

COMMUNITY

'30s writer recorded banker's philosophy

Samuel D. Mobley was interviewed in 1938 in the small Chester County town of Blackstock by W.W. Dixon, who was then working for the Federal Writer's Project (FWP).

It was during the Great Depression and Dixon had been unable to find a job. One out of four of all American workers was jobless until the Federal government started projects (some called it "make-work") and tried, as much as possible, to give work that fit existing skills.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

Some worked in construction, others bound old courthouse records, some built trails, some painted courthouse murals — a great variety of work was done, and much is now treasured.

W.W. Dixon may have been an unemployed journalist, a teacher, a young unemployed college graduate — no matter what his past, we know he was highly literate and was expected to be able to interview people and write down what they had to say. Dixon chose Mobley as one who had led a life worth recording.

Samuel D. Mobley thought in 1938 that the government had tried to keep people on farms by providing rural free delivery of mail, building good roads and promising electrification.

In an introduction to the interview, Dixon wrote of Mobley that he was presently (in 1938) living with his sister-in-law and his nephew John D. Mobley. He said Mobley had been "a close observer of the panorama of life unfolded to his vision in the last half century and is a reasoner and philosopher of no mean ability."

Mobley started to school on his sixth birthday, March 22, 1870. (Teachers didn't have a first day of school or think that children should all start a textbook together.) His "beginner's book" was Noah Webster's blue-backed speller.

Mobley termed the school a "small pay school" that was supported by a few families of the neighborhood. Still, it was a three-mile walk for the boy. He remembered that the children played mumblety-peg, knucks and Holey Rolly.

He had three teachers until he was old enough to be sent to a boarding school — the famed Fort Mill Academy headed by Professor A.R. Banks. Mobley thought both Banks and his assistant, L.W. Deck, to be able educators who provided him with all he needed to know to go out into the business world.

His first job was clerking for L.S. Douglas Co., but he quickly moved to George L. Kennedy and Co. There Mobley prospered. His company benefited greatly by what was called the "lien law." This law allowed a merchant to furnish needy farmers with everything they needed to produce a crop. The farmer, to secure the debt, mortgaged the crop, and perhaps his mules, cow, hogs, all his household goods.

Every article in the store had a cash price and a lien price with the lien price 20 percent higher than

the cash price. The merchant generally bought and sold cotton.

Mobley took his profits and established the Bank of Blackstock in 1916. The bank profited until he liquidated it and retired in 1933. He said that no one lost a penny by the operation of the bank.

Mobley was asked what were the most significant trends that he had seen in his 74 years. His answer:

- The Red Shirt movement which took African Americans out of S.C. politics.

- The migration of rural white people from the farms to town.

Mobley thought the government had tried to keep people on farms by providing rural free delivery of mail and building good roads that allowed farmers to take their crops to market easily. But this had not worked and he had heard that rural electrification was next — but he didn't think that would keep people on the farm.

Mobley pointed out that every doctor, lawyer and banker he knew, and some of the preachers, lived in town and had tenant farmers raising their cotton. He couldn't help but wonder: What is this world coming to?

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