

FOREST STEWART: "I left the farm and went to Lando for \$6.60."

Forest Stewart

I was born in 1909. I moved here in 1920. I was born over here next to the Richburg Junction on the Sam Martin Place – black jack farmin'. So we moved then over here to Tinkler's Station and from there over here to Westbrook's.

I was born 1909. I moved over to Westbrook's in 1920. I stayed over there over ten years. I helped lock up plenty of cows. Them colored folks what lived in the Quarters then and them white folks too, they all had cows. Might nigh every family had a cow – the Hefners and all them. Them cows used to come 'cross the creek where them big rocks is down there and come in that field down there eatin' up Mr. Westbrook's corn and cotton and stuff. He catch 'em down there; say, "Bring them cows to the barn." We bring them cows down there and lock 'em up. Sometime he'd have 5 or 6 in there in one day. Old man Curtis Hefner, him and old man Bob got into it. Old man Bob had 2 of his cows and Hefner sent his chaps over there and they come over there and Mr. Bob told 'em they'd have to pay 50¢ a piece for 'em 'fore he'd let 'em have the cows. They went on back over there and told their daddy. Then Mr. Hefner too come over there and brought his chaps to drive the cows back. Bob wasn't there at the time. He was down on the branch at the saw mill. I think Uncle George was up at the barn and we was just chaps, you know, and we was the one put the cows up there – us chaps, my brother and 2 more boys. Well, they wasn't llowin' to ask to see old man Bob, and they started to open the gate and Uncle George said, "You better not take them cows outa there 'til you see Mr.

Westbrook. Said, "Where he at?" Said, "He down yonder at the saw mill on the branch." Said, "I'm gone' get my cows." Said, "No, you can't get them cows out 'til you see Mr. Westbrook. He told us to tell nobody to bother them cows 'til they leave a dollar here for 'em." Well, Mr. Westbrook had a little ole bell out there so if anything come up, he tap that bell 'bout 2 or 3 times and he'd come on up. So they was arguin' out there so Uncle George told M. J., said, "Tap that 2 times" – Bam, Bam. Mr. Curtis looked back there and said, "What you doin' that for?" He said, "Mr. Westbrook 'll be here directly." After while old man Bob come 'cross that field, cross the pasture from the saw mill – long, tall man. Got up there said, "Mornin', Mr. Hefner." Said, "Alright, I want my cows outa here and I ain't payin, nothin' for 'em neither for they broke out and got in here." Said, "You gone' pay me for them cows." Old man Bob, he'd run into you, and old man Hefner, he commenced to crowin' up. But that man paid him that dollar 'fore he got them cows out.

There's a fellow down there – you know Bus Hyman – it's his brother. He's kindly deaf like and he couldn't talk plain. He liked to pick blackberries long in the summertime. He pulled some out twixt the two branches down there going over to the other school over there. He picked him two arm loads full of blackberries. Ole Dummy come walkin' back up through there. It was dinner time and we was comin' out the field. Old man Bob worked in the field too jus' like us colored folks. Well, Dummy was a little fellow jus' like Bus. He was comin' up the road sweatin'. Ole Westbrook looked out there and said, "Hey Dummy! Where'd you get them blackberries?" Dummy said, "Got 'em out there twixt the branch." Mr. Westbrook say, "You know you got to give me half of them blackberries. Where's my half at?" Said, "I left your half down there on the bushes." He had about eight or ten colored boys over the place farmin'. We laughed about that.

Back in there we had some fun sure 'nuff. I declare we did.

