

Noise Crockett

There was 11 of us — all dead but two. Just me and one sister livin'. I'm 71 and I gets along pretty good, thank the Lord. Yeah, I was born in 1905. I was born about a mile from Lando on the Atkinson place.

I went to school there when I was 'bout seven years old. I walked in from the country. That was the first school I member. It was a school settin' right at the low end of that ball ground. They call it Mission School. You know where that row of houses go from Mr. Tadlock store up. It set right next where the second house goin' up to the forks of the road set now. Wasn't no houses at all on that line. It finally just rotted down. I guess the company built that school for us. When I come to the mill it was there they built another school on 'cross the creek over back of the Quarter up on the hill. If I'm not mistake, the white folk had that same old big school what stands there now. Long in then, we had to tote the wood to heat up our ole' wooden school. The boys'd go get wood at recess, and the girls'd clean the schoolhouse up. We'd play ball when we'd get a chance.

We played ball right there where the superintendent stay. It's a big rock used to be there. That was the white folks ball ground, but when they wasn't playin', they left us play. And they had a good team, and we had a good team. We played 'em one time, and I 'member the teacher whipped us about that. We got there one mornin' good while 'fore the teacher come. We jumped in and played the whites and the teacher didn't 'llo us to do that less'n we asked her. And she give all us a whippin' for playin'. That was Miss Ella White. Her husband name is Taylor White. There was a big ole' lady use to stay right there next that school. She name Miss Frances Abraham. She weigh way over 200. She the one told the teacher 'bout us playin' ball with the white folk.

In '20 the Lando Quarter had a lot of houses and they was just full of people then. Somebody in every house. Henry Barber, he's 'bout the oldest one in there. He was the choir leader, and the church set right down in there next to the creek. And there'd come a big rain, and the creek'd get up. Well, the water would be in that church, oh, waist deep. That was the Baptist Church, Big Calvery. They'd just get in and let the water outa' there — just dip it out. I 'member it come a big rain and it took the old bridge. H't it was wood. Had a wooden floor and had iron bars up overhead. That high water took that bridge. After the creek got down, you had to wade the creek — walk through the water to get 'cross 'til they got the bridge back up.

Then there was another man stayed there in the Quarter. He was a little older than Mr. Henry. They called him "Pap", "Pap" Williams. His name was Reese though. He had a boy they called Rube and one they called Pink. Next oldest one was Jackson Carwell, and he had three boys and they was workin' over there at that mill. They was James, Willie and Ike. One day while they was workin' over there, they said one of 'em got tired and wanted to rest. So one of 'em give the other a big knife and he clipped and cut one of the ropes that pulled the big wheel and pulled all the mill, all but that little bit run by the water wheel. They asked him, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Well, I just got tired and I wanted to rest." They didn't get no rest though. They put 'em on the chain gang to make some time.

It was two branches you cross to get to the Quarter. We call one the Cool Spring Branch and the other 'n the Crockett Branch. They called it the Crockett Branch 'cause that's where all of us was born at 'cept two. That was the last branch to cross. I 'member a fellow used to work all that. A Mr. Wade Ramsey he was. Now that was Mr. Oscar Stroud's wife's daddy. We'd get done hoein' cotton and we'd go over there and help him hoein' cotton. His overseer, Lucius Williams,



NOISE CROCKETT: "In '20 the Lando Quarter had a lot of houses and they was just full of people." Note: Calvery Church, far right background, and houses, left background. (Photo courtesy of Myrt Long)

that was our boss then. I was 'bout twelve years old then. If we'd get done hoein' cotton 'fore night, we'd go in the creek and go in swimmin'. Long in then, all that land was worked, all the way down to the creek. We'd get fifty cent a day or fifty cent a acre. But we was just workin' by the day.

I 'member one time I was comin' cross that branch goin' from up there where Mr. Sam Collins lived and the branch had two big thick pieces of lumber 'cross it. That's what you walk 'cross. I went 'cross there, had my guitar on my back, and when I got cross I come up on the left, and I see somethin' white. I thought, "That ain't nothin' but a spider web." And I said, "I'm goin' there to see what 'tis." And I walked close to it as me to you and I couldn't make out what it was. It looked like a little girl 'bout so high, but she didn't have no head, no shoulders, no neck. And I commenced walkin' off fast and I looked back. Look like I could see it movin', comin' behind me. I shot outa' there and I was goin' 'cross that field



