

Audio File Name: shankleville_interviews_17
Transcription by: Rachel E. Winston, 2020 June
Interviewer: Lareatha Clay
Interviewees: Malchia Cannon, Willie Pate Shankle, Gwendolyn (Wilona) Cannon,
Larutha Odom Clay
Location: Shankleville, TX
Interview Date: 2004 September 4
Duration: 24:54

Speaker Identification:
Lareatha Clay: LC
Malchia Cannon: MC
Willie Pate Shankle: WPS
Gwendolyn Cannon: GC
Larutha Odom Clay: LOC

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

LOC: —they go and open it out and look at me. You know on holidays or my birthday. Mother's Day and stuff like that. I just can't stand those bugs! I'm talking about in the graveyard. I don't want to go down in the ground. Lareatha wants to be cremated!

MC: Who?

LOC: Lareatha does. And I'm sort of leaning in that direction.

MC: I heard that!

LC: I want to be cremated and put out in the Shankle cemetery.

[CROSSTALK]

WPS: You looking finally to come back to Shankleville?

LOC: No. If they bring my ashes first! If they bring my ashes I can take it.

GC: In the future maybe they can build one up there.

MC: Build what?

LOC: A crematorium thing. To store ashes. I don't want ashes sitting up in anybody's house. In a place nobody's going to look at me—I want them to look at me on every holiday. [Laughter]

LC: We were talking about the CME church—

MC: The history behind the CME church. It was organized by Reverend Harris Shaw. Who was known as a circuit rider for the CME church in 1875.

LC: Now what I heard about it was from an article—go ahead sorry—

MC: You're correct. Okay. The church didn't have a permanent home until 1875. But prayer meetings were started in 1871 in the homes of Jim Shankle, March Smart, Tobe Perkins, Gibson Fowler, G.N. Shankle, and Will Peacock families. This is the first beginning of what we know of Mount Zion CME church today. Correct? I knew I'd seen it somewhere. It was organized by Harris Shaw who was a circuit rider—

LOC: Does it say anything about Joseph Odom?

MC: No ma'am.

LC: Because Gibson Fowler is Joseph Odom's stepdaddy. So he's a contemporary of Jim Shankle. So those people you named must be the original Shankleville people. They must've been in their fifties and sixties when that happened.

GC: Had to have been.

MC: It says—it was held in the home of Jim Shankle, March Smart, Tobe Perkins, Gibson Fowler, G.N. Shankle, and Will Peacock. Miss Tish(??) had more than this.

LOC: Will Peacock was Aunt Lyda's husband—do you believe Willie Pate? No?

WPS: No.

LC: These are the ex-slaves.

MC: You know Tobe was—

LOC: One of the original children.

MC: Yeah. That was Winnie's—and you made a beautiful statement at the Homecoming. And I didn't get to you to tell you and thank you. When Phillip made a mistake and said—

LOC: Phillip accepted that as a mistake. But John McBride is trying to send that message out. John McBride wants to change the name of Shankleville to McBride.

MC: Yeah I know.

LOC: And they sure want to change that cemetery up there. They want to change that cemetery up there by the Church of God to McBride Cemetery. See—because Jim Shackle's daughter married Steve McBride. And they bought land together. And something happened. And the McBride man had given the plot of land for the cemetery and Jim Shankle said he didn't want his relatives buried in that plot. And that's why he gave another one. That's why we have two. But they call that one the Shankleville Cemetery and this one over here the Jim Shankle Cemetery.

MC: They call it the Community Cemetery.

LOC: Yes. And Joan she wants to change that. But Phillip was so gracious. He took credit for it and said, I just made a mistake. But that's what Joan is trying to get across. She's trying to get across.

LC: You didn't let him finish what he was saying.

LOC: Okay. I'm sorry.

MC: You know when you made that statement that we were all kin. You know—and it wasn't no split there no way. I often wondered about that. How did the McBrides and the Shankles come— Jim had a daughter to marry—

LC: Actually it was Winnie's daughter. It was the daughter that he raised—it was Winnie's daughter by the white guy. Mary—

LOC: We don't know that. We just assume that. She was born during slavery.

MC: Okay. What was her name?

