

*Tape Log
By Content
Mr. D. A. Nelson*

Tape I

Group I---Learning to turpentine---First memories---jobs

0h 05m 44s

0h 06m 14s

0h 09m 03s

0h 29m 10s

1h 43m 49s

Group II---Bosses and Woods riders

0h 56m 31s

Tape II

0h 13m 34s

0h 13m 59s

0h 14m 37s

0h 57m 16s---*Nelson becomes a woods rider*

0h 57m 58s---*His treatment of woods workers*

Group III---Life in the camps---check tape one @ 1h 01m 59s---then back to tape II

0h 18m 46s

0h 19m 04s

0h 19m 12s

0h 19m 20s

0h 20m 42s

0h 20m 59s

0h 21m 47s

0h 22m 06s

0h 22m 21s

0h 22m 31s

0h 23m 14s---*Baseball, Teams Holidays*

0h 23m 22s---*Baseball, Teams, Holidays*

Tape II

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Group IV---*Children Schools*

0h 25m 36s

0h 25m 42s

0h 26m 24s

0h 37m 36s

0h 37m 45s

0h 37m 58s

0h 38m 13s

0h 38m 30s

0h 38m 36s

Group V---*Camp life---Church---Women---Family*

0h 43m 35s

0h 43m 42s

0h 43m 55s

0h 44m 14s

0h 44m 28s

0h 45m 22s

******Tape I---Women at work---1h 12m 20s******

Group VI---*Payday-Leaving*

0h 46m 25s

0h 47m 29s

0h 47m 46s

0h 47m 55s

0h 48m 27s

0h 48m 40s

0h 49m 22s

0h 49m 35s

0h 49m 40s

0h 50m 35s

0h 50m 39s

0h 51m 37s

0h 51m 48s

0h 53m 14s

0h 56m 16s

0h 57m 16s

0h 58m 5s

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Tape One

0h 05m 44s---*Learning to turpentine---first memories*

Well, when I first started it they did what you call rake pines. Get you a hoe, clean around the bottom of that tree, where the fire wouldn't catch it and burn it up. (out cue)

0h 06m 14s

Well, I first started working turpentine when a little boy on down further, place called Fargo. (out cue)

0h 09m 03s

You heard tell of the Langdales. Well, I started working for them. I started working for Langdale and Poole. (out cue)

0h 29m 010s

First job I had in it was weeding pines, next job in it was chipping boxes, and you chip them boxes, you hung a cup on the bottom of the tree down there, and you cut a streak across there and the gum would run out into that cup. That cup get full, dip it out, put in a barrel, carry it to the still and make rosin and turpentine out of it. (out cue)

0h 56m 31s---*Boss men---Woods Riders---Workers and Treatment*

I didn't do no special favor but work, and they didn't do me none. They like to beat on people, they tell you how they gon kick you or hit you or something. I tell him don't you put your foot on me. I never got kicked by none and I never have got hit by none. Cause if you done something I didn't like, I told you about it then. Yeah, I told you about it then. (out cue)

1h 01m 59s---*Singing---Entertainment---Jukes*

They had pianos in a big house there and they called that a Juke Joint. I went in one of the Jukes a many night, all night. (out cue)

1h 12m 20s---*Women and work*

Chop cotton, hoe peanuts and gather corn and stuff like that. But now, in the turpentine business they could rake pine, theys some women would chip, do anything a man do. (out cue)

1h 43m 49s---*Work Ethic*

What did it teach me? Yes sir, tend to my business and leave the other fellas alone. Now that's the best teaching you can get. Don't give and don't take. That's what keep me in there. (out cue)

Tape 2

0h 13m 34s---*Life in the Camps*

The white folks, most, didn't too many people, white folks stay in the camp with colored folks. (out cue)

0h 13m 59s

But there'd be a white man or two in that camp; the man that owned the camp, and he had what they call a woodsman. And from time to time, camp what I mean, he had what he called a over rider. (out cue)

0h 14m 37s

If he was a good man, he was a good man to get along with. But some of them wanted to be kinds important and bigoted, and want to beat you or hit you or something. But if you stood up for yourself, you didn't have no trouble. (out cue)

0h 18m 46s---*Camp Life*

You see, you had your privileges. (out cue)

0h 19m 04s

I was a good ball player. (out cue)

0h 19m 12s

They had teams just like they do now, and they'd go from place to place like they do now. (out cue)

0h 19m 20s

Farmers have big plantations; 15-20 plows. Well, you take it that was a big camp, farm. And they'd go , they didn't let the niggers have but three days out the year to play ball and things. (out cue)

0h 20m 42s

Tom creek, place right below Valdosta down there where that Wetherington woman live there, that was one place, Fargo was another one. (out cue)

Page 4---*Camp Life Continued*

0h 20m 59s

Short stop, right field, I could do a little bit of any of it. But it was one thing I didn't like was back stopper. Didn't want that man chunking at me. (out cue)

0h 21m 47s

You see, these old big shot farmers would let the niggers off the fourth of July, they play ball the twentieth of May. (out cue)

0h 22m 06s

Just a day kinda that they freed them niggers kind of. And that was his all day, the twentieth of May and the fourth of July. (out cue)

0h 22m 21s

Christmas, Christmas day you had a week off. (out cue)

0h 22m 31s

Thanksgiving, fourth of July, and the twentieth of May, them three days them big shot farmers would get together and the niggers could play ball. But then, I forgot; in turpentine, every Saturday and Sunday you could play ball if you want to. (out cue)

0h 23m 14s---*Holidays in the Camp*

Oh, it was alright. It was just a bunch of them get together and have fun.