where the ball park used to be, and somethin' jumped up. I don't know what it was. Where it was a cat or a rabbit, but I told it to get outa' the way and let somebody run that could run. And I was movin' on! Every now and agin' I'd hear that guitar, "ping, ting". I had it on my back tied with a cord, and I reckon when I hit a low place, I'd jar it and it'd pick. I was runnin' so fast that night if the law woulda' seen me, he'd a got me for speedin'. I got to the house and I jus' hit agin' the door with both hands, and Mama said, "What's the matter?" I jus' fell in the middle of the floor, flat on my back and stretched out. Told them to fan me fast. She got a big piece of pasteboard, and she's just a fannin' and my sister, Lou, she had a big piece and she was just a fannin'. She asked, "What's the matter?" I said, "Jus' fan". I got so when I could talk, I told 'em I seen a haint. I didn't know what it was. I called it a haint. I said, "I couldn't make out what it was. I let out." My daddy said, "Boy, you quit that runnin' when you see things at night. You hadn't a been in the road, you'd a killed yourself." I woulda' sho' 'nuff. Cause if I'd been goin' through woods, I 'speck I woulda'. But I was in the road. Long in then, there was a pretty good road where wagons could travel it all the way from our house. Well, in fact, that road come from Martin Quarter. He had a plantation, a big one. That road went from there right straight on to Lando. That was the way we went to Lando. I was runnin' faster'n usual that night. They wadded up a towel and wipe the sweat out of my face. Now that was in the winter time. It was cold that night, and I was jus' sweatin' jus' like it was in summer, 'cause I was runnin' so. You talk 'bout runnin', I could run. I was young. Round 'bout eighteen years old. I had a good life then.

Long in then, we was makin' good crops, but we wasn't gettin' nothin' for it much. The cotton wasn't bringin' much,

you see. But we was makin' a good livin' on the farm. But I wanted some money. That's the reason I'd go to the mill and make me some money. I give my daddy some of it and give my mama some and I'd take some. I had a little 'baccar sack I'd put it in. That 'baccar sack had a string you could pull it up and draw it tight and it'd stay in that sack 'til I get ready to take it out. You could buy somethin' with money then. Things was cheap. I was crazy 'bout salty fish. Mr. Walker Atkinson'd keep 'em. I'd go up there and get five fish for a dime. I'd bring 'em back home and they was so salty, you'd have to put 'em in soak. If you gone' eat 'em tomorrow, you'd have to put 'em in soak this evenin' or tonight and let 'em soak all night, then take 'em out tomorrow and cook 'em and eat 'em. It was good though. Long in then they was in barrels. And lard, h't was in barrels. Sugar h't was in barrels. You'd want a quarters worth of lard, they'd dip it up — fill up one of them trays. Barrel of soda, it wasn't but a nickel — great big ole' barrel of soda. Plug of 'baccar is ten cent. And it was some 'baccar they called chip tobacco, and then there was some they called Red Coon, and some they called Red Jay. Long in then, cigarettes wasn't but a dime — ready made ones. You get 20 cigarettes for a dime and ten for a nickel. They had some they call Piedmont and some they call Chesterfield Coke Cola wasn't nothin' but a nickel. The best overalls then was Cowhide and Headlight. They cost you a dollar and ten cent. Now that was the best. The best everyday shirt was fifty cent.

Then the first house you get to comin' from the mill on the right, that was the mill office where you went and got your "loonies". Mr. Willis and another man work in there what they call Mr. Perry. They'd give out the "loonies". After a while, they cut that store out and they built the office up there in that new store they got now. Then you'd go up there and get your "loonies" there. Mr. Charlie Murphy, Mr. Shaw Simpson, they was the head mans in there. You could get your "loonies" and your back time if you get your order from the "super" and take it in.

We called it rough, but we made a good livin'. Look like people then had better health than they do now. They didn't get half as many different things to eat as they do now, but they had plenty somethin' to eat. See we used to raise wheat, corn, peas, 'taters. They had a corn mill in the back of that new store what they got now. Sam Featherstone used to ground corn. People come far and near and bring corn. Sam would ground corn for 'em and take out tolls. Had a little box he dip in thee and get the little box full, then reach back and get a half. That was your toll. They ground your corn then and that's big money then. You could take a nickel and get a great big box of salt. That was fresh salt what you put in bread. And milk was plenty, cause might nigh everybody had cows. We was livin' good then. We had plenty to eat and clothes, but what was scarce was money. Money didn't get plentiful 'til Mr. Roosevelt took the chair.

I worked in the mill chance time when I wasn't farmin'. But I worked there straight from '49 on up 'til I retired in '65. When I first started workin' in the mill, I just worked 'til farmin' time come and then I'd go back to farmin'. I was

helpin' Mama and Papa. But they give me a job there at the mill, and anytime I'd get loose from home, I'd go there. I was makin' ten cent a hour.

