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Interview with Clem Haskins (FA 202)

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Recommended Citation

Folklife Archives, Manuscripts &, "Interview with Clem Haskins (FA 202)" (2006). *Folklife Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 24.

https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_fa_oral_hist/24

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Folklife Archives Project 202 – Campbellsville-Taylor County Oral History Project

Interview with Clem Haskins (B1,F7)

Lynne Ferguson: This is Lynne Ferguson, and I am in Campbellsville, Kentucky. It's January 30th, 2006 and I am at 3060, is that the address?

Clem Haskins: 3060 Roberts road...

LF: Roberts road and I'm with Clem Haskins and he has agreed to do an interview, an oral history interview with Campbellsville, Taylor County oral history project. Okay Mr. Haskins, can you tell me your full name?

CH: My name is, my *full* name is Clem Smith Haskins.

LF: And when were you born?

CH: I was born, uh, July 11th, nineteen and forty three.

LF: And where?

CH: In Taylor county, Kentucky, Campbellsville, Kentucky.

LF: Whereabouts in Campbellsville?

CH: Well it was called, at that time, Lemon Bend. Which would be in South West part of the County.

LF: Was there an address at the house?

CH: I wouldn't know that address at this time; it would be a rural route. Everything was rural route then...it'd probably be rural route five.

LF: Okay, that was the name of the community, Lemon Bend?

CH: Yeah, it'd be Lemon Bend.

LF: That's pretty interesting, do you know how it got its name?

CH: I have no idea how it got its name, no, I have not researched that at this time to find out how it got its name.

LF: Tell me, when you were born was there uh...were you born at home?

CH: I was born at home, right. I have eleven brothers and sisters and we all was born at home with a midwife.

LF: Do you know who, what the midwife's name was?

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CH: No, again I don't recall, but there be somebody in the community help with the delivery. Also, at that time, a doctor by the name of... had two brothers they was Hall brothers... Lyman Hall and Mike Hall... and so one of the Hall brothers probably assisted on my mother after the birth, but I was born at home?

LF: And the Hall brothers were doctors?

CH: They was doctors, yeah, Mike Hall and Lyman Hall...

LF: Were they black or white doctors?

CH: They was white doctors and they were located, built a home clinic later on...on...it'd be on the corner of Broadway and Lebanon, all the way in Colombia Avenue in Campbellsville. Later on they had a clinic called Halls' clinic.

LF: Well, tell me about your parents, or tell me your mom's name.

CH: My Mom, her full name was Lucy Edna Haskins.

LF: What was her maiden name?

CH: Her maiden name was Smith, and that's where I got the middle name Smith. I have, like I said, five brothers and she was determine to name one of her sons after her maiden name, so I got stuck with the Smith. So, that's why my middle name is Smith.

LF: Well, it was you're first name though... it could be first...

CH: Well, they all call me Smith or Smitty coming up ...

LF: Oh really...is that your nickname?

CH: My middle name is Smith so my nickname was Smity coming up and most people called me Smith, until I started playing basketball and then people adapted... well my real name is Clem... they started calling me Clem, but, in a community coming up as a young man, a youngster, everyone called me Smith because my mother called me Smith.

LF: Smith or Smitty?

CH: Smith or Smitty, right.

LF: Does anyone call you that anymore?

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CH: My brother, Paul, calls me Smith today, yes, my old one, my brothers still call me Smith, and most of my brothers and sisters, older brothers and sisters still call me Smith, but my younger brothers and sisters call me Clem.

LF: So you have six sisters...?

CH: I have six sisters and four brothers, right.

LF: Oh my, that is a big family.

CH: A large family we had.

LF: Tell me, and your father.

CH: And my father's name was Charles Columbus Haskins ... and my father's been a farmer all his life and he worked public work, and a hard working man... and a very very good father, like I said I had wonderful parents.

LF: He was a farmer all of his life, so was this a house on a farm?