Oh 23m 22s

Yeah, they'd have big eats, that's what they allow, now mostly that boss man would help them prepare a big dinner. (out cue)

Oh 25m 36s---*Children in the Camp*

They went to school. (out cue)

Oh 25m 42s

They had, what ah, way back then, colored went to colored schools and whites went to white schools. (out cue)

Oh 26m 03s

The Langdales yonder in Valdosta got they start out, they daddy built a camp two miles out in the woods. (out cue)

Oh 26m 24s

Judge Langdales daddy he raised a bunch of people out there. He had a way to carry them to school. He had a school right there on the job. (out cue)

0h 37m 36s---*Children in the Camp Continued*

When school started, white children always had to go to school. Black children didn't. (out cue)

0h 37m 45s

Well, I went to school all around. Every where we went I went to school a little bit. (out cue)

0h 37m 58s

They didn't compell you to go to school then. You go to school if you want to, and then, if the boss man was willing for you to go to school, you go to school. (out cue)

0h 38m 13s

Teachers come up just like they come up now. (out cue)

0h 38m 30s

White children had a good school to go to. (out cue)

0h 38m 36s

Poor people had just some old broke down something or other. Had a school now out there to Thomasville, that's where I done the biggest going to school. We got wood, didn't have no lights, and things in school like it is now; and heaters and all that kind of junk. You heated from a wood heater, and then the boys would go out in the woods and cut that wood up. They go out there and cut it long and bring it to the school house and cut it up. Then us little children would tote it in. And there'd be 2 or 3 certain children had to be there when it was cold, every morning to build a fire in that big heater; warm up the school. Out there where I was telling you about, Spring Hill, wasn't but two families out there and they both run a store. One on this end and one the other end. But now you want to get in trouble, you go out there and mess with one of them niggers then. Them two crackers get together and get their crew and run you. (out cue)

0h 43m 35s---*Camp Life*

Everything just about in them camps come to be as one. (out cue)

0h 43m 42s

Yeah, just like family. (out cue)

0h 43m 55s

Church time, my momma was a church lady, now my dad wasn't too much of a church man until he died. (out cue)

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0h 44m 14s---*Camp Life*

I wish I could count the dollars I heard her sing. All them good old religious songs. (out cue)

0h 44m 28s

Her favorite song was "Gimme That Old Time Religion."(song-38s-to out cue at end)

0h 45m 22s

And them old sisters would get in there, having revival. Sisters would go in there and open up, have their little prayer meeting, then turn it over to the brothers. It was some good times back in them days and it was some bad times. Yes sir. (out cue)

0h 47m 29s---~~Money~~ Pay

President Hoover, he come in here and cut the wages down where a man wouldn't make but a dollar a day, and little boys, young men fifty cent. (out cue)

0h 47m 46s

I was making just as a man. (out cue)

0h 47m 55s

Well, that dollar a day wasn't in there then. See, you worked by piece in the fall of the year, you raked pine by the hundred. (out cue)

0h 48m 28s

Hoover come in there and we was getting two dollars a hundred to rake them pines. He cut it down to fifty cent. (out cue)

0h 48m 48s

Where we was getting \$2.50 a thousand for chipping and pulling, he cut it down to a dollar. (out cue)

0h 49m 22s

I had rented me about 30,000, and had hired two men to help me work mine. (out cue)

0h 49m 35s

Make some money. (out cue)

0h 49m 40s

I had been doing it for 3 or 4 years for the other fellow and I decided I'd try to do something for myself. And then I'd done left home but I went back and I talked to my daddy about it. He say Kid, he say Kid, say that's a good idea, you can make some money. (out cue)

Oh 50m 35s

I said I wasn't gon work for that. (out cue)

Oh 50m 39s

I had all them boxes ready to dip out, and had dipped about half of them. And that Saturday morning was pay day and I walked in the commissary to get paid for all that I got out, where I could pay my mens off. Old man Boyd, the captain, the man that run the camp, say Nelson, I say, Yes Sir. He say, you heard the latest ain't you:? I say yes sir. I say, but what about it? What y'all go do about it? He say well, ain't nothing we can do about it. I say what you say? Ain't nothing we can do about it. Says ah, I say captain Boyd. He used to be a convict captain. (out cue)

Oh 51m 37s

He was a good man, and calm. (out cue)

Oh 51m 48s

He was the camp man then, but he had been a warden on the chain gang for several years. But he seen in the paper where Langdale and Poole wanted a woodsman and a camp manager, and he come and traded with them. And I say Captain Boyd, I say, now there 25 barrels on the platform, say you gon cut for them too? He say yeah, everything. I say, now I could see if you was cutting everything in the woods, but that on the platform, I don't see where you oughta cut that. Ought to let that go just like it always been. He say no, I can't do it. I say well, just wait. I start to walk out. He say, ah, Mr. Langdale just call me, told me he's on his way up here. I say well, I'll be waiting on him when he gets here. (out cue)

Oh 53m 14s

Mister Langdale the old man, not none of them that's in Valdosta now. He drove up there and got out; he drove up to that store. I just stepped to one side there on the porch, and when he got in there he say hey Nelson, I say Mr. Langdale, I say, Mr. Langdale I want to talk to you. He say ah, you done been over to the commissary? I say Yes Sir. He say you want to talk to me over here, or you want to go over there to the office? I say, I'll just wait and go over there to the office. So, we went over there, I explain to him like I did. He, say well, he say, I'm just like you, but I got this to do just like the government say.

0h 53m 14s Continued

Say, well, when he got through paying for that, I had enough on the platform to pay my boys off for all the work they had done. And for that what was back in the cup in the woods. I called them all up there to the commissary. I say, alright captain Boyd, pay them off, just like you paying the rest of them off. He did and he paid off, had about 3 dollars left see, for my whole months work and that was, we got paid off once a month, and that's what I got out of it. So they went on and that next morning, Monday morning, I went up there and the boy say to me, say Stick; I say what? Say, what you gon do? I say, he say, what you gon do this morning? I say now, I tell you what, y'all go over there and start where we usually start, if y'all want to. But I ain't doing a damn thing myself. Say, you ain't? Say, naw. Say well, what you gon do? I say I don't know. Bout 10 o'clock, I stayed out on the far end of the quarters; I come on up through the quarters walking, all dolled up like I was bout ready to go to church. Met captain Boyd, he had these old pacing horses going. Met me, say whoa! Say, where you going looking like that? Say, I don't know.

