here I was living out at Crown(??)'s place—I had a bunch of hogs and a few cows. And the first time I killed hogs I wouldn't kill no less than three.

LC: Y'all would share that too?

TS: Yeah I carried it around—give it to my neighbors around, everybody. A person kill a hog to give meat to the others around.

LOC: And they killed their share too.

LC: Then y'all must not have killed cows often for everybody to come and get some.

TS: Yes. And then it got up to where the cows were worth ten cents a pound for meat.

LOC: That was a lot of money huh? And if a cow got hit on the highway you'd hurry up to go kill that cow! Hurry up and kill that before gang green and stuff set in.

TS: That's right. And now I believe over there where it's Troy Jr. farm—on the highway there where them Johnners(??) live now. And the government bought a property. And if a cow was in real good number one shape they'd give you ten dollars a head for it.

LOC: Ten dollars a head? A cow?

TS: Yes. Shoot 'em down with a twenty-two. You couldn't use the meat. Everybody else could use it. Me and Toot and Morris went out there and I say, Oh let's look around and skin us a beef a piece. And we had beef rib in April and May.

LOC: We had it in the deep freezer. Did you dry it? You had a freezer by then?

TS: No.

LC: Oh that's why you were giving it away because you couldn't keep it.

TS: No you couldn't keep it too long. But it was a cool spell that spring. You know how it be cool sometimes—be ice on the ground two, three weeks at a time? You remember that. You don't remember that no more.

LOC: We don't have it no more. Yeah but we used to.

TS: And then we go around and divide it up.

LOC: Why were they killing the cows?

TS: So the price could go up. Can you remember when Pine Cotton up in the fields so the cotton would go up?

LOC: Yeah I remember that. They'd pay the farmers.

TS: The first cotton that I growed I sold it for five cents a pound.

LC: The government would pay people to grow cotton so the price would go up?

TS: Yeah. And then pay you five cents a pound for them not to grow it. You understand me? See the government has messed with everything. 'Til they got to the place where they don't know what they're doing.

LC: Why did the government want the price to go up?

LOC: To make the economy better. People have more money to spend.

LC: But you not growing cotton! But you're getting paid.

LOC: Those other people—

LC: The people who were growing it were getting more money than you for growing it—

TS: That's right. You catch now—cotton is a dollar something a pound. The first cotton I growed got about five cents a pound for it.

LOC: White guy told me the other day, You all should've gotten mad. I said, We ought to still be mad! He act like he thinks it's over now you know and we getting equal treatment. I said, You come to my neighborhood! I said, You'll see! The ditches in my neighborhood are not like the ditches in your neighborhood. In fact he didn't have any ditches. We're still being taken advantage of!

LC: So what you're saying is that they would basically tell the Black people not to grow it for five cents a pound?

LOC: We don't know. We don't have any proof of that, do we?

LC: Okay.

TS: Ain't got enough proof, do we?

LOC: No. All we know if they came by and told you to plow yours over.

TS: Do you know why? That we got the advantage we is now. I know you've studied history. The Northern slaves didn't have nothing. A person didn't have an education—couldn't do. And the Southern slaves was working the hell out of us down here. Growing them hogs, cows and syrup and everything you know what they could eat. And the Northern couldn't do it! And that's the reason why we is got the chance we is today.

LOC: We've learned how to do stuff.

TS: Oh yeah. We've got to go to school now where everybody go. Everybody knows the same. See—back there then you could take a whole [inaudible] and a mule and go to it down here. But you couldn't do that up there in the North. It was too cold! You had to have something up here.

LOC: I hadn't made that distinction.

LC: So how often did y'all interact with white people in the Liberty or Shankleville Community? Did they come often—or did they just come as government? Did anybody ever live in the area that was white?

TS: Well you see. I have—I can't say too much. But when I was in PUCKWOOD business—if I would've had the set of mind like I have today I would've went to that auction block in Mississippi where they auctioned all the Negros off when they brought them from Africa here.

Well you see here's the thing about it—excuse me for saying it—but that was the cheapest way they had of transporting people from overseas. On them ships. Put them on there and make them all paddle their own canoe. Bring them in by the skip load. And when they bring them in by the skip load they'd meet there and all of them would bid on them. What you gon pay for them. You understand me? A man told me he'd tell me—show me where the block was. That's the reason why everybody in this part of the country come from Mississippi.

LC: But Jim Shankle was born in Kentucky.

TS: Well that's what I'm talking about.

LC: And then he moved to Mississippi. Oh—you're saying he was driven there or had to walk there. Because Winnie was born in Tennessee.