CH: Yes, we had... I was born on the house on a farm and he was a sharecropper. And later on he started working public work and as we, as boys, got older we started helping take care of the farm for Dad and he'd come in and help us in the evening but he worked out for forty years.

LF: So as you were growing up he was a sharecropper, did he has his own land by then?

CH: He owned his own farm and always owned his own land and worked on the farm. As he got older increased out and bought more land, yes.

LF: Is the home place still there?

CH: We still, I still own the home place today and as my parents got up in age I was able to buy there home place and I till own it today.

LF: The house and everything?

CH: The house and the home, uh huh.

LF: Wow that's pretty nice to have that... uh, so your father and mother, where did they come from?

CH: They're originally from...my Mom and Dad are originally from Green County and Adair County, right on the line between called Coldberg, a little small community in

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Cane valley there- its kind of a line that divide between Green County and Adair County.

LF: And was it Colbert?

CH: Called Coldberg in Cane Valley. Little, just small communities.

LF.... Were they from different places or were both of them from the same little area.

CH: Well they were from uh, you could throw a rock hit of the little communities they were born at... this one would be about five or six miles when he was born, but back in then, there was horse and buggy and it was an all-day trip, but today it's a pretty short drive.

LF: So that's how they got to know each other, or do you know how they met?

CH: Well they met as children.... Back in those days you had churches were big and Sundays you were outing to church. I'm sure that church we got together on the cookout or on a meeting and I'm sure that's how they met. And that's how most parents back in those days met. A boy and a girl meet at a church function from there and it started from there and the courtship started from there. I'm not sure that happened, but I'm assuming it happened that way years ago. That's how black families had strong ties usually because of communities through churches.

LF: So you're a middle child... how do you fit in the...?

CH: I have two older brothers and two older sisters, I'm the fifth child.

LF: Right in the middle.

CH: Right in the middle.

LF: Okay, when did you parents come to, If they were born there or if they were raise in that area, when did they come to Taylor County?

CH: Well Taylor County, I think they well really when the probably when they first got married, they migrated to Taylor County because they both lived basically in Taylor County and Green County, it's all right here together. You have Green, Taylor, Adair, it's all within ten miles of each other and a radius of ten to fifteen miles- its close. And we lived in Taylor County all of our lives, the majority of our lives. Of course, we lived in Taylor County, in Washington County, in Green County combined, but ninety-five plus percent of our time was in Taylor County. So I don't know what year, but I know all of my life I been in Taylor County perhaps in early, when my parents got married, I think

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they may have lived in Green County for a year or two, then most of the time they've been in Taylor County.

LF: And why did they come to Taylor County to settle?

CH: Well, farm. My Dad was always, like I said, a sharecropper he lived on a farm and he farmed for.... And he lived on another farm, and like I said sharecropper and being farmer brought him to Taylor County.

LF: What did you all grow when you were growing up?

CH: Well you grow on a farm rows of tobacco, corn, some wheat basically you milk cattle and cows I should say...and back years ago you had a lot of cane, sugar cane. You made molasses and things like that but you don't have that today, but they grew some molasses...sugar cane and made molasses, but it was hard work. It's not like today, you know, it was a lot of hard work on the farm and that's what my dad did and...and he was farming for other people back then. And I don't know what year but I know by the time I was five years of age he had bought his own track of land and he would, um, my older brother would work for other people as well to take care of his own farm, but he was able to start managing well and make money and then he'd start buying his own farm... bought his own farm and we moved into that house when I was a young age.

LF: You don't about what time?

CH: The years would be probably around forty...uh, I think our first farm he bought was like about forty-six, forty-seven in the late forties , mid-forties.

LF: Okay, What were your responsibilities on the farm growing up?

CH: Well, we always had chores, you know, and you could set the clock by. Wwe ate in the morning, ate lunch at twelve, and ate supper at six. We called it breakfast, lunch ... we call it breakfast, dinner, and supper because now you have a breakfast, and you eat lunch, and you eat dinner, but back in those days it was always called breakfast, dinner, and supper. So we ate six in the morning, twelve, and six, you know, you could set your watch by that and we didn't vary from that. And we all had chores we all be up a milk by four or five o'clock in the morning, you know, and we get up at four in the morning milk our cows, our mom would have breakfast ready at six, and we eat, and course when you go to school you'd be out, you'd be in....We had to walk to school back in those days, went to a county school.