Oh 56m 16s

He say, you going to that far piece like you always start, ain't you? I say, yes sir. I said, they is, but I ain't hitting another damn lick. (out cue)

0h 57m 16s---*Woods riding*

Well, the way I tend my own business and left the other fellas alone. And you do like that and the man out there got two-three little things he need done. He figure you could take somebody and get him to do it. That's how I got my start. (out cue)

0h 57m 58s

I treated them just like I'd treat a white person. (out cue)

0h58m 05s

When I left Edith, I went to Jacksonville, Florida. (out cue)

child they had to move. The Langdales had a camp at Tom's Creek and need someone to run it. Nelson recalls that it was a man named Carter that was given the job. Bob was sent to the headquarters for area turpentine camps in Valdosta, Georgia. Joe was later sent to Alabama. "The Wetherington's treated me almost as if I was white. I was Mrs. Wetherington's chauffer.

Tape 2
9-10-03
7:40pm
Nashville, Georgia
Home of L.A. and Bertha Nelson

*Note...there are conversations going on in the background

2.13...Mr. Nelson's knowledge of the turpentine process is vast as he explains it from start to finish. His experience spans 62 years.

10.00...Mr. Nelson recalls that his introduction to the camps came through his stepfather Mr. Will Brown, also known as "neat at the waist." He worked under Brown's guidance until he was 21 years old. Brown had honed his own skills in the area of Tifton, Georgia.

1310...The camps were comprised mostly of blacks except for the presence of the woodsman and the over rider. He states that "life was as good as the over rider allowed, but if you stood up for yourself, you didn't have no trouble."

*latest version
w/ my additions
for tape 1*

TAPE LOG

FIELDWORKERS TAPE # 01...first tape of interview)

Person Interviewed...Mr. L.A. "Sticks" Nelson

Fieldworker...Le Roy Henderson

Dates Of Interview...July 10th...July 15th...July 24th...August 7th...2003

Location of Interview...Living room of the Nelson home...Nashville, Georgia

Others present...Ms. Bertha Nelson (wife), Granddaughter, and great-grandson

Recorder...Sony Digital Walkman-AVLS

Tape Type...Masterdat R-124 Md DAT

Summary Description of Tape Quality (background noise, etc.)

Mr. Nelson is strong spoken throughout most of the interview, however there is distracting background noise from conversations, direct cross-talking, other areas of the house, phone, lawnmower, and running water.

Summary Description of Tape Contents

This interview is a description of the life of Mr. L.A. Nelson his family members, and friends that were involved in the production of turpentine. While covering many areas of Georgia, Florida, and the exploits of Mr. Nelson, the focus is on various aspects of life as it was lived in the turpentine camps, and his employers. Mr. Nelson is ninety nine years old as of the dates of these interviews and has much to say. Being an animated speaker, there were several times, while using his hands to emphasize a point, that he struck the microphone, causing a stop and start during the process and some static. Nelson clearly has some stories he wants to tell and these are not necessarily the stories prompted by the interviewer. Despite other questions inserted, he frequently comes back to a story he wants to tell and persists until he has completed it.

TAPE INDEX COUNTER # 0000

SUBJECT OPENING INTRODUCTION

047...Mr. L.A. "Sticks" Nelson was born in Spring Hill, Georgia (approximately 6 miles from Thomasville), a settlement of Negroes from North Carolina, who cleared a wooded area and homesteaded on the site establishing farms. To his knowledge, to this day the site is still identifiable. He was born February 26th, 1903. Cut logs to make a log house. Big farm. Still have a church there to this day.

300...His father left the family while Nelson was still quite a small child, but his mother took care of him and his sister by doing various domestic jobs for whites who lived in the area. One of those jobs was for Mr. Jim Sloan, a storekeeper who lived in Murphy, Georgia. It was during this time

that his mother met his future stepfather. Slaon sold wood. They would load wood on a boxcar to ship different places.

536...At age 12 or 13 (1915-1916) Nelson was introduced to the business of turpentine as a pine-raker, in Haylow, near Fargo, Georgia. His family farmed in Colquitt County, but Nelson worked for Langdale and Poole turpentiners. Tells a story about a man loading wood off wagon onto flatcar; he brings wood to Nelson's mama. This is Will Brown, who eventually becomes Nelson's step-father. Tells the story of their courtship and marriage. His mama was cooking for a white man in Coolidge, GA; meets up with Will Brown again.

1345...Farming was a big part of the life of the Nelson family, and a bargain was struck between Lee Stringer of Dahlonga, Georgia (and lived between Macon and Cordele) and Nelson's stepfather, Mr. Will Brown, for the services of the youth. This work took young Nelson from his family in Dahlonga to Moultrie, Georgia. Tells story of step-daddy Brown telling Stringer, "Don't you hit him a god damn lick." Stringer says, "He'll sleep where my own children sleep" and "that's what I done." Brown's nickname was "Neat in the waist"—a tall man with a trim waist. Later, his entire family was moved to Moultrie to work for the Stringer's, who also worked property in Macon, and Cordele, Georgia. "We was 5 years with him. We stayed in a settlement. I was the only black boy. How did they treat me? Just like the rest of 'em." Only 2 colored families there. Story of running into some of step-daddy's people from Nashville.

2305...Mr. Poole met with Judge Langdale concerning the start up of a turpentine camp and farm. Mr. Brown was the first in Nelson's family to enter the turpentine business. The arrangement between Mr. Poole and Mr. Langdale covered land that lay between Valdosta, Howell and Mayday, Georgia. I was 14-15 when we left Colquitt Co. Moved because a white girl got crazy about me. Daddy said, Kid, we moved to keep you from getting killed. Daddy overheard them talkin' about who they was going to kill. Poole now set up in Fargo moved the Nelson's there (belongings went on freight train, they went on passenger train) except for the stepfather who remained behind to work various camps and farms in the Waycross and Blackshear area until his death in 1951.