CROSSTALK: Mary.

LC: And she married Steve McBride.

MC: Mary. Yes. Okay.

LOC: But she's Mary Rollins. I never did get that Mary Rollins.

LC: She's still Winnie Shankle's daughter.

MC: Who is B.M. Lears?

LOC: That's what Trogie and I were talking about. That's another daughter—

MC: That's a daughter?

LOC: —that left there and went to Navasota. Isn't there something in there on her?

LC: Emmaline. Isn't that her name?

LOC: Yeah. That called her Emmaline and B.M.

MC: B.M. Lears—it's just like Harriet. They got Harriet as Harriet Odom. But she was Harriet Odom Shankle. And they got the same thing on the B.M. Lears. She married a Lears?

LOC: I thought she married Uncle Simon. But it looked like to me Uncle Simon wouldn't be that old. Huh Willie Pate? Uncle Simon Lewis.

WPS: Uncle Simon wouldn't be that old.

LOC: That's what I was thinking. He dad's wife was named Margaret. And she was living during my time. Uncle Simon died right before—look like—

MC: That's what's got me puzzled. That was Winnie and Jim's daughter—B.M. Lears.

LC: Is the one—ya'll were talking about that today—she left and went to Navasota and nobody knows what happened to her.

LOC: But it seems to me somebody—Navasota is just across the street now. Right out of Houston. Navasota's not that far. But back in those days I guess so. I thought it was some

children here. I thought she had a child—a daughter named Hattie and one named Madney. At least we know that. Maybe we can ask Junior White since Simon Lewis was his grandfather. Uncle Simon Lewis was Cousin Foney(??)'s daddy. But I don't know who is mama was.

WPS: I bet Junior could tell you.

LOC: That's what I'm saying. But you know Mama and Daddy used to sit up and talk to me when I'd come and I'd just write the stuff down. It didn't mean much to me then. Now I'm trying to go back and see if they told me she was married to Uncle Simon.

MC: You know that got me because I studied that every time I go out there. Then I'll try and visualize and just have a vision. And I couldn't come up with nothing. I come up with something on everybody else but couldn't see that vision. I'd go down there in Spring and sit and meditate and just meditate—I feel comfortable down here.

LOC: I'd be worried about those bugs! [Laughter]

GC: I make him dig the spray out so I could see the water flow!

WPS: That water run just as clear as—

LC: You know I wonder if there's a way to—

GC: Restore it?

LC: Yeah.

MC: It's some kind of way.

GC: I keep asking. There's something you could do—that could be done—to make this water flow all the time.

MC: It's something. We just not doing it.

GC: Because if you just kind of move the sand it'll come up.

MC: Yes it'll come up! It works.

WPS: Let that sand go up there and stop it. Have some kind of pipe or something comes back up in the ground—

MC: But you've got to clear that—dig that sand out.

LC: Because when I talked to Big Mama—Annie Odom—she would talk about the spring. The way she was describing it—it seemed like it was a whole lot more than what's out there now.

MC: Oh yeah!

LC: She talked about washing clothes in it and—maybe I shouldn't tell some of her personal business. Let's say—when she became a woman she went and bathed in it and stuff like that.

MC: That's what I'm talking about! Yeah. They washed clothes and stuff. See that's what happened when Jim and Winnie got here.

LC: Yeah I know. That's why when you go and you see what's there now—

MC: We looking at something that we—we need to just go down there and dig it out by hand. I don't want nothing else to mess with it.

WPS: [Inaudible].

MC: Because it was some water flowing through there.

LC: Maybe that's a project that the Shankleville Historical Society needs to work on. But whose land is it on?

MC: It's on—whose is it? It's y'all's ain't it?

GC: It's on Odom land.

WPS: Odom I think—I think that was from Ms. Nash on there.

LOC: Yeah you know she got mad at Daddy about it. Because her dad was the last one to live. But that doesn't have anything to do with it. Everybody's supposed to share and share alike. But Daddy just didn't want to face her wrath. So he just gave her the deeds and let her go and she put them in her name. It's in her name now. But if somebody felt like going to court about it—it would be divided up between all of the sisters.

CROSSTALK: That's right. Yes.

MC: He wasn't for no mess.