Long the fall of the year it'd be cold and you had to get out in the wood of a evenin' and pick up trash after you come out the field pickin' cotton. Old folks wouldn't haul up no wood, they'd get cold sure 'nuff. Pick up trash comin' home to make a little fire to warm that night. Me and my brother went down to the old saw mill place down below our house to get some kindlin' wood, you know. The shed was built up there and had the saw in it and had some ole pine boards up against it just to keep the water from blowin' in on that ole saw. I was down below my brother and I was pickin' up trash and he was up there pullin' on that ole pine bark. The wasps was in there and one of 'em got him. Now, I'm scared to death of a snake and he hollered, "Oh, I'm snake bit. Boy, I'm snake bit", and he come runnin' towards me. I said, "Go back, don't come here!" I made a circle and went 'round him and wound up there at the house hollerin', "Hey y'all, James snake bit! James snake bit!" Mr. Westbrook heard me and so I just kept a goin' on to the house to tell my Granmaw 'bout it. So when I went through the yard, you know chickens was like pets then. You could just pick 'em up anywhere in the yard. I saw them little ole biddies. So I thought 'bout they say if you pick a chicken and cut him open livin' when you get snake bit and put him on that place where the snake bit you, it'll draw the

poison out. I reached down and I got me one when I was goin' in the house tellin' Granmaw 'bout it. I went on in and said, "Mama, James snake bit!" Mama said, "Oh Lord, child! Where's my child at?! Lord!" She was just goin' on, so I just tore back out the door with the chicken in my hand. I got down there Mr. Westbrook done went down there and he knowed what it was, a wasp had stung him. So, he said, "Wasn't nothin' wrong but a wasp done stung him." He look at at me, said, "What's that you got in your hand?" I said, "It's a chicken to cut open live." He said, "You ain't gone cut that chicken open live. That chicken dead!" I'd done squeeze him to death 'fore I got down there.

I don't think my parents was raised up too much for mill work. Other words, none of my people was. They was farmers. I never did go nowhere. I always stayed here with my grandmother. My daddy died the year after I was 21.



HENRY RAMSEY and FOREST STEWART at the steam engine used to run the sawmill.

Back when I was comin' up parents whipped you. They didn't go out there and get a little switch. If Daddy send you after a switch, you better not come back there with no little switch. It didn't make no difference what it was, my Daddy knocked me down with anything he got his hands on if he got mad. I was scared of him. If he'd tell me to go somewhere and do something, I'd go and do that. It ain't like chaps is now. You tell 'em to do somethin' and they tell you, "I ain't gone do that!" No, good God. That's the reason I say if I had chaps I'd have to get after mine. For I know how I come up and I don't see how in the world, the way children goin', the way they treat their parents. Don't see how in the world they take it. If they treat me thata' way, they'd have to get outa' my house. That's the truth. Daddy didn't laugh and talk too much with us. He just said what he meant and that's it. One evenin' I was sittin' up there – was a pine tree in the front yard and he was sittin' on the porch. Daddy said, "Boy!" I said, "Sir?" He got up and come on out in the yard. Said, "Come on." I just got right up. He walked on down the path that ran down through the woods back of my house. Old man Bob Westbrook used to skin cows down there. He got to a big ole tree and just backed up 'gainst it and I was standin' up there and he said, "Son." I said, "Sir?" Said, "I want you to go down through yonder and bend that tree down." I didn't know what tree he's talkin' 'bout but I walked on off down there and I stopped and looked back. He said, "You see that tree out over

