

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

Folklife Archives Oral Histories

Folklife Archives

4-3-1993

Interview with Joseph H. Page (FA 377)

Manuscripts & Folklife Archives

Western Kentucky University, mssfa@wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_fa_oral_hist



Part of the **Folklore Commons**

Recommended Citation

Folklife Archives, Manuscripts &, "Interview with Joseph H. Page (FA 377)" (1993). *Folklife Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 454.

https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_fa_oral_hist/454

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Folklife Archives Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

TRANSCRIPTION

Name of Oral History Project FLK 399 Oral Histories of the
Children of Tenant Farmers

Tape 1 of 1. The number of the tape being transcribed 1

Name of narrator: Joe H. Page

Address: 600 Stacker Street
Lewisburg KY Tel. n/a

Name of principal interviewer: Victoria Conatser

Date of interview: 3 April 1998 Place of interview: Spa, KY

Other persons present at interview: _____

Equipment used: Reel-to-reel _____; Cassette x; Model: Sony TCM 818

Tape used: Brand Audio-90; Amount (side 1) approx 3/4; (side 2) not done

Summary description of interview context and contents:

The interview took place at Elk Lick Baptist Church in Spa, Kentucky. Mr. Page was one of ten people who volunteered to speak with our class about his memories of his childhood on a tenant farm.

(Introduction was lost due to a short in the AC cord of the recorder. The interview tape picks up at the point where Mr. Page was answering the first question.)

PAGE: After I was married I was, we went to Lost City. Have you heard of Lost City?

CONATSER: No, I sure haven't.

PAGE: It's an Indian burying ground, two and a half to three miles east of Lewisburg.

CONATSER: What year was that?

PAGE: Nineteen thirty-eight. It was nineteen thirty-eight.

CONATSER: Okay.

PAGE: And now these landowners at Lost City. It was three of them. I believe two of them in Chicago, and the other one in Lewisburg.

CONATSER: So the landowners didn't necessarily live where

Conatser-Page--2

CONATSER: So the landowners didn't necessarily live where you all were.

PAGE: Part of them did. The one that took care of Lost City. He was at Lewisburg. The other was, it was cooperatives. One of them's name was Doves and the other one Brown. Other than that, I don't know.

CONATSER: Okay, that's fine.

PAGE: I don't know if you can make heads or tails of this. *that or not*

CONATSER: I'm sure I can. You write better than I do.

PAGE: That's my job, (Unintelligable)

CONATSER: Oh, you do?

PAGE: I'd write down his name and address.

CONATSER: Uh-hum?

PAGE: And weigh his tobacco.

CONATSER: Was that at like the end of the season that ya'll did that?

PAGE: No. It was all during the season, and in the winter months, in the tobacco season, we'd sell it, about November and oh about March maybe sometime. They're over now earlier than March. *g*

CONATSER: Was tobacco primarily what you grew?

PAGE: That's right. That's our money crop. It didn't bring much money, but we did it. When it got cheap they'd say we had to raise more tobacco.

CONATSER: (Unintelligable)

PAGE: I'm eighty-one years old, and I've been through a whole lot of it. I've got some pictures that you might want to want to see.

CONATSER: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'd like to see them.

PAGE: I thought you'd want to take a look at these. I don't know if they'd be interesting to you or not.

CONATSER: Let's see...

PAGE: There's my first automobile I bought.

CONATSER: Oh. my goodness

CONATSER_PAGE--3

PAGE: A nineteen twenty-nine (Unintelligable) Have you ever seen seen this automobile.

STUART: Yes, I have.

CONATSER: Yes, I remeber seeing just the the-

PAGE: I would sya that the oldest part of the car was the radiator part.

CONATSER: So did you get it in nineteen twenty-nine or later on?

PAGE: I got it used in thirty-seven.

CONATSER: Oh,oreally? I ath

PAGE: No, this is a (?). A twenty-nine model. I bought it just before I married. In the thirties. There's our family automobile.

CONATSER: Oh.

PAGE: There's a picture of that automobile because there's a group of our friends. And my wife's pictures in there, too.

CONATSER: Which one is she?

PAGE: Right there in the white suit.

CONATSER: Is this like a Sunday outing or-

PAGE: Yeah. Actually that was made over there, close to Lost City, before we were married. After we were married, we movied to this farm.

CONATSER: And that was the first tenant farming you two ever did?

PAGE: Yes, ma'am.

CONATSER? Hmm. That's neat. (LOOKS AT PICTURE)

PAGE: Nineteen twenty-five model T Ford. Looks awful, but we came to church in that. To church right here in Elk Lick.
(Looks at another picture of a horse and buggy meeti meeting a car on the road) That's wher two transpo transportations come together.
That's a nineteen fourteen T-Ford and me standing on the running board.

CONATSER: Oh reaaly?

CONATSER: Was that the first car that the family had that you could remeber?