WPS: Like the way it is now—she done gone in [inaudible].

GC: Who was Ms. Nash?

WPS: That was Cookie and them's mother.

LOC: Willie Pate—do you think your barn could be converted to a nice assembly place for the Homecoming?

WPS: My barn?

LOC: Yes. Does it have a floor in it?

WPS: Oh it don't have no floor in it. But otherwise it's good. Good but just don't have no floors in it.

LC: Y'all getting off the subject again.

LOC: You going to will it to somebody?

WPS: Am I gonna will it to somebody? When I'm gone Ruth—anybody can have it.

LOC: Well you ought to put that in your will. To give it to the Historical Society. And we could have a nice place.

LC: Y'all getting off the subject.

LOC: We're finished then. I'm trying to get him to say on the tape that he would will it to us!

WPS: You asked something about Terie hankle. Who is Terie SHankle?

LOC: That would Cousin Fletcher's sister that was married to Willie Shankle.

WPS: Willie Shankle—my uncle.

LOC: And she had two children—Willie May and Willie Moore.

WPS: That's right.

LC: A boy and a girl?

WPS: A boy and a girl.

LOC: And then she married a Sullivan. That's what I was going to ask y'all—did you know the name of the Sullivan man? I found a book I had up on my shelf—

WPS: His name was—we called him Johnny Sullivan.

LOC: Johnny?

WPS: Sullivan.

LOC: Because he had a son named Roy. And he wrote a book and I bought it from him. Roy Sullivan.

WPS: Okay. And they had a daughter. Her name was Terece Sullivan.

LOC: Yes she surely was. She was in school with us wasn't she?

WPS: Yeah. We got to talk about what we got off of awhile ago.

GC: I'm glad y'all keep the heritage going. All the information would just die if y'all didn't take the initiative to keep it going.

LOC: We supposed to be going to put out this book with these trees in it. But I can't picture putting it out and making mistakes in it. And we just haven't found a way to proofread it. To make sure we've got it.

LC: We'll probably just go down to a certain level. But that's part of what this is—I'm going to type it up and hopefully we'll be able to get it in some kind of order to be able to give it to people. That's why I'm trying to keep us on the subject! So what were you saying?

LOC: She would've left me in Beaumont if she'd have known I'd come about her sense.

[Laughter]

WPS: The lady Terie—she was married to my uncle. Uncle Willie Shankle. He got killed by lightning. He had two kids. Willie Moore Shankle and Willie Mae Shankle—boy and a girl.

LOC: And Willie Mae is the San Antonio man's mama.

LC: Okay. When you were working on the carpentry teams—was that the only job you had or did you have other jobs in addition to that?

WPS: I had that job and I had a job working out with your grandpa. Doing carpentry work.

LC: Other than the carpentry work what other jobs did you do?

WPS: Oh. I worked at Toledo Bend Dam. I worked up there about two years and about three months. When the Toledo Bend Dam was being cut out. If I hadn't worked on that job I wouldn't get no social security card. I wasn't paying social security on the farm. And doing carpentry work I wasn't paying none. And by me working up there that's what put me on—brought me social security.

LOC: And so you're able to draw it now?

WPS: Oh yeah.

LOC: Good.

WPS: That's what keeps me going now. That and my little timber and cow. Timber. You know I grow timber. Timber and cows—that's what keeps me going here.

LOC: Now Lareatha you were asking him about did he have another job. That farm is a job in itself! They had a lot of farm.

WPS: That's a full time job.

LOC: Yes! They had that farm right across from ours.

WPS: Yes that's right. Then we had all that at the house and we had nine acres over the bayou. We was ten over there.

LC: What did y'all grow?

WPS: Corn, peanuts, peas, sweet potatoes, ham.

LOC: You didn't have peas this year did you? Livie said the peas—it was too we for peas this year.

WPS: Oh yes. That's what happened this year.

LC: Did you sell them? Did you sell what you grew?

WPS: At that time I was growing just to feed my stock from. Like somebody come through and want some peas I'd give them peas. But I wasn't selling none of them. I just turned to odd jobs.

LOC: Get your camera Lareatha. You forgot to take your pictures.

LC: I haven't forgotten. We're still talking.