there?" I said, "Yessir, I see a heap of 'em out over there." Said, "I'll show you the one I want you to bend." So I walked on and looked back and said, "This here the one?" Said, "No. It's that one 'bout the size of my leg. It's a hickory. Bend that tree down." I said, "Papa, I can't bend that tree down." He said, "You ain't tried it, is you?" I said, "No Sir." Said, "Well you grab it and bend it down." Just like that I said to myself, "Oh, I done done somethin' wrong now." Well, I grabbed that fool and was rasslin' with that tree there for 'bout five minutes. Papa hollerin', "Bend it down!" I thought, "Papa done got somethin' on me and he gone' kill me out here." So he said, "You can't bend it?" And I said, "No sir, I can't!" I's just cryin', scared to death. Said, "Okay. I'm gone see if you can bend that other'n down over there. Go over there at that little 'un and grab it. Reckon you can bend it down?" I looked up at him and I said, "Yes, sir." Said, "Well, bend it down, Boy." I grabbed that thing and rid it to the top – brought it on down to the groun'. Said, "Yes sir, I got it down." He kinda' smiled then, you know. Said, "Well, turn loose and come on back here." I went on back up there where he was. He looked at me and said, "Sit down over here, son." I squatted down over there by him. Said, "Son, now you's your own man. You was 21 years old yesterday, but I didn't think 'bout it 'til last night in the bed. Said then I'd have to have a talk with you this evenin'." I didn't still know what it was all 'bout then. He said, "Now, what I wanna tell you is you's 21 years old now, but I'm gone' tell you, you can go out there and work and make you a little bit of money. If you felt like givin' Daddy some of it it's alright. You oughta' help Daddy 'cause Daddy done raise you up. I can't whip you now, for you's your own man. But son, I'm gone tell you one thing – long as you live under the roof of the house where I'm at, you gone' have to listen at me. When you see you can't listen at me, you got to get out." And that's the way he give it to me. Just like that. He died the next year. I was just as scared of him then as I was when I's a little chap. I thank him for every lick he hit me and them what he hit at me and missed me, I oughta' got them too. I tries to stay on the right track all I can and I think a lot 'bout what he told me.

I worked in Lando. I reckon I started there 'bout 1937, and I ain't been long left Lando – I'll say about seven years. I lived in the "Quarter" down there. It was 'bout ten houses down in there. There's a water tree settin' right there where I used to live.

When I moved over there I wasn't married, but I married after I came over. I married in '29 cause Dad died in '28. I was workin' in Lando there, but I was stayin' out on other places. I reckon I moved out of the "Quarter" 'bout six or seven years ago – just about the time things were gettin' bad around there. They just kept a continue tearin' down the houses 'til they got the last one out of there. It ain't been over two years ago since that last was tore out of there or burnt down one.

I worked in the mill. I worked cards in what they call the mule room. Lots of changes in there now since I was there. I was in there when they was puttin' another one in this year. But I ain't been back there since.

I'll just tell you like I see it was back then. Life was good!

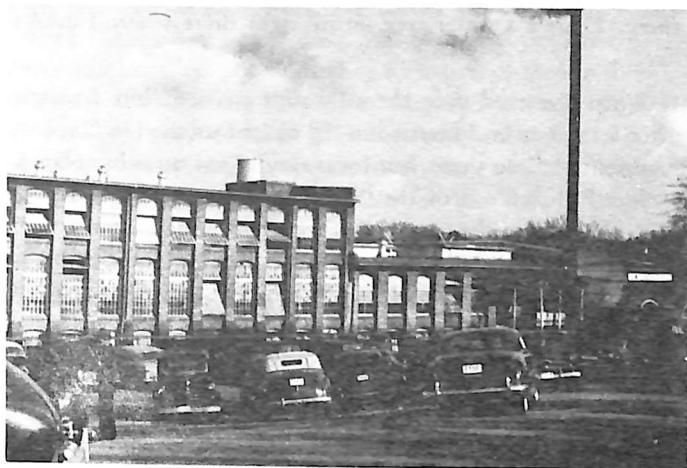
We wasn't making no money. We worked down there for \$4.80, \$6.60, \$9.90 and all like that. But it seem like to me that you could save more outa' that than what you can now. I worked on the farm for three dollars a week and I bought all my furniture when I was makin' three dollars a week. That was me and my wife together. She's passed now, been dead 'bout four years now. We didn't have any children. I think I was livin' a better life financial then what I is now. That's the truth. I left the farm and went to Lando for \$6.60. I was jus like everybody else, wants to leave here and go north for more money. That's what I left the farm for – more money. The farm was alright, but I jus' thought 'bout the other boys was down there makin' more 'n I was. I could get a job down there and I went in there. They had the folks in there workin' then. They might nigh hired anybody come along. They wasn't payin' nothin', but they needed the people. You see it'd take about five men to run one machine. Now one man runs more 'n five machines. So I think I was livin' jus' about the best life I could in my young days. 'Cause now I ain't able to work, but I see how all these people what is workin' make all this money and they don't have nothin' to show for it. No sir! I believe I was livin' 'bout the best life a man could live then. We worked from sun to sun on the farm. In the mill I went to work at six o'clock in the mornin' and worked 'til six in the evening. We put some hours in down there. We worked 'til 12 o'clock on Saturday and we might have to work all day. Everybody there had to be on the job.

