

10-7-1989

Interview with Frank N. Davis, Jr. (FA 94)

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WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY FOLKLIFE ARCHIVES

INFORMANT/FIELDWORKER DATA FORM

I. INFORMANT

NAME: FRANK N DAVIS, JR
(Include fullest possible name -- first, middle and/or maiden, last)

(For example: John James Smith; Mary Ann Franklin Smith (Mrs. John))

ADDRESS: 5218 MEADOW LAKE RD, BRENTWOOD TN

PERSONAL DATA: Age 68 Date of Birth 4-8-21

Place of Birth HERMITAGE Sex M

RACE/NATIONALITY/ETHNIC BACKGROUND: CAUCASIAN - ENGLISH

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: (Include education, occupation, places of residence, religious affiliation, etc.)

3 YEARS COLLEGE, BELL SOUTH, RETIRED
NASHVILLE, SMYRNA, CHATTANOOGA & MEMPHIS
TENN. SOUTHERN BAPTIST

II. COLLECTOR

NAME: AMANDA LEE DAVIS
(Include fullest possible name as described above)

ADDRESS, LOCAL: 216 POTTER HALL WKU B.G. KY 42101

ADDRESS, PERMANENT: 5218 Meadow Lake Rd Brentwood, TN 37027

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE INFORMANT, SUCH AS COUSIN, FRIEND, EMPLOYER, ACQUAINTANCE, ETC.:

FATHER

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

TAPE INDEX

Tape # 1 of 1

Interviewer: Amanda Davis Address: 216 Potter Hall, WKU,

Interviewee: Frank Davis Address: 5218 Meadow Lake Rd., Brentwood, TN

Interviewee: _____ Address: _____
(write additional names on back of sheet)

Place of Interview: FD's home Date: 10/7/89

Equipment Used: Soundesign #4375B

Tape Brand: _____ Speed: _____

Cassette Brand: BASF 60 or 90 minute? 90

Amount of tape used: Side A: 3/4 Side B: 0

Brief description of contents: My father tells of his Christmases in his childhood and throughout his life.

Comments:

Turn no.	Outline of contents--verbatim material in quotes
	<p>What time did you begin celebrating Christmas? Beginning of December or sometime in December we'd begin to get the christmas spirit. Now, the family gets more involved than I do, but I think about Christmas sometime in December. That's not necessarily my family, just me; the family gets interested earlier.</p> <p>Growing up, what did your family do before Christmas? We began to talk about Christmas presents and what you wanted for Christmas, I don't think that there was as much preparation and hassle as there is now, concerning presents and so forth. I think Christmas now is a burden the we celebrate it. I think it should be a relaxing, happy time.</p> <p>Did you or a family member do any baking for the holidays? I didn't do any baking, but mother did. There were certain things at Christmas we would have that you wouldn't normally have. One was a fruit cake which you know about and in our family, I don't know if any other family had it, was an Amalgatum cake. It was a two layer white cake that has a thick filling one inch or two thick of a mixture, I don't know what all was in it, coconut and raisins, nuts and certain ingredients were mixed together to form this thick, it wasn't like meringue like you put on a pie, but a thick creamy-like filling and it goes between the layers and then you put on the icing, white. I don't know where it came from, it was just a custom for our family. Also, at Thanksgiving and Christmas too, we would have with meals, which you wouldn't any other time of year, was Ambrosia, which is oranges, coconut or</p>

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something like that. You buy coconuts and brake them, drain the milk and grate the coconut and start cooking with it. We also had a boiled ham in a big container and put on the stove for X number of hours and it would be sliced and served throughout the season. Those were some of the things that were traditional . Of course, you had vegetables and other Christmas specials.

How elaborate were your Christmases?

Not too elaborate, not as many gifts as you give now. For one thing, when I was little, things were different as far as money is concerned. We didn't have much, but we didn't know that. You would ask for some gifts, but that didn't mean that you would get it. Each person would get about five gifts, usually clothes and things you needed with some gifts you wanted thrown in. And in our stocking, you didn't have stocking stuffers like they have now, you'd get some nuts, fruit, dates and dried figs, which you hardly see anymore in these containers that they were stacked in, also, Christmas was a big firework time when I was little, so normally you'd get fireworks in your stocking. On the Fourth of July I don't remember a lot of fireworks, but at Christmas you'd hear Bang-Bang-Bang all over town Christmas morning, but you don't hear that now.

Were your stockings homemade?

No, not the homemade felt kind, you would just hang up a big sock.

Tell me about your Christmas tree.

It was always a Southern cedar tree. My responsibility was to go where the cedars were growing outside town, I lived in a small town so you didn't have to go far, because cedars grew on the side of the road and in thickets, so I would take a hacket and try to select a good cedar tree which was about six feet tall or something like that and bring it back. You didn't have the metal stand that ypu put it in so that meant you made one by making an "X" out of wood and driving a nail through the center of it up into the tree and then stand that up in the house. So my assignment was to find a cedar tree, cut it down, saw it off and put a stand on it and bring it in the house. I would help to decorate some, but my mother and sister did most os the decorating. Homemade ornaments, popcorn strings, tinsel, which we saved year after year and then some ornaments that had been around for a while, there was something like paper garland too. I don't remember any lights on it and I think we put candles on the tree one year which isn't a good idea, later on we put on Christmas lights. On the top tere was a star.