LF: Where'd you go?

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CH: Went to a place called Aborista which was about oh, two miles walk and we had to walk that in rain snow and it was a all black school, one-room school, and had eight grades there and one teacher. It was, talking about a hard time, that's what we went through until I got in the fifth grade before school consolidated, I went to a one room school up until I was in the fourth grade.

LF: Until the fourth grade?

CH: Until the fourth grade. My, excuse me...so I started one through four grades and then the fifth grade; so one through four in the one-room school, one-room school... and uh, anyway we uh get up, like I say, about six o' clock will be through eating and about six o' clock we'd eat breakfast, by six thirty we'd be through eating, and my mom would have the dishes washed by six thirty in the morning; just clockwork ain't it?

LF: Mmhh.

CH: But you understand though by eight o' clock you'd be in the bed, you know, you'd go to bed by eight o'clock; we didn't have TV. It's not like today, we didn't have no TV. And so it's not like you set up and watch TV, so you've got your seven or eight hours by four o' clock in the morning; you were ready to get up. So it's not like today, kids stay up till twelve, one o' clock. So uh... it was a luxury to listen to the radio, and there's people who don't understand that, but it was a luxury to listen to the radio back when I was coming along. And that was a big thing, radio was big. And we did get, have a radio and we listened to the radio, uh, at times and that was only one, two nights a week, but, you know, it was discipline; our parents were very strict parents, but that was just part of growing up.

LF: Well when you came in...when you walked back from school what chores did you have to do in the afternoon too?

CH: Well in the afternoon you'd just have work to do, you know, we'd come in, my brother and I we'd have to milk the cattle, uh, we'd have to feed the chickens, feed the hogs, those type of things you'd have to do every day, you know, you had chores to do on the farm, you know, just every day; it was just a thing you had to do. In the morning you got up, like I said, we milked the cattle, chop the wood, got the wood in, we burn wood in the winter times and you did all those chores before you got to school. And if you had to... if my mom was going to wash that day, we had to carry water or she washed on the iron born, washboard; didn't have no washing machine back in those days so, you know, those types of things you'd do. You'd fill up...maybe...whatever it could be, she had, we had barrels of water and maybe we carry enough to fill up fifty barrels, a hundred barrels, a hundred gallons of water, at two barrels, fifty gallons each and that'd be a hundred gallons of water we fill it up before

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we went to school in the morning, so that was a lot of water you had to carry. Those types of thing you'd have to do, you know if it was a washday, and those were just things you'd do as a kid-the chores you'd have to do... and that was just a few things you'd do. And sometime you'd them wrong that they'd get angry at us and well, punishment.... Make you fill up the... entire fill up every barrel in the county; you know if you'd do something bad. If we had a bad meeting, missed school or behave in school, whatever... you'd do something mischievous. But anyway, that was a way they had of punishing you, so anyway. Those type of things that you don't forget growing up but, you know, that was a good way of disciplining young people and today, we need more of that in our system. If we had it today we wouldn't have the problem we have today either. But anyway, I had wonderful parents; that was the thing we used to do when we'd come in from school, we would, like I say, I would do all my chores or whatever my daddy would find for us to do.

LF: Did the community get at, the little community where you lived; of course there was enough of you all to make a community almost, but where there community things that you'd do together like, I don't know, in the fall did you have like hog killing... was there anything you'd do as a community?