2914...Jobs in the turpentine fields included weeding and raking pines, chipping boxes, hauling and putting up tin, and driving trucks. This was about 1921-22. During this time licenses were optional and Nelson had chosen to do without until one of the Wetherington's for whom he worked near Jasper, Florida requested that he obtain them. Tells story of going to the courthouse to get a license. Production in this camp was so plentiful that Nelson was put to work driving trucks that carried the rosin to Valdosta. He was also chipping boxes at this time and had as many as 8,000 boxes of his own.

3552..."Life in the camps was fine and most of the work was done by blacks." Few white men would do it. "You work to suit yourself." Free time was abundant, because each man in the camp knew exactly how long it would take to work his section. Q: You had that kind of freedom in the work camp? "Yeah, you could do as you pleased." Rising early in the morning to catch the work trucks to the pine woods, each man knew just what he had to do. Nelson would start at "6am and by 3pm he would have chipped 2,500 trees". He could "dip as many as 2 to 3 barrels full per day

and call it quits." Those who could walk to the woods could start work when ever they pleased. Often it would be a 2 to 3 mile walk into the woods to a particular worksite from the edge or beginning of the pines.

3848...Each camp had a commissary and the camp workers "went to the commissary just like city folks went to the grocery store." Nothing was withheld from the workers; "everything that could be bought in the grocery in town could be found in the camp store." Nelson liked to work by himself. Rising early in the morning, he would start breakfast around 6am, go to work between 8am and 9am, and chip 2,500 trees, and start for home by 3pm. His freedom to do as he pleased was shared by others as well.

4142...For entertainment the camp workers would visit area JUKE JOINTS AND CAFES. Music, dancing and gambling was part and parcel of everyday life. His responsibilities grew with his abilities and reputation as a woodsman. He held the positions of dipper, wagon driver, woods rider and even camp boss. As a woods rider, a most coveted position, his job was to see that all other jobs were properly done. "I told em what to do and what not to do. I rode that hourse through the woods and see if you done it right."

4256...Some of the riders that he worked for could be harsh at times, even violent and verbally abusive, but Nelson would have none of that behavior exhibited toward him and he made that clear at the outset of each job. "Some of them wanted to be mean. But that's only how you let em be. I didn't cuss them. Some would kick you or hit you. I didn't cuss them. I didn't hit any of them and they' didn't kick me." Some men were beaten, even lynched, and Nelson was of a mind that "some of these blacks gave the whites reason to treat them like that." In place like Fargo, Council, Needmore, Mayday and Tom's Creek, a black had to be careful. Nelson admits that he never saw a lynching, but he saw the results of a horrendous beating of his uncle-administered by a white camp boss and another white cohort. [tells this story] Still, Nelson is clear in his recollection of good treatment by his boss man; he could even use his automobile.

4705...One night Nelson and a friend named "Blue" went to a place called the "Quarters". One of his uncles wanted a ride to town and at first Nelson complied. However, he later discovered that hid uncle wanted to carry a gun with him, and that surely spelled trouble. Nelson being aware of all the vices present in the Quarters then refused the ride until his uncle relented and left the gun at home. It was common knowledge that white woodsmen carried guns in the woods and out of the woods, but Nelson did not. His experience in the camps was one of cooperation and hard work by example. On guns "I didn't think I needed that. And I didn't."

5007...Later that night while gambling in the camp Quarters, Nelson heard shots ricochet in the distance. His uncle had been shot at, caught and severely beaten by the camp boss. He was so severely whipped, that Nelson recalls that the blood that flowed from him "bloodied the water of a horse trough" from which the horses and mules drank. The shots even struck the house where Nelson's mother was living at the time, and he became enraged. He later confronted the white men and ordered them not to strike his uncle again.

5227...Before barrels were transported by trucks, mules and wagons ferried the rosin. Nelson notes that one of the greatest advantages of having a mule to work with was the fact that "a mule did not need a road to travel down-trucks did." They named their mules just as people were named and he claims that it made it easier to work with the mules. The mules were smart says Nelson, "they were trained to work the woods and even a language was used that could be understood by man and beast: words like come-up, gee-haw-backum and whoa were common". He also recalls the use of "Hoover Wagons", these were wagons made expressly for the woods under Hoover administration. The wheels were placed on axels and mules would pull them into and through the woods.

5425...Nelson's relationship with woods bosses and camp overseers was unique, for even the whites who had beaten his uncle were not hostile towards him. In fact, they sent Nelson for the car to transport his uncle to the Statenville jail. And while many blacks feared for the life of "Uncle Charlie", Nelson simply warned of severe repercussions if any more harm befell his uncle. "He asked no quarter and he gave no quarter." He was never hit or kicked by whites as so many blacks were. His tenure in the Wetherington camp was familial.

5923...All trees were named according to the product..Virgins at the bottom...Yearlings at knee height....Hack (?) Boxes and Pulling Boxes were higher up. Each year's growth called for a different naming of the tree. The grading of the gum was contingent upon two factors...look and attitude. The higher the spot from which the gum was taken from the tree, the stiffer the gum.

101.02...In crew work every man knew and did his job. There were large and small crews just as there were large and small camps. The families that made up the camp sites could grow in communal size to as large as the city of Nashville, Georgia. Life in the camps was often full of songs and music. They had pianos in a big house, called that a juke joint. Some camps had as many as 100 families living within their boundaries. The men all had "hollers and mine" say's Nelson, "was double O." Tells a story of an uncle who followed him around for a couple years from place to place. Didn't know he was my uncle.

104.20...Nelson says that "there was no difference in the camps from Fargo to Needmore and other places". According to him all treatment of workers was based on "the attitude of the overseers". "Some had attitudes that were kind, while others wanted to be "Johnny who tied the bear", meaning that they wanted everyone to know that they "would beat up niggers." "But I never had a white man hit me."