What about your tree now?

We have an artificial and occasionally we buy one, a shipped in Wisconsin fir, but that was unheard of growing up.

How did you celebrate Christmas Eve?

A lot of excitement and anticipation of Santa Claus coming, so there would be some last minute preparations. We didn't bring in a lot of paper for wrapping, we reused most of our

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gift wrap, ribbon. No sitting around the fire reading the "Christmas Carol" or singing songs like some people do, we didn't have special readings or a routine, just last minute preparations.

When did you open presents?

Christmas Day.

How big a part did religion play?

We attended church regularly and the church and various organizations would have Christmas pagents with the shepherds and the manger scene and the wise men and the men in the community would be dressed in bathrobes and a towel tied around their head. Not as authentic as pagents now, we just used what we had, and a church would have Christmas songs around town, but no manger scenes like now.

Any family songs or stories?

No, I don't remember any. We had a piano and my sister played the piano and we might have sung a Christmas song, but I don't remember any that we sung regularly.

Did you do anything for the community?

No, not that I recall other than be in the church Christmas play. There might have been some, but not as organized and maybe I was too little to pay attention. My father knew a lot of the black people in town and at Christmas they would come around, following this old custom of saying, "Christmas Eve gift Mr. Frank!" and that means its Christmas time and it's time for you to give me something. "Christmas Eve gift" was usually some money, some meat dried in the meat house, nothing elaborate, just a remembrance.

Did you believe in Santa Claus?

Yes, I believed in Santa. I believed until you get to school and kids begin to talk about Santa being make-believe. I forget exactly when, third grade maybe and you begin to add up all the evidence that Santa can't go down the chimney and do all the things he's supposed to do.

Any special childhood memories a best or worst?Christmas?

No, not as elaborate as now, maybe I didn't ask for certain things because I knew that I couldn't get them. One time I got a bicycle and that was the biggest thing I got and sometime in grade school the big push was to wear big, high boots and military corduroy pants, like riding pants and a sheep-skin coat and helmet and goggles. That was the whole outfit. Of course, you didn't need it in Tennessee because you would walk arund with the boots, pants, coat and the helmet and burn up. But anyway, it was a fad and the thing to do and be part of the group. I probably got a wagon, but I don't recall anything outstanding.

A favorite Christmas?

No favorite. I remember when I was in the military and I was on leave and I had to be in San Diego on the twenty-sixth, but I had to leave on the twenty-third, so I was on the train on Christmas Eve. I remember that as I was going off to fight the war and I asked for a few days extention for Christmas, but they wouldn't give it to me.

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Do you have a favorite Christmas song?

Bing Crosby's "White Christmas." I remember sitting on a coconut log in the Solomen Islands in the rain and listening to "White Christmas." It was real hot and we had ponchos on watching the movie. I never was too emotional, but sometimes things get to you. Bing Crosby is one of my favorite singers so "White Christmas" is one of my favorites. I liked the church songs, but I didn't have a favorite and we sang them so much that we knew them, so I didn't think there was one that was a cut above the other.

How about the Christmas movies?

"Miracle on 34th Street," "White Christmas," and old movies, but I don't have a favorite.

One thing I would like to say that is a Middle Tennessee Christmas tradition is spiced round. Nashville has the Christmas custom of roast beef and they punch holes in it, put spices and slivers of fat and cook like you would cook a ham. There is only one place in Nashville that still makes it. I don't know where it came from. We lived in Memphis and they hadn't heard of it.

Is Christmas too commercial now?

Yes, it is too commercial, it should be more of Christmas and not so much hassle and that people spend too much time, money, and effort to buy gifts. Of course, some gifts are well received, but a lot of times I think that the gifts are things that people don't really need and they just sit on the shelf. I think that it should be a family time.

So it should be a family holiday?

It is a good time for families to get together. Families seem to think that they should get together to reminisce and be together.

What is the true meaning of Christmas?

Originally it was the birth of Christ and then it became twisted around and Jolly Old St. Nicholas came on the scene and then it became too commercial. Initially, celebrating Christ's birth.

Is there a big difference in Christmases past and present?

Not a great difference, families pass along customs and how things should be done, so you have a tendency to do the same things. One saw how things were done when they were younger. Another family may be doing something else, but they've been doing it all their life. Generally, Christmas is pretty much the same, but more elaborate, more hustle and bustle of getting things ready. Under the tree at home, there were gifts but not as many as you see now.

What would you like to pass on to your grandchildren?

Nothing other than what I talked about, to remember family at Christmas and try to celebrate Christmas is the proper way and be happy and try to cut out the bickering and unhappiness and forget hard feelings, but that should be anytime.

Do you have a Christmas wish?

The same as millions of other people, to have a good Christmas

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for peace, contentment, not to necessarily have everything good in life, but not many disappointments. Of course, we have no control over this, but people like to see it and it is on all the Christmas cards.