CH: Well yes, you have that growing up in a community- you have certain things you do certain times of the year and in the fall, like here now we don't have the cold winters like we used to have and, for example, Thanksgiving was a time of year that you'd kill hogs, around Thanksgiving. You'd fatten your hogs all year and you'd get them ready to kill, and on Thanksgiving and if it were back then, it would be cold and the ground would be freezing. So you don't have to kill anything... the ground have to freeze, and so back then the ground would be frozen by early, mid-November around Thanksgiving, so the third week in Thanksgiving today. So we'd kill a hog around that time. So you'd get neighbors together and you'd kill your hogs and maybe three or four families would kill hogs and you'd have one... well you have a, uh, a, you had to scald a hog. So you'd get that one water trough or scalding trough together and everybody then everybody would kill their hog and bring them there to maybe to your farm or you next neighbor or next-door neighbor's farm and you'd have that hog killing time whatever day you'd set so it may be three families, four families would share in killing their hogs, so that would be a time of year... I say Thanksgiving, around Thanksgiving, could be the second week of December, uh, November, could be the first week of December. In that time range of year, that you'd kill your hogs and everybody would share in that, that you would work your meat, meaning, "work you meat", you would cut up your lard and you would cook your lard and so you'd have one big skillet where you'd fry all those, your fat to make to make grease that you would cook with, your lard. So those things that, just hard times, so, to make a long story short, in killing hogs, for example,

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nothing went to waste because we had large families and back in those days everybody in the community had anywhere from two to six or seven kids in the family, had large families. Today, you don't have that, but everybody and every farmer around would have anywhere from one to ten kids, so they couldn't afford to lose anything so keeping...having big gardens in the summers and killing hogs and keeping everything including the squeal from the hog, they did that. They save everything. They knew how to manage well, and managed well.

LF: What about, you were talking about growing sugar cane... was that a kind of community rendering?

CH: That would be a community that too, we hey get ready to make molasses. When you harvest your sugar cane that, uh, when you cut the cane you bring it in and we had like a mill and you had to uh... you need a horse or a mule to grind the sugar cane in this mill- it turns and you have to rinse juice out of the cane and so that was a community thing too, and people didn't grow a lot of cane, but you had several, not several but a few, neighbors to come and they would cook this, they called it a cooker, that you'd cook this sugar cane with. When it'd get a certain temperature you'd have to take it off... excuse me, molasses. So yes, that was kind of a community thing too. And everybody couldn't make molasses, you had one or two guys that knew how to get them at a certain temperature, it's been so long ago that I have forgotten all the details, but as a young boy my job was to drive the mule around the cane and to put in the cane in there, but I didn't have no part of cooking the molasses. That was my dad and the older gentlemen, the older gentlemen those guys'd be like seventy-five, eighty-five years of age-they had been in it a long time. They'd be the skimmers of the molasses and in getting off and when taking off. But that's an art in itself, what I'm trying to say, and being able to do that. And so that was a big thing, yes.

LF: What about, we were talking about farm work, do you remember the types of arts or things that maybe your mother did. Did she piece quilts or do needlework, anything like that...can you remember anything like growing up?

CH: Oh yes, my Mom a, even today we have a house full of quilts my mom had made, my mom have quilts that today would be worth several thousand dollars probably, be antiques. Quilts, and she's made all us, meaning all the kids, a quilt and we have several quilts that are in the family today that we still have and will always have throughout history that she had made with her initials on it and she put her initial on each one of the quilts she made for her kids and her grand kids and her great great grand kids that she'd made quilts for. And she did something before she passed, my mom lived to ninety years of age, and she was in great health until the last two years of her life. And she made a quilt and all my, I ran basketball camps I've been a

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basketball coach and basketball player and she took a lot of my jerseys and she kept everything and she kept a lot of my, I played NBA for many years, and jerseys from my playing days and she cut them all up and made a quilt out of them; it was the most beautiful thing you ever laid your eyes on. It was a king size, she made a king size, I have a king size bed, she made me a king size quilt and it's something I will cherish for the rest of my life. Not only that, she made me one and she made, I think, both of my daughters and my son a king size quilt for a bed. So, you know, she was a unique lady that only had a third grade education, my Dad and my Mom only had a third and fourth grade education, but two of the smartest people I know. And my Dad is, and I said, the greatest man in the world in my life, Martin Luther King, and then the Kennedy brothers, John and Robert Kennedy are the people that I have the most respect for and my Dad is number one, and Martin Luther King is second, and John and Robert Kennedy are four of the men that I respect more than anybody in this world. My Daddy, to me, is the smartest man of all.