108.30...Nelson's relationships with his bosses continued to be non typical wherever he went, owing in part to his tremendous work ethic, and in part to his belief in himself. One example of such a relationship was that of Nelson and a man named S.W. Paw. It was Paw who took it upon himself to aid Nelson's family when his sister Effie became critically ill in the middle of the night. Not only did Paw transport them to Jasper, Florida to the doctor's office, but he also got the doctor to come to the aid of these Negroes and administer treatment. It was on Paw's directive that the doctor acted on the Nelson's behalf.

112.12...The women in the camps worked as domestics and as farm hands. They chopped cotton, pulled peanuts and corn. Still, some of the women worked directly in the turpentine woods raking pines, chipping and doing anything that a man could do.

Comes back to the story of treating his sister's illness, leaving Tom's Creek camp with a load of men and his sick sister to Jasper. Goes to get bossman in white barbershop in Jasper to get him to take his sister home. Man wants to go to a party first and Nelson is enraged.

120.45...During the 1920's Nelson worked for the Wetherington's, and in the 1930's worked specifically for Horace Wetherington. Most camps did not have running water or electricity when Nelson first got started, however, the arrival of utilities certainly made life for all a lot more livable. The style of dress in the camps was based on the style desired by the worker. While at work they would wear "jumpers", but when it was time to "dress up" they could certainly do that too. Housing according to Nelson differed from camp to camp depending upon the kindness of the camp bosses and owners: some were good, and some were not so good."

Tells story of going to work for a man in Taylor Co. FL. Went on a Friday, left on a Monday. "Didn't like his ways. He was the kind that beat you up." Nelson was 23 at a time. To get to the camp had to cross a lake in a boat. He persuaded the boatman to let him across. Went with another man.

132.24...The children spent their time going to school and playing. The companies would build the schools and hire the [black] teachers, but the management and administration was always white. "Some would eat better than they do around here now." Women who worked as turpentiners were paid the same as the men. When Nelson began turpentine as a youth he was paid the same as adult men, but he states that "when Herbert Hoover became the President of the United States, wages were cut in half." Initially he received 50cent per hundred for raking pines, and the pines were raked every fall. All camps paid about the same wages. When raising tin, he made about \$1.25 per hundred trees; each year the virgin pines had to be tinned and cupped.

135.48...There were lots of weddings and celebrating in the different camps, but Nelson recalls that "there was little joy." "Niggers didn't have too much joy until later on. Used to be that white folks didn't allow a nigger in their yard hardly, yeah." Didn't have lights in churches like they do now.

Returns to story who left the bad camp with him (crossing the lake) and how they met up again by chance 7 years later. Describes how he met his wife, Bertha. She was in another camp. They've been married 54 years.

What did your years in the woods teach you? "What did it teach me? Yes sir, tend to my business and leave the other fellas alone. Now that's the best teaching you can get. Don't give and don't take. That's what keep me in there."

144.51...Nelson first began his work for the Wetherington's under Bob Wetherington. He recalls that Bob's brother's son, Joe, got a job walking dippers for on of his uncles. Joe became involved with a female that turned out to be his first cousin, and when it was discovered that she was with

TAPE LOG

FIELDWORKERS TAPE # 01...first tape of interview)

Person Interviewed...Mr. L.A. "Sticks" Nelson

Fieldworker...Le Roy Henderson

Dates Of Interview...July 10th...July 15th...July 24th...August 7th...2003

Location of Interview...Living room of the Nelson home...Nashville, Georgia

Others present...Ms. Bertha Nelson (wife), Granddaughter, and great-grandson

Recorder...Sony Digital Walkman-AVLS

Tape Type...Masterdat R-124 Md DAT

Summary Description of Tape Quality (background noise, etc.)

Mr. Nelson is strong spoken throughout most of the interview, however there is distracting background noise from conversations, direct cross-talking, other areas of the house, phone, lawnmower, and running water.

Summary Description of Tape Contents

This interview is a description of the life of Mr. L.A. Nelson his family members, and friends that were involved in the production of turpentine. While covering many areas of Georgia, Florida, and the exploits of Mr. Nelson, the focus is on various aspects of life as it was lived in the turpentine camps, and his employers. Mr. Nelson is ninety nine years old as of the dates of these interviews and has much to say. Being an animated speaker, there were several times, while using his hands to emphasize a point, that he struck the microphone, causing a stop and start during the process and some static.

TAPE INDEX COUNTER # 0000

SUBJECT OPENING INTRODUCTION

047...Mr. L.A. "Sticks" Nelson was born in Spring Hill, Georgia (approximately 6 miles from Thomasville), a settlement of Negroes from North Carolina, who cleared a wooded area and homesteaded on the site establishing farms. To his knowledge, to this day the site is still identifiable. He was born February 26th, 1903.

300...His father left the family while Nelson was still quite a small child, but his mother took care of him and his sister by doing various domestic jobs for whites who lived in the area. One of those jobs was for Mr. Jim Sloan, a storekeeper who lived in Murphy, Georgia. It was during this time that his mother met his future stepfather.

536...At age 12 or 13 (1915-1916) Nelson was introduced to the business of turpentine as a pine-raker, in Fargo, Georgia. His family farmed in Colquitt County, but Nelson worked for Langdale and Poole turpentiners.

1345...Farming was a big part of the life of the Nelson family, and a bargain was struck between Lee Stringer of Dahlonga, Georgia and Nelson's stepfather, Mr. Will Brown, for the services of the youth. This work took young Nelson from his family in Dahlonga to Moultrie, Georgia. Later, his entire family was moved to Moultrie to work for the Stringer's, who also worked property in Macon, and Cordele, Georgia.

2305...Mr. Poole met with a judge by the name of Langdale concerning the start up of a turpentine camp and farm. Mr. Brown was the first in Nelson's family to enter the turpentine business. The arrangement between Mr. Poole and Mr. Langdale covered land that lay between Valdosta, Howell and Mayday, Georgia. Poole now set up in Fargo moved the Nelson's there except for the stepfather who remained behind to work various camps and farms in the Waycross and Blackshear area until his death in 1951.