LOC: Oh I'm sorry!

LC: If you hadn't worked at Toledo Bend then you wouldn't have had social security at all?

WPS: No I wouldn't. Because I just wouldn't have fooled with nothing like that. By me working at Toledo Bend that's where the state required I had to draw in social security.

LC: What did you do out there at Toledo Bend?

WPS: Worked in cement finishing.

LC: How'd you learn to do that?

WPS: Along with my brother-in-law Absalom White(??) and your grandpa. Because we go on jobs and have a little concrete to finish and we take care of that.

LC: When you were working in the carpentry you were learning a lot of different things?

WPS: Oh yes. That's right.

LOC: Is your name Gwendolyn?

GC: Gwendolyn.

LOC: Can't you visualize having Homecoming in that barn?

GC: Oh yes.

LOC: We could get air conditioning in there. We could put the floors, put air conditioning and a kitchen—

LC: You know what I visualize for the near term?

LOC: What?

LC: Especially since Homecoming is taking in more money—this time it took in more than ever—

LOC: Willie Pate are you still on that board—that Homecoming board?

WPS: Yeah I'm still on it. Oh yeah.

LOC: You're still on there. Well make sure they spend the money right.

LC: Mother let me finish my point—when we were growing up at the Homecoming when it was time for the food everybody would kind of stay outside and hang around and talk and that's when you really got to visiting. Now a lot of times people just kind of go and a few people hang around but most of them go in and get the food and get in the car and leave.

CROSSTALK: That's right.

LOC: And some people come back and ask for seconds!

LC: Since it seems like we have a little more money maybe put a tent out with some of the fans in it that mist. To try to get people to stay and sit—and have picnic tas and everything—and stay and eat and talk.

GC: Oh yes! You have enough room.

LC: Because in the church—the Church of God—it was too hot and there wasn't enough seats. You don't want to eat inside the church. And so now it's more conducive for people to get the food and leave. But if you had a place—and that's what I'm saying now—a tent—you could put it up. You could rent it—if we really had money we could buy it but you could rent it for a couple hundred dollars. Get a couple of those fans out there and have a little mist and then people might hang around.

GC: We could take the tables and set it up buffet. And us ladies could stand behind there and people could come by and get what they want and it would be a lot more togetherness if we did it like that. That may be something we could bring up to Phillip or—

LOC: Do you go to the meetings?

GC: Yeah I can. Suggest it?

LC: Bring it up at the meeting.

LOC: Tuesday night after the Homecoming. That's when y'all have it. Do you go Willie Pate?

WPS: Yeah I go every year.

GC: And see they have summer meetings before the Homecoming and we could suggest it.

LC: When we were talking to Cousin Trogie earlier today he was on one of the original committees for Homecoming. Were you on the original Homecoming Committee?

WPS: Yes I was.

LC: So you've been on Homecoming Committee ever since?

WPS: Ever since.

LC: What kinds of things have you seen that have changed over the years that you think are better today than when you first started?

WPS: I'll tell you—I was on it with your grandpa and them. After us the young people come in—they had more ideas then we had. So we kinda got back and let them handle it. And so far they've done a good job.

LC: What are some of the things that used to happen in the old days when the Homecoming first got started that you miss now?

LOC: Take your pictures so we can go.

GC: Please don't get me on it!

WPS: It's just a few things that changed from what it was when we had it.

MC: Like what?

WPS: I'll give the young people this—they've done a good job.

LOC: Are they mining the money?

WPS: Oh yeah! They're taking good care of the money. One thing—they really save more money than we saved when we were coming along. Now what I'm talking about—when we were on there we had to do the work out there ourselves at the cemetery and all that. But since they've been in there well they pay for it—got somebody that do it in the morning and everything. The way I look at it saves more money they save more money than we saved. They probably give more money but more money coming in then when were—

LOC: Do you know why more money's coming in?

WPS: Okay.

LOC: Because Lareatha and I send out all those letters.

WPS: Yep.

LOC: We have a database—a good mailing list!

WPS: Well I'll tell you one thing—a whole lot more money coming in when they doing it than when we were.

LOC: Yes. That's it. We send out more letters.

TRANSCRIPT END