LF: Now do you keep it on your bed or do you keep it put away or uh....the quilt that your mom made with your jerseys?

CH: We have it on ... our son has it on his bed and we keep one of them put away.

LF: Good, keep it out of the light.

CH: Yes.

LF: That will keep it protected. Okay, let's talk about schools. You were telling me that you were at Aurista one room school from grades one to four, it was a county school. Do you remember your teacher's name at all?

CH: Yes, my teacher's name was Maddy Anderson.

LF: Okay, where did you go after that?

CH: I went to Campbellsville Dern.

LF: Okay, the old school?

CH: Yeah, the black school, it was called Campbellsville Dern.

LF: Now did you...how did you get to...did you all move closer to Campbellsville?

CH: No still lived right up the road from where we're giving this interview. We was on Roberts Road. The address of Roberts Road today would be 2632 Roberts Road, but back in those days you didn't have names, they were routes. You had Route one, but exactly 2632 it'll actually tell you it 2.6 miles from...

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LF: Where the family's house was?

CH: Yeah, yeah.

LF: So how did you get to school at Campbellsville Dern?

CH: We had a bus, we rode a bus then.

LF: Was it a segregated bus?

CH: Yes.

LF: So it was a county school bus, and how long did you go to school at Campbellsville Dern?

CH: I went to Campbellsville Dern from the fourth grad, actually fifth grade, to my sophomore year.

LF: So that's fifth through tenth grade?

CH: Yeah, fifth through tenth grade.

LF: And then, where did you graduate, where'd you go?

CH: I went to Taylor County, I integrated (the) school system. I was the only black in Taylor County High School in the fall of...I graduated in sixty-three. So my junior year would have been the fall of what, sixty-one?

LF: Okay, so now I'm saying you're the first black student at Taylor County High School?

CH: First black and only student at Taylor County High School.

LF: And only black student, right?

CH: Yeah.

LF: So do you want to talk about how that happened?

CH: We can.

LF: If you don't want to that's fine, we'll go on. Tell me where you went to school after that, let's go on with that.

CH: Okay, which one do you want to go to?

LF: It's up to you.

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CH: Go ahead, go ahead, ask a question.

LF: Where did you go to school after you graduated from Taylor County High School?

CH: I went to Western Kentucky University.

LF: And when did you graduate from there?

CH: I graduated from Western Kentucky University; I went to the fall of sixty-three and I graduated from Western in the spring of 1967.

LF: Do you, if you want to talk about changing schools, how was that going from a segregated school to an integrated school. Those, between those two years...between you're sophomore and junior year?

CH: Well it was very, uh, for me, it was not as trying time as people may think. I was an athlete; I think I was accepted because of that probably as much as anything. But I think that more than anything else, number one, I was a Christian, and I think that helped me more than anything because I think God directed my life. And I think because I had a...my mother was a praying lady, was a God-fearing lady, and the people of the community respected the Haskin name and through my mother and father. They respected them and I think that was the key that me being able to integrate the school system and it going over as smooth as it went over. I had no problems in Taylor County, myself personally, and it's due to, because... it's due to my parents and I give all the credit to my parents and having wonderful parents. The way they raised us, not only me, but the whole family, and their respect in the community. The people had the respect for them, the Haskin name, and the way I carried myself. I respected my parents enough that I wouldn't do anything to hurt them as parents and they way the instilled the respect in me, so you know.

LF: So the key was your faith and your raising?

CH: Yeah, Yeah.

LF: Uh, when you got to Western was it an integrated school at that time?

CH: No, I was the first and only black at Western, with Dwight Smith we integrated Western Kentucky University.

LF: You were the first... you and, and....

CH: Yeah, Dwight Smith...

LF: Dwight Smith...