2914...Jobs in the turpentine fields included weeding and raking pines, chipping boxes, mauling casks, and driving trucks. During this time licenses were optional and Nelson had chosen to do without until one of the Wetherington's for whom he worked near Jasper, Florida requested that he obtain them. Production in this camp was so plentiful that Nelson was put to work driving trucks that carried the rosin to Valdosta. He was also chipping boxes at this time and had as many as 8,000 boxes of his own.

3552..."Life in the camps was fine and most of the work was done by blacks." Free time was abundant, because each man in the camp knew exactly how long it would take to work his section. Rising early in the morning to catch the work trucks to the pine woods, each man knew just what he had to do. Nelson would start at "6am and by 3pm he would have chipped 2,500 trees". He could "dip as many as 2 to 3 barrels full per day and call it quits." Those who could walk to the woods could start work when ever they pleased. Often it would be a 2 to 3 mile walk into the woods to a particular worksite from the edge or beginning of the pines.

3848...Each camp had a commissary and the camp workers "went to the commissary just like city folks went to the grocery store." Nothing was withheld from the workers; "everything that could be bought in the grocery in town could be found in the camp store." Nelson liked to work by himself. Rising early in the morning, he would start breakfast around 6am, go to work between 8am and 9am, and chip 2,500 trees, and start for home by 3pm. His freedom to do as he pleased was shared by others as well.

4142...For entertainment the camp workers would visit area JUKE JOINTS AND CAFES. Music, dancing and gambling was part and parcel of everyday life. His responsibilities grew with his abilities and reputation as a woodsman. He held the positions of dipper, wagon driver, woods rider and even camp boss. As a woods rider, a most coveted position, his job was to see that all other jobs were properly done.

4256...Some of the riders that he worked for could be harsh at times, even violent and verbally abusive, but Nelson would have none of that behavior exhibited toward him and he made that clear at the outset of each job. Some men were beaten, even lynched, and Nelson was of a mind that "some of these blacks gave the whites reason to treat them like that." In place like Fargo, Council, Needmore, Mayday and Tom Creek, a black had to be careful. Nelson admits that he never saw a lynching, but he saw the results of a horrendous beating of his uncle-administered by a white camp boss and another white cohort. Still, Nelson is clear in his recollection of good treatment by his boss man; he could even use his automobile.

4705...One night Nelson and a friend named "Blue" went to a place called the "Quarters". One of his uncles wanted a ride to town and at first Nelson complied. However, he later discovered that his uncle wanted to carry a gun with him, and that surely spelled trouble. Nelson being aware of all the vices present in the Quarters then refused the ride until his uncle relented and left the gun at home. It was common knowledge that white woodsmen carried guns in the woods and out of the woods, but Nelson did not. His experience in the camps was one of cooperation and hard work by example.

5007...Later that night while gambling in the camp Quarters, Nelson heard shots ricochet in the distance. His uncle had been shot at, caught and severely beaten by the camp boss. He was so severely whipped, that Nelson recalls that the blood that flowed from him "bloodied the water of a horse trough" from which the horses and mules drank. The shots even struck the house where Nelson's mother was living at the time, and he became enraged. He later confronted the white men and ordered them not to strike his uncle again.

5227...Before barrels were transported by trucks, mules and wagons ferried the rosin. Nelson notes that one of the greatest advantages of having a mule to work with was the fact that "a mule did not need a road to travel down-trucks did." They named their mules just as people were named and he claims that it made it easier to work with the mules. The mules were smart says Nelson, "they were trained to work the woods and even a language was used that could be understood by man and beast: words like come-up, gee-haw-backum and whoa were common". He also recalls the use of "Hoover Wagons", these were wagons made expressly for the woods. The wheels were placed on axels and mules would pull them into and through the woods.

5425...Nelson's relationship with woods bosses and camp overseers was unique, for even the whites who had beaten his uncle were not hostile towards him. In fact, they sent Nelson for the car to transport his uncle to the Statenville jail. And while many blacks feared for the life of "Uncle Charlie", Nelson simply warned of severe repercussions if any more harm befell his uncle. "He asked no quarter and he gave no quarter." He was never hit or kicked by whites as so many blacks were. His tenure in the Wertherington camp was familial.

5923...All trees were named according to the product...Virgins at the bottom...Yearlings at knee height....Bulk Boxes and Pulling Boxes were higher up. Each year's growth called for a different naming of the tree. The grading of the gum was contingent upon two factors...look and attitude. The higher the spot from which the gum was taken from the tree, the stiffer the gum.

101.02...In crew work every man knew and did his job. There were large and small crews just as there were large and small camps. The families that made up the camp sites could grow in communal size to as large as the city of Nashville, Georgia. Life in the camps was often full of songs and music. Some camps had as many as 100 families living within their boundaries. The men all had "field hollers and mine" say's Nelson, "was double O.

104.20...Nelson says that "there was no difference in the camps from Fargo to Needmore and other places". According to him all treatment of workers was based on "the attitude of the overseers". "Some had attitudes that were kind, while others wanted to be Johnny who tied the bear", meaning that they wanted everyone to know that they "would beat up niggers."

108.30...Nelson's relationships with his bosses continued to be non typical wherever he went, owing in part to his tremendous work ethic, and in part to his belief in himself. One example of such a relationship was that of Nelson and a man named S.W. Paw. It was Paw who took it upon himself to aid Nelson's family when his sister became critically ill in the middle of the night. Not only did Paw transport them to Jasper, Florida to the doctor's office, but he also got the doctor to come to the aid of these Negroes and administer treatment. It was on Paw's directive that the doctor acted on the Nelson's behalf.

