

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

JAMES MELVIN COATES

Interviewed by Brenda Coates
December 11, 1996
at St. Mary's Nursing Center
Logged by Tania Jordon on September 27, 2005
A verbatim transcript is available
Original format is one cassette tape
58 minutes, 37 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 1

Track 01

- 0:00 Introduction by Brenda
- 0:29 Lives in Hollywood, MD behind the old Hollywood School and
First National Bank
- 1:06 Born in Pearson, MD – inside the base, now called Cedar Point
- 1:23 Father was a tenant farmer and mother was a homemaker.
- 2:06 Family moved from Pearson when he was 10 to a farm at Arcade Bridge, where
San Sousi is now – little graveyard use to be in backyard; lived there until
1935/1936 when he went to CC camp
- 3:27 Family ate what they grew, had to buy some things
- 4:13 Family attended St. Nicholas Church on the Base,
- 4:22 Family didn't really take any trips, maybe to the city to visit and back.
- 5:06 Family wasn't involved in community activities – just farming

Track 02

- 5:17 From what he can remember times are better now, no more outhouses, etc:
- 6:40 In school use to have left over books from the white people, didn't have a chance
to attend much school because he had to go to work

6:54 Health concerns: Mother made some medicines for coughs and colds; coal oil (kerosene) & sugar and muttontyler to rub on chest)

9:24 Dr. Bean and Dr. Brown (lived near Winter's Sheet Metal) use to make house calls. Dr. Brown tried to start hospital near his home.

Track 03

10:17 Blacks got their news: Some of older siblings couldn't read or write, plus average person didn't have money for newspapers; depended on word of mouth to get news

11:46 When family got a radio didn't listen to any particular show.

12:38 Games played as child; dodge ball, run relays

13:17 Chores: feed animals, milked cows, cut wood; didn't have machines to take care of those things as they do now.

Track 04

15:08 Got along well with siblings; they moved away when got older and had families because father couldn't pay them to work the farm

16:20 Discipline/ went to jail once as a man

17:00 Taxes/ Losing property: Could have bought the place at Arcade Bridge for \$200/\$400 – Harry Thompson, Steven Watts had places- all land up that line was \$.50 per acre. At CC camp: made \$1 a day/\$30 per month; kept \$5 and sent \$25 home; didn't have money to buy property

Track 05

20:22 Schooling: St. Nicholas, Jaboesville and St. Francis (walked 11 miles) schools. At St. Nicholas the hall/school was not far from the church, society people used to have fairs, etc at the hall

22:29 Teachers: Mrs. Allen at St. Francis, Theresa Somerville (St. Francis) was last teacher, let him drive her '33 Ford to the California store to get cake and candy for the other kids. Ms. Jones at St. Nicholas, Ms. Nolan and Vernon Bell's wife (Vernon was Martin Bell's son)

Track 06

24:59 Left school in 8th grade to go to work full time, had been helping on farm before then.

25:40 Dreams as a young child- certainly didn't dream of staying on the farm

26:50 Mother didn't approve of him going to many places because of being a Catholic. Went to Camp Meeting because there were lots of people and opportunities to meet girls. Roy Cutchember was a good friend

28:56 Dating: went to house parties and church festivals but had to be back home at a certain time (when the sun goes down)

31:00 Moved to DC and stayed with siblings, moved from job to job and went to beer gardens

Track 07

31:23 Salaries: \$.32/hr (part-time) at drug store, liquor store, cooking, making deliveries – made tips (great hustler). At one time made \$15 for a week (good money in the late 1930s)

33:26 Father died in 1936 before he went to CC camp; made \$1 per day; went there twice, it was rough

34:07 Went to school with his wife – decided to marry her because he didn't know any better. Married 6/12/38, best man was Warren Fredericks (Pernell/Bernard Fredericks) who was related to him

Track 08

35:56 Family life: Did the best and as bad as he could. Had to do a lot of different things to make ends meet. Near the end had a government job. Hollywood was mostly black

37:27 Social Security: Paid in \$.02 per week (?) started in 1937, wife never worked, but got half of his social security

38:41 Attends St. John's Catholic Church, pays church fee, use to carry kids to church's festivals - very few blacks attend that church now

39:57 Community activities: donates to rescue squad, and fire department

Track 09

40:50 Living conditions are 100% better now

41:25 Now you cannot even speak to people, they will shoot you down. People were friendlier in the old days

42:50 Race relations: As child, played with white boys who came to his house to eat – was not invited to go to their house.

44:20 City vs. country living: Liked the city better except to raise family.

Track 10

45:43 Biggest changes in county – race relations are getting better

47:03 Base displacements: Father didn't own any land, gave up farm in Pearson before Navy came.

48:05 Navy Base was good move for the County. Some people were hostile about Base and thought they didn't have to come out of there.

48:30 Fordtown and Pineyhill were the sections of Pierson where the blacks lived. They didn't have farms, maybe ½ to 1 acre, just enough for a house and garden. Nace Austin had a piece (farm).

Track 11

49:45 Most blacks worked on the white farms owned by George Quirt, old man Dawson, Jarboes, etc. These people took the biggest hits

50:12 George Quirt had a canning factory in Pearson

51:31 Didn't do everything in life he wanted to do

52:04 Difference between walking around rich and walking around poor

Track 12

55:23 Biographical Information