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CH: Yeah, another...we were basketball players at Western Kentucky University...and Dwight Smith was from Princeton, Kentucky, and we integrated Western in the fall of sixty-three and we was freshman together and roommates at Western.

LF: Okay, let's get back to Taylor County. Tell me about, uh, your marriage...uh, of course, I know Yevette, what about your children, I've got their names, let's see it's... Clemette?

CH: Clemette, Lori, and my son, Brent .

LF: Lori and Brent, okay?

CH: Yeah.

LF: One, two, three.

CH: Yeah, my daughter Clemette, she's the oldest; she forty at the present time, and my daughter, Lori, is thirty-six at the present time, and my son, Brent is thirty-two.

LF: What changes in the community have directly affected you and your family the most...changes in Campbellsville?

CH:(long pause)..... Mmmhh. What changes?

LF: If you want to think about it, that's fine.

CH: Uh.....Mmhh..... There have been a lot of changes affected us the most, I don't how to answer that... what affected us the most... You mean as a family? As a...

LF: You or your family.

CH: Me or we are talking about the family, me, personally?

LF: You or...either one... personally you, that'd be fine... You or your family, yeah.

CH: Are we putting a time frame on that...

LF: No...

CH: ..Just...

LF: No, what do you think has generally affected...what change in the area has affected you... you the most?

CH: That's a broad question isn't it...

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LF: It is...it's very general.

CH: Oh, I don't know the answer to that one. I could answer it in a lot of ways, you know. Hmm, I never thought about that. What change affected me? What change affected me? I... I don't know, I never thought about it. What change affected me? I, uh, I don't know. What's another question?

LF: Uh, okay...what would you say your occupation has been, and I know you've been a basketball player, professional right?

CH: Right.

LF: And a professional coach and...a farmer and is that what you're doing now?

CH: Right, Right.

LF: But are you retired at all?

CH: Well, I think I'm retired from coaching, but I'm not retired from farming. I farm every day, and I enjoy that very much. And the coaching aspect, I have retired from coaching, but I'm involved with basketball in one sense. I do some consulting for the Minnesota Timber Wolves, and I do some scouting for them. Uh, scouting for college talent for the pros, and, uh, I watch a lot, I watch *a lot*... I see a few high school games; I enjoy my local team, Taylor County High School, and I go to various high school games around the state; to stay involved, and because my wife, Yevette loves games, she loves the game and so I like to take her to as many games as possible but I have retired from coaching. And don't anticipate every coaching again, as far as coaching. But I...my son's involved in coaching with the Minnesota Timber Wolves and I try to sit up on with the times of what the coaches are doing...and the players, uh, what their thinking, kind of...and stay in tune with the Now generation. So that's why I try to stay involved as much as possible, so if he happened to become a head coach that I would be able to give him some insight in maybe dealing with today's players, sort to call, you know. So that's why I try to stay involved with the game as much as possible because I truly enjoy, uh... We've spent time together as a coach, when I was coaching Minnesota, he was one of my assistants and I think that was the most fun I had, my son working with me. I think that was very important to be able to help him. So that's why I try to stay involved with the game, but as far as coaching, I'm through with coaching, but now I am farming, yes.

LF: Uh, could you tell me about your church...what church do you attend?

CH: I attend Pleasant Run Baptist Church, I'm a southern Baptist. I am a...trustee, chair of my church (unintelligible), and a junior deacon in my church. And I, have always,

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and always will be, a member of my little small church, we only have a small congregation; about fifty, sixty people involved, but actually in Black Gnat, Kentucky, which is between...it's actually in Green County...

LF: really...

CH: ...where we go to church at...

LF: Black Net is the name of the community?

CH: Yeah, yeah, there's not even a traffic light there it's just...

LF: B-L-A-C-K N-E-T, is it two words?

CH: It's just one...it's two words and it's spelt G-N-A-T.

LF: Oh, sorry (laughs).

CH: It's black and then well they spell it G-N-A-T.

LF: Black GNAT, okay in Green County.