112.12...The women in the camps worked as domestics and as farm hands. They chopped cotton, pulled peanuts and corn. Still, some of the women worked directly in the turpentine woods raking pines, chipping and doing anything that a man could do.

120.45...During the 1920's Nelson worked for the Wertherington's, and in the 1930's worked specifically for Horace Wertherington. Most camps did not have running water or electricity when Nelson first got started, however, the arrival of utilities certainly made life for all a lot more livable. The style of dress in the camps was based on the style desired by the worker. While at work they would wear "jumpers", but when it was time to "dress up" they could certainly do that too. Housing according to Nelson differed from camp to camp depending upon the kindness of the camp bosses and owners: some were good, and some were not so good."

132.24...The children spent their time going to school and playing. The companies would build the schools and hire the teachers, but the management and administration was always white. Women who worked as turpentiners were paid the same as the men. When Nelson began turpentine as a youth he was paid the same as adult men, but he states that "when Herbert Hoover became the President of the United States, wages were cut in half." Initially he received 50cent per hundred for raking pines, and the pines were raked every fall. All camps paid about the same wages. When raising tin, he made about \$1.25 per hundred trees; each year the virgin pines had to be tinned and cupped.

135.48...There were lots of weddings and celebrating in the different camps, but Nelson recalls that "there was little joy." "Niggers didn't have too much joy until later on. Used to be that white folks didn't allow a nigger in their yard hardly, yeah."

144.51...Nelson first began his work for the Wertherington's under Bob Wertherington. He recalls that Bob's brother's son, Joe, got a job walking dippers for on of his uncles. Joe became involved with a female that turned out to be his first cousin, and when it was discovered that she was with child they had to move. The Langdales had a camp at Tom's Creek and need someone to run it. Nelson recalls that it was a man named Carter that was given the job. Bob was sent to the headquarters for area turpentine camps in Valdosta, Georgia. Joe was later sent to Alabama. "The Wertherington's treated me almost as if I was white. I was Mrs. Wertherington's chauffer.

Tape 2
9-10-03
7:40pm
Nashville, Georgia
Home of L.A. and Bertha Nelson

***Note...there are conversations going on in the background**

2.13...Mr. Nelson's knowledge of the turpentine process is vast as he explains it from start to finish. His experience spans 62 years.

10.00...Mr. Nelson recalls that his introduction to the camps came through his stepfather Mr. Will Brown, also known as "neat at the waist." He worked under Brown's guidance until he was 21 years old. Brown had honed his own skills in the area of Tifton, Georgia.

13.10...The camps were comprised mostly of blacks except for the presence of the woodsman and the over rider. He states that "life was as good as the over rider allowed, but if you stood up for yourself, you didn't have no trouble."

15.08...The music of the camps came from the jukes, guitars and pianos. Mr. Syl Copeland and his brother would come to the camps and play. Some of the jukes had "quarter bosses" or bouncers and they often were very abusive.

18.45...As a teenager in the camps, life was full of work, but there was "lots of fun and games." Baseball was a large part of the life of the turpentiners. Teams formed in each camp would travel and compete against each other. "They didn't let the niggers have but three days out the year to play ball and things" Nelson says. He states that he was quite a baseball player for his Tom Creek team and that his position was shortstop and right field. "On the fourth of July these big shot farmers would let the niggers off, or the twentieth of May...was just a day that they kind of freed the niggers; Christmas you had a week off; Thanksgiving too. But during the turpentine season you could play ball every Saturday and Sunday."

23.13...Holidays in the camp were fun says Nelson. Everyone had plenty to eat and the boss man would help people out too. "Monday through Friday in the camp, you worked, you played on Saturday and on Sunday, you went to church." Nelson states that there were many different denominations represented in every camp. It all depended on the size of the camp.

25.30...The children in the camps attended company built schools that were always segregated. Judge Langdale's father built a school for his camp. Nelson, recalling the condition of these schools for colored children says that "more often than not they were just some old broke down something or other." He remembers that white children were required to attend school, but the coloreds were not. He attended school in each camp where his family worked, and that most of his schooling took place in Thomasville, Georgia. Before school started for the day the older boy's were required to go into the woods to cut logs for the fire that would heat the school.

43.15...Everything and everybody in the camps became as one. When it came to music most of the singing came from the church. Nelson recalls that his mother was a singer and that her favorite song was "Give Me That Old Time Religion".....he sang it for me.

49.00...He describes the camp churches and prayer meetings with fond memories and concludes that "there were bad times in those days, and there were good times."

49.00...At one point in his career, Nelson rented his own boxes and hired two men to work it with him. He had learned the business of turpentine quite well.

56.55...Nelson became a woods rider, and an overseer as the result of his hard work. He recalls that "everybody was glad for me." His treatment of his fellow workers was applauded

**FROM 57.55-149.30
L.A. NELSON (NON-TURPENTINE)
FROM 149.30 TO END IS BLANK TAPE**

beginning Topel - Spring Hill settlement
homesteaded

cut logs - made a log house - big farm
still have check there every Sunday

Feb 26, 1903 -

1921 - started living in a log cabin camp
made living in log cabin until 1921 - ?

daddy + mama parted when he was a baby -
house keeping for a man named Sloan in Murphy, GA -
people would buy wood from him. load wood on
box car to send to diff places for people to use

about 12-13 - working in camps - first started peck pine

(Hayden) near Foy - Over living in Colquitt Co.

We farmed. Man loading wood off ^{wagon into} flat cars story

about his mamma getting wood from him. w/ wheelbarrow

you heard tell of haydale - started working for haydale + Poole

Main man Poole - had a place in Tarver. Taken a liking to

Mamma - went to Colledge. Colley for white man - story

Courtship + marriage of his mother

story of man wanting ^{an other} Stride to work for him Lee Stronger

lived between Macan + Cordale. Step - ^{Mr Brown} Daddy told man -

That far hit him a god-damn like. Mr. Brown - (Will Brown)

"He'll sleep where my children sleep" (that's what I done

nick name = "Went on the
Waist"

full man - small in the waist

3-4 yrs he sold that place + went up near Hallco. Went w/ him
He moved Daddy. We were 5 yrs w/ him. We stayed in a
... the only black ...