PAGE: That's right. A nineteen fourteen Ford and that was the preachwer in this photo. The preacher and a friend of his, But he always drove a nice, slick, fat horse. That buggy. And he was a pastor at our church.

(A photographer comes in to copy the photos)

CONATSER: So did you go to Elk Lick Baptist the whole time you were here?

PAGE: I would say to you, that I went to Elk Lick Baptist when they arrived in the twenties. I'd come hear the preaching. And I went here until after I got married. Then I moved to Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. My wife and I moved to Lost City, so we came to church at Mount Pleasant. My mother and father are buried out here at the cemetary. And I've got a sister here.

CONATSER: When you were youger, what wasa Sunday like?

PAGE: Well it started at home. It was six of us children. By the time we got up We knew where we was going that day because we was going to church and Sunday School. By the time we got all our faces washed, it was time to go to church. And we'd go to Sunday School and church. And whenever the preaching and Sunday School was over, it was a ball game or something like that. That afternoon, we'd get in a ball game. All my mistakes of my younger life was right here at Elk Lick. I told them, I said if the peolpe will forgive me, I know the Lord did. Yeah, I wanted to be noticed as bad as anybody ever saw. When I was growing up, I made a lot of mistakes.

CONATSER: How long did you go to school here, if you don't mind my asking...

PAGE: Well, I got through the eighth grade. Some of them, I made two years in the same grade. I told them, I said there's a school in Lewisburg. High School. I said, it burned down, and I told them it had to burn down to get me out of the eighth grade.

CONATSER: What kind of school was it, the one you started out in. Was it a one room school?

PAGE: No, it was a four classes ion that school. Small school, but they did have a high school. Well, school just didn't take for me. Id rather been working any day than to gone to school. But my Dad says, "You gonna go to school. Then I was, I got about sixteen or so, fifteen. He seen school's

PAGE(CONT): gonna start. Do you want to go to school or go to work?" I said "Dad, I would rather work." And I'd rather work than to go to school. It was Well, I have to work a whole lot on the farm, and I'd get behind in my subjects, you know, it was, I'd go back and I was behind. It was all dutch to me, because I didn't know what it was they'd studied. In fact, it didn't make much difference. But recess and dinnertime was my choices.

CONATSER: Your favorite subjects.

PAGE: They was my favorite subjects. Ah, I had a lot of fun.

CONATSER: Was there anything at the school that you can remeber that the whole commuity took part in?

PAGE: Well, they did have a basketball courtthere. and I did love to see the boys play. They did have a girl team there for a while, but they called them the Bloomer girls. They wasn't too, they wasn't too active. They mostly had hair-pulling and so forth. But they did have a good ball team, a boy's ball team.

CONATSER: Really??

PAGE: Yeah, it was played on the very court.. And one of my heroes was Bob Thompson. Bob Thompson lived in Russelville, but he died a few years ago. And I thought Bob Thompson could hit that goal from anywhere in that court. It was, he wasn't a very tall boy, but he was quick. I used to would stay after scho school and watch them play. After a while I knew I needed to go home because I had to go the back pass. I'd run almost all the way home. I di love to see them play ball, I knew the names of all the players.

CONATSER: Did you have specific chore that were yours to do?

PAGE: Yeah. After school we'd set the tobacco out. We'd set it out by hand. And we had to wait fior a season a good season, so could seel the tobacco. And then w we had to cultivate that stuff, get it up to a certain height.. And then the suckers, we had to pull those suckers out by hand. So, we had to do it all.

CONATSER: What's a sucker?

PAGE: It's a shoot that comes out of the leaf, like so. And you pullthe suckers out when the leaf gets this tall. And if you don't pull the suckers out they'll get so big they'll push the leaf off. Now you know they use a sucker oil. They

CONATSER: It must be a lot easier now than it was then.

PAGE: Oh yes! It was a seven day a week if I wanted to work on that seventh day. But you had to get the worms off, you know, get them off by hand.

CONATSER: So when you were tenant farming, the land owners didn't supply anything to-

PAGE: No, they didn't supply anything. We furnished our own team and tools. He just told us where we could grow our crop, you know.

CONATSER: What was your relationship like? Did ya'll work together?

PAGE: No. The landlord didn't work with us. He'd come by to supervise or make some suggestions and if it didn't suit me, I'd just ignore it.

CONATER: When ya'll moved to a new farm, did you and the landowner set up an agreement, right then and there that you'd get so much of the-

PAGE: Yeah.

CONATSER: HOW did that usually work?

PAGE: Well, it was, I don't remeber how it was set up. Of course the corn was set up on the bottom. We'd get three loads and he'd get one one load. We called it the Lost City crib, and put it inthere. The tenants and the landlords had cribs. We had some good crops over there.. Had to fight johnson grass too about all the time.