TS: Yeah. But you see they would auction off from the Mississippi block. Just like we got cows—we got a block here in Kirbyville to auction off. We got one at Lufkin. We got one in Center. We got one in Nacogdoches. That's the way they done Negros at that time.

LC: But what I'm asking is if when you were growing up—what interactions did y'all have with white people if any?

TS: When we was growing up we didn't have nothing to do but stay out that white woman's way or they'd drag us. You understand me? And on and on.

LC: But were there any white women around for you even to deal with?

TS: Oh yeah there were white women.

LC: In Shankleville?

LOC: No.

TS: Yes. They was in the woods.

LOC: I didn't know anybody in Shankleville. I didn't know any whites lived in Shankleville.

TS: Let's see—the Medleys right there across the bayou. All that there was white owned. White folks there.

LOC: I didn't know that was considered Shankleville.

TS: Well they called all that Shankleville then. You understand me?

LOC: I remember them talking about the Medleys—

TS: Yes. Medleys and Millers—

LOC: Over there down by the bayou?

TS: Yep. And Ramseys. You know they killed a Black man over there and buried him in a shallow grave there. And them Negroes went to come in there with them big rifles for hunting and they got scared and told them to carry them Negroes back home they'd show 'em where he was.

LC: The white people got scared?

TS: Yeah.

LC: Why did they kill the man?

TS: Well white folk always—if a Negro got something they want they kill him to get it.

LOC: They don't have to have anything! It's the strangest thing. I think I told you about it—I was showing a film in my classroom it's name was The Lottery. And it started off talking about how people are giving their lives for strange things and it started off with a background with a Black person giving his life by being lynched. And a hundred old white boys was just, Oooh! Yell and were just so glad to see that going up. And you know what I did? Put my light on. Put my light on and sat up on my stool and looked at them. Just to see who was gonna holler. And nobody would holler. And I'm looking. Because they knew I had my ink pen in my hand and I was going to write it down. And when that was over I would put the film on and go on and look at them. It's in their blood today! You can't get it out.

TS: Well do you know what? That is one of the worst things there is among the human family.

LOC: Race relations. It never will get to be the same.

TS: It never will wear out.

LC: Why do y'all think that?

TS: Well I'll just tell you what to do. You're younger than I am. You watch it.

LC: So these people—the Medleys and the white people who lived around here—so one of them kills this guy. And then the Black people from Shankleville went up there and said, I'm looking for him. Is that what happened?

TS: I'm gonna tell you were Shankleville history come from. Old Man Jim Shankle—just like all of us Shankles is now—that's our trouble. We ease around and try to find out too much.

LC: What do you mean?

TS: Well when the sold Grandma Winnie away from Old Man Jim—Shankles is hard. Don't care nothing about giving a woman up. Every now and then you catch a Shankle won't stay with a woman. But if he got the Shankle blood he about to stay with her if she'll do something right. You understand me? And that made a big difference. And he found out where Grandma Winnie went. And he take a chance on his life—swim the Mississippi river and come all the way down to Louisiana. Crossed Sabine into Texas. And he just—I don't know how the man that had bought her found out. They hunted him and couldn't find him. And said, If he come that not to hurt him because he was a good nigger. Said, You couldn't place him. And told whenever he come up—I think it was a thousand dollars.

LC: Who told you that?

TS: I'm just thinking now who it was. Seem like to me it was this old man from down here at Magnolia Spring.

LOC: Ben Willie Shankle?

TS: Yes. He's the one brought that up.

LC: And he was a grandson?

TS: Yeah that's right.

LOC: George's son.

LC: I've never heard the thousand dollars before.

LOC: I haven't either. That's George's son.

TS: You see that's the reason why I say I can say too much. You understand me? Cause if I'd have had sense enough and had me a pencil and wrote it down who it was. I'll tell you something else I haven't been able to put my finger on. You heard them talking about Emmaline?

LC: Emmaline who?

LOC: That's another child?

TS: Now I ain't never been able to put my hand on it.

LOC: That's another child of these original children? They say she went to Navasota. And I know Navasota is close enough for us to get in touch with.

LC: Oh she went to Navasota and you never heard from her—

LOC: Never came back. Never heard from her. That's what they told me. What do you remember?

TS: You see I ain't never got a hold of her. You see that—Emmaline and Toge(??) Perkin and Wash Rollins and McBride. I've got a hold on all of them but Emmaline. I ain't got a hold of her yet.

LOC: They say she never did come back—

TRANSCRIPT END