Only 2 closed families up there. Mine & 4 more.

story of encountering someone from Nashville - one of daddy's people.

* ? Something about referral that Langdale looking for workers
He went to VLD to talk to Judge Langdale. Went down to look at
a farm (near Edith?)

begin when moved - we moved - white girl got so crazy about me
I was 14-15. (left Colquhoun) Daddy said, kid we moved to
* keep you from getting killed. Daddy overheard ~~the~~ ^{the} talk
about who was going to kill. Loaded things on train
Caught train to Fargo (passenger train) ^{Daddy} Never did come
back there to live. Daddy died between Waycross &
Black Swan d. 1957. We had 1 child when he died.

* Jobs he had. - Pines Chippin' boxes. Got stretch
gun. would run into cup - That's first thing I done
2nd job - hauler + puttin in up. Then started driving truck
about 21-22. No license then. ^{when they came in} Gas didn't have to get him.

Living outside Jasper Pl then.

Family from Newton - GA - ? name. Worked for that.

Family 24 yrs. Name? Bought land to haul Ross
One of main man who owned everything, said Steve, you got a
license to drive a truck? Story of gang to get license to
get a license. (?)

I had 8,000 boxes. Would chip it. Describe bad.
hack + haul about a bag of your fist

Tape 1 Cont. Nelson

Typical day in trap camp. Few white men would do it. Free time when working. You work to suit yourself. 2500 trees in 1 day. Rip me 2-3 horses a day. I was just kind of average.

Traps wagon/mules carrying you diff places. 3 or 4 miles from where you live to where you work at

~~Concessions~~

* Take for lunch any kind of food you wanted you cooked + eat it. Lunch break depended on who you worked w/ I liked to work by myself

(*) I eat breakfast around 6:00. If I was walking a long way. Chp 2500, go back home, cooking supper. Sun rise I'd be chipping

* You had that kind of freedom in the work camp? Yeah, you could do as you pleased.

What did black men do for fun? Juice joints + cafes. Had music, dancing, gambling. Anything you wanted to do.

Answer to what he did, dipping, drove wagon, riding woods. You become a woods rider? I told em what to do + what not to do. I rode that horse. Show the woods + see if you done it right. Woods rider you worked for - what kind of men were they? Were they mean?

* Some of em wanted to be mean. But that's only how you let em be. I didn't use them. Some would kick you or hit you. I didn't use them. I didn't hit any of them, + they didn't kick me. Say those who were hurt, led by woods riders gave em name to do that

What camp is
I rode woods all around Fargo, Caval, Maroon

Towel Side B

(?) ↓
Salkers Ck, Fk drama + daddy lived there

quarter-gambly, big juke joint

(? cant understand, something about a gun)

White woods riders carried guns. Sick didnt. "I didnt think I needed that. & I didnt."

* Q Did bosses help you buy cars, groceries, pay doctors bills? Yeah

(still telling story about man + gun.)

bossman - sheds gay - he doesnt know why. Something about his
mamai house. ~~One of them~~

ask
very

-c

* Mule - w/ do something a bunch cant do. Through the woods.

Name mules just like you name a person we trained em.

Words - used to control a mule.

Hoover wagon ~~truck~~

Story about man asking stick to bring his car - putting man in jail
in statenville.

Sounds like you dont have no trouble w/ white people.

Tape 1 Side B -

tells bossman - mean carried up to Statenville. Sick
wants to make sure there was no blood on him.

- Why did they call you sick? I was called sick from
a little by.
- * - Why trees called vagons & yearlings -
- * - diff grades of gam - diff looks - higher you get the stiffer the
gum get.

Some of them were big camps. 100s in 1 camp. Everybody had own house.
* In camp - did you get together - tell stories/sing songs?

they had pianos in a big house, gall that a juice joint
Werte says - out to the woods, rater pin on putting up wagon,
raisin tin, they had a hellen they would holler. Purple & wear
my name. My hellen.

- * - I had an uncle who followed me for a couple yrs. Didn't know
he was my uncle. Labaland, Needmore, Lk City
Diff camps had diff attitudes in the bossman. Some of them
good & kind, some of them Johnny who had the bear
But I never had a white man hit me.

~~Fights~~

Sister got sick - Fattie. Needed to carry her to doctor.
Goes to bossman. Called the doctor ^{away from medicine} ~~at~~ Needed to see
her ~~very~~ Sunday morning @ 9:00 Sharp

What was it like for women & children?

Some died. Farms - Luel pearls, cotton.
Some women would chip No anything a man would.
I. i. r. - h. . . ~~that~~ that she, of such

In a white barbershop in Jasper? Man wants him to wait until
he goes to a party. Horace Wetherington.

(1920s - 1st Wetherington worked for

30s worked for Horace W.

Quarters

No running water + electricity at first. To start with they had pumps.

Workers - woods men, hussmen all the same kind of clothes
Overalls.

Had good humor believe in - "You loved it good"

Taylor Co - Pl. worked in a Fri - left on a Mon. "Did like his
ways. He was the kind that beat you up."

How did you get away?

Tap 2-A

He was 23 when this took place.

Man brought across the lake to get away.

Children in camp. Some of em would eat better than they do
around here now. Went to school.

Camp was built the schoolhouse. Black teachers

Women + men paid same if did same work.

2 A

Desochas process.
Pay varied w/ job. Rasin tea + hammu + nails

Weddings in camps - Didn't have too much joy. Lights hooked up to
a generator. People didn't have lights in churches like
they do now.

Start - 7 yrs later met up w/ man who came across
lake w/.

- Got tickles from moonshiners

- How did you meet Miss Beatha? She lived in one camp +
I lived in another. M. 54 years.

- What did it teach you? (Yrs. in the woods)

Kind of my business, let the other fella alone.