I went there and ask Mr. Walt Aycock for a job, and I went to work in the picker room sweepin', and I was under age when I first started. And there was two ladies come there. They was all in black, and they sent me out. They told the boss man I was too young. They sent white and colored out. They didn't make no difference. I was about fourteen years old and they couldn't work none under sixteen years old. Then we had another man come there they call Mr. Will Easter. He was the walkin' boss. The superintendent then was a man they called Mr. Tisdale. He was after Mr. Farr. Then after he left, this other fellow come there they call Mr. Wilson. The superintendant is over all them walkin' boss — over everything. He's right next to the president, and the president, he's over all of it. Mr. Gilbert Heath was president there then. Long in there, it wasn't but about four finishers in the lower end. And a fellow there run the cards, his name was Will Jack. That was when Erne Miller was knockin' the thread off a them quills. And another fellow was helpin' him called John Henry. He come there with some white folk. I don't know where he come from — way off somewhere. When I first started in there, I's cuttin' thread off'n them jack spools. Mr. Walt Hyatt was in there then. And the boss man was name Mr. Freeman.

I run the wringer in the dye house awhile. I run the waste machine. But I first started to sweepin' in the picker room. It was a big fellow in there, his name Mr. Walter Aycock. I was makin' 10 cent a hour. They had furnaces, breakers, and hoppers. Had all that in the picker room. I work there awhile. Then the next time I come back there, I work on the yard with a man they call Mr. Miller. You know Miss Myrt Miller. Well, it's her father. I 'member that dam broke and we had to fix it so we could start up the mill Monday mornin'. We worked on that dam all day one Saturday 'til we got it up. Right up 'bove that dam, there's a fellow on that trussel and he had too much, too much whiskey in him. He got 'bout middle ways and he fell off the trussel. Name was Son Brown. Well, he left that Saturday mornin' and he didn't show up Saturday night, nor Sunday, nor Monday. But they found his hat Monday up above the trussel. They said, "Well, he must be in that mill pond." They said they was gone' raise the gates. Well they did and it took it 'bout two o'clock for all the water to run out. When it run off, he was down in there on his knees and had both arms in the mud. That's the way they found him. And long in then they passed a law that they didn't 'llow nobody to get drunk what work in that mill. Well, they call this Brown dodgin' the boss man by cuttin' cross the cow pasture and comin' down the creek and tried to cross the trussel, but he couldn't cross. He got 'bout half way and fell off. He was the best finisher hand they had. After that happened, they cut that law out. Reason they put that law on, people'd come in there with whiskey in 'em and try to work. So they just passed a law for none of 'em to drink while they workin'. So when the best finishin' hand fell in there and got drowned, they cut that out. If they'd break that law they'd fire 'em . . . white and colored. Didn't 'llow none of 'em to do it.

Wasn't nothin' in the picker room but the colored. Onliest white man in there was the boss man. That was Mr. Walt Aycock. And the superintendant was a little low man they called Mr. Farr. He wore a little black hat just like a derby. Had a old man down there on the lower end knock the thread off them quills. His name was Erne Miller, and he was cripple. He walked with both knees together and he had a stick. But now he was stout. If he grabbed you or me, we couldn't get loose 'til he turn us a-loose. They had a 'ole lady down there pick strings outa' waste cotton. They call her Miss Molly Ann. And another big lady, they call Nancy Bell. Down in the lower part was a fellow worked down there, his name was James Stevenson. Him and his chaps run that part down there. Had two girls. One they call Mary Ella, one name Marie. Then they'd take that cotton outa' that picker room and take it up-stairs in sheets. Up there right below the boiler room as you start down, that was the old card room. Then they built another 'n up there at the upper room they called the new card room. There's a fellow used to run them cards down there, they call him Jim Brown — call him "Nubby Foot" for a nickname. He was cripple and walk like some of his toes was off. Long in then, they'd give cripples somethin' to do to make a livin'.

I knowed all of the Heaths, but I didn't know Mr. Ward. I knowed Mr. Bascom, 'cause he'd walk so fast we call him the "Boss Fire". We'd say, "Here come the 'Boss Fire'. You better get a move on." Everytime you see him, he's walkin' fast. That was Mr. Gilbert Heath's brother.

I was workin' there in the card room when Mr. B. D. Heath was buried. That was Mr. Harry's granddaddy. The mill stood one hour. The superintendant told us, "The mill's gone' stand one hour and let everybody's time run." So they all stopped for one hour while they was preachin' his funeral in Charlotte. Then when the hour was up, we went on back to work. Now I reckon he was a millionaire. I seen him sometime come down through there at the mill just lookin' everywhere. ■



NOISE CROCKETT: "I worked in the mill chance time when I wasn't farmin'. But I worked there straight from '49 up 'til I retired in '65."