My Gilbert and his brothers was all in there together when I went there in '38. The "super" was old man Buchanan. He had a son there name Tom Buchanan. Had a colored fellow down there, he's dead now, called him John Kee. And him and Tom had their fun. He was the overseer of the "mule" and his daddy was the "supper" so it wasn't much you could do with Tom. He'd get by with what he wanted to. He stayed high all the time and he didn't hardly know what was goin' on, but everybody knowed what they had to do and they run their job. He didn't have to have no trouble outa' nobody 'bout their job. They knowed what they had to do if they wanted their pay. So they run the job. It wasn't rough then as it is now on that line. They put one man out there to run a job

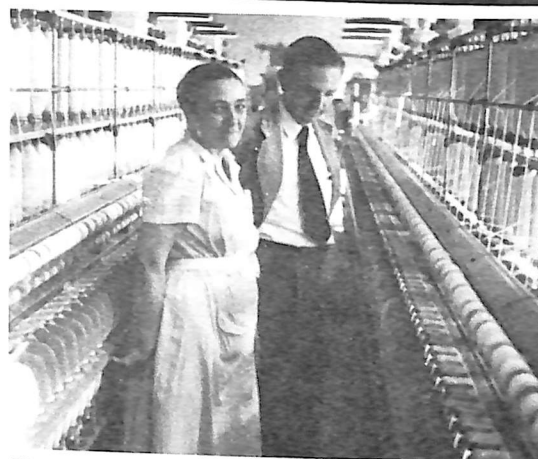
now and if he can't run it, why the big man all the time standin' over him and lookin' at him all the time. Back then they put you to runnin' a job, you didn't have to worry 'bout nobody lookin' over your shoulder. If anything go wrong, it wasn't nobody come ridin' you 'bout it – you jus' set there 'til somebody come and fix it. Now if anything go wrong, here come the man down there: "What's the matter with that machine?" You say, "I don't know. It broke." Then, "Get it fixed and get it goin'." That thing's got to go." Wasn't nothin' like that then. Now you go down there and the machine break why the man who runnin' the machine got to look for the fixer and they don't wanna' do nothin' but slip around there and try to hide. That fixer what they had down there, Mr. Walt Hyatt and Bill Ramsey, they work that end and if you need 'em it's one of 'em right there you could go to and tell 'em 'bout it. And then if it take 'em all day to fix it ain't nobody comin' down there sayin', "Hurry up and get it done." That's the way it went then. You didn't have to run 'round hunt nobody – scared the man gone' ride you 'bout it. You might have a good one down there and try to keep it straight. But the way they run it down there now, they put that machine in there, that cloth machine. Forty mens could run that thing. I work down there a little bit last year 'bout 3 months. I come out that place. Good God, I couldn't make it in there. Them doggone machines, you couldn't do nothin' with 'em. Had three to run and they had them young boys and you know how young boys is. If they can get 'round you, they gone get 'round you. If one of 'em break down, you couldn't leave that other two and run up and down the mill huntin' that fellow to fix it. It's enough job to try to run that machine without havin' to run 'round huntin' a fixer to fix it.

I think I done worked enough. I been workin' ever since I was big enough to work. And I works 'round here now every-day, but I give out 'bout dinner time – take it easy in the evenin'. But if I was able, I'd go right back down there to that mill and jump on the things and ride 'em to death. But I ain't able to take it.

I'm 65 years old and I feel it. Sam Featherstone is the oldest man I know livin' that was 'round back then. All the rest of 'em gone. ■



MANETTA MILLS in the Early Fifties:



DORA HEFNER and HARRY HEATH. (Photo courtesy of Harry Heath)