CONATSER: So did ya'll use anything or was it all strictly manual?

PAGE: Manual. Offcourse, in cultivating this corn, you'd use a cultivator. I had an old cultivator. We'd then you had the corn coming up and youd have to cut down the morning glories and the weeds. We'd get that little dic cultivator and put it to , we'd get the Harrison boys over there to hoe and cut that grass. Morning glories and cockleburrs out of it. You get your hands dirty for fifty cents a day.

(Explanation of question sheets)

CONATSER: Did know you had weeds, did ya'll hav a problem bugs and worms. What did you do about that?

PAGE: Yes. We had to fight insects all the way to the roots. We didn't have too much trouble withthe corn. Insects wouldn't bother the corn. With tobacco, now that's

CONATSER-PAGE--7

PAGE(CONT): Where you had to go into the manual labour.

CONATSER: That sounds like some hard work.

PAGE: It is some hard work.
Its honoest, and its what the Lord put us here for.

CONATSER: Did you ever hear about people planting by the phases of the moon or did you hear any old wives tales about signs.?

PAGE: Oh you can hear a lot of stuff about old witches tales,

CONATSER: What were some of the things you heard, can yo remeber?

Page: Well, there's a superstition , if you had several children, you'd make them wear mole's teeth around their necks, and the reason for that is to help them cut teeth easier. But that was kind of amusing.

CONATSER: Did you have any signs that you could remember people using for rain?

PAGE: For rain? Oh, yeah. My wife's here, she's good at that shell say "Oh my arthritis is killing me, it's going to be bad weather." All the old folks'd say "Yeah, its fixing to rain."

CONATSER: Other than old witches tales, did ya'll have some kind of remedies that you'd use when you got sick?

PAGE: oh ,yeah. Well, of course, we didn't go to the doctor everytime we got sick. WE had home remedies. I used to have an earache a lot when I was a kid, and the remedy for that, we'd call old gran Fitzhugh. Mammy would take an onion and roast it and put the juice in that kid's ear. It worked, I didn't know if I was going to get better anyhow or not.. It worked, and that was roasted onion juice. And if you had pnumonia , you had to believe it was a mustard plaster. A poultice to put on your chest. And of course in later years, Vicks Salve came along. They said if you'll live nine days, that pnuemonia would break.

Conatser: You'd put the plaster...

PAGE: Yeah, you'd put the whole plaster on there. Of course nowadays you just get shots, they come at you with a needle.

CONATSER: You said you ~~were~~ didnt go to the doctor much. Were you the oldest child or were there?

PAGE: No, there was a sister older than me. I was the second child, there were three boys and three girls.

CONATSER: Were all of ya'll born at home?

PAGE: Yeah, Old Granny Fitzhugh was there, and she attended the birhts.

CONATSER: Can you remeber any ways they would have gotten the house ready for the baby?

PAGE: No, not exactly, I knew whenever us kids was gone and they brought old Missus Fitzhugh, there was going to be a baby there when we came back.

CONATSER: Did you have any games that you played to tell wehter a baby was going to be smart, or a boy or a girl.

PAGE: Never did.

~~Thisxxx~~

CONATSER: This is getting back to the tenant farmer relationship with the landowner. When you went to a farm, did you know what the family was going to be like? Did the owners have a reputation for have good or bad places to work?

PAGE: We had a pretty good idea what they would be like. My father knew, he was a good fqrmer himself. And he SAYS, TOLD ME BEFORE WE MARRIED. We had a pile of clothes, I'd go to the house. We didn't have the money to get out and go th th show or anything, but I was twenty-six years old when I married her. Of course, I knew we was going to get married and my wife she says, "You want to talk to my Dad and Mother?" Ix said, "Yeah, I'll talk to her " We told we was going to get married, and we wanted their blessing. And told them that I was a farmer, he says "Now the Lost City place is going to be for rent next year. Says the p people that are on it now are leaving. Dad-in-law says I cultivated that ground over ther. It's good. So I got in touch with the landlord , told him we'd make a trade. We got the house fixed up a bit, it's a two story old house, and in the cold weather, we'd put a newspaper down on the floor, inside the door if it was windy, the mewpaper would crawl right across the floor..

CONATSER: Did you ever hear of any cases of abuse by a landowner?

PAGE: Abuse? Well, sometimes you;d have something that would be that way. But most landlords and tenants wanted to do right. They wouldn't have any trouble. If there was trouble, they wouldn't stay but about one year. Then they'd have to move..

CONATSER: How did the landowner show appreciation if it was a good crop and ya'll had worked really hard?

PAGE: He'd just tell us we did a good job this time.
That's what it was. We didn't get any bonuses.

CONATSER: You were talking about courting your wife, did you
propose to her before you asked for her parent's
blessing?

PAGE: Oh, yes. I made a...

(AT THIS POINT, THE TAPE GOES BLANK)