

### Maude Lee Spells

Interview conducted by Dr. Alvin Jackson of Maude Lee Spells. The date and location of the interview are unknown. This interview focuses on Spells's time at the Bennett Grove School.

ALVIN JACKSON: [00:00] Hey, Cousin Maude, how are you doing?

MAUDE SPELLS: I'm doing pretty good.

JACKSON: Did I wake you up?

SPELLS: No, uh-uh. (laughs)

JACKSON: Yeah, this is Jackson. I called you the other day, remember?

SPELLS: Uh-huh.

JACKSON: And I was trying -- wanted to talk to you about the Bennett Grove School, when...  
And so, you told me to call back as soon as I got in from work, one day.

SPELLS: Uh-huh.

JACKSON: So, I'm just getting off of work.

SPELLS: OK.

JACKSON: So, are you up to an interview today?

SPELLS: Well, I'm getting (inaudible). You don't -- I don't (inaudible) none of my teachers (inaudible).

JACKSON: Well --

SPELLS: (inaudible).

JACKSON: Well, let me -- I've got a list of questions I'm asking all the students, because we're trying to save them. And so, you just answer what you know, and if you don't know it, I mean, you can't answer it. That's OK.

SPELLS: Yeah, that's right. You're right.

JACKSON: OK, now, so let's -- let me -- I've got my questions here, so let's -- let me start off.  
And the first question is, what is your full name?

SPELLS: My full name is Annie Maude Spells.

JACKSON: Annie Maude Spells.

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: Now, what was your spouse's name?

SPELLS: Burman.

JACKSON: Burman Spells.

SPELLS: Uh-huh, that's right.

JACKSON: OK, now, how many children do you have?

SPELLS: Four boys, and I have nine little ones.

JACKSON: How many -- how many total children did you have?

SPELLS: I had -- I mothered 13, but I raised 10.

JACKSON: Mothered 13, and you raised 10?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: OK, starting from the oldest child, what's your oldest child's name?

SPELLS: Jerry.

JACKSON: Jerry?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: Jerry what -- Lee or Spells?

SPELLS: Spells.

JACKSON: Jerry Spells.  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: Who's the next oldest?  
SPELLS: Geraldine.  
JACKSON: Geraldine Spells?  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: Who's the next oldest?  
SPELLS: Peggy. She's our -- she's the daughter. So, she's passed.  
JACKSON: Peggy Spells?  
SPELLS: Peggy, she's passed.  
JACKSON: OK. All right, but she's... Now, who was after Peggy?  
SPELLS: That was (inaudible).  
JACKSON: OK.  
SPELLS: Dennis, Dennis, Dennis.  
JACKSON: Dennis Spells?  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: Who is after Dennis?  
SPELLS: Burman.  
JACKSON: Burman Spells. Who's next?  
SPELLS: Yeah, let me see. Kathy.  
JACKSON: Who?  
SPELLS: Kathy, Kathy, Kathy.  
JACKSON: Kathy Spells. OK.  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: Who's next?  
SPELLS: The next one is Janis.  
JACKSON: Janis?  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm. She's the (inaudible).  
JACKSON: OK. Who's next?  
SPELLS: Emilene.  
JACKSON: Eloise?  
SPELLS: Emilene.  
JACKSON: Emilene?  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: Who's next?  
SPELLS: Mabel.  
JACKSON: Mabel.  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: Who's next?  
SPELLS: Danny.  
JACKSON: Who?  
SPELLS: Danny, Danny. D-A-N-N-Y.  
JACKSON: Danny.  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: And then, who's next?  
SPELLS: That's the last one.

JACKSON: OK. Oh, I thought you said 13. OK.  
SPELLS: I ain't got (inaudible). I'm just saying I'm the mother of 13.  
JACKSON: I see -- what -- the ones that died, did they have names?  
SPELLS: Huh?  
JACKSON: The ones that died, did -- would any of them have names?  
SPELLS: Yeah, two.  
JACKSON: What was their names?  
SPELLS: The oldest one was Curtis.  
JACKSON: Curtis. And what was the other one's name?  
SPELLS: Peggy is the one that passed not too long ago.  
JACKSON: OK. All righty. So, I -- your mother's name?  
SPELLS: Was Inez Mincey Lee.  
JACKSON: OK. And what was her mother's name?  
SPELLS: Ardella.  
JACKSON: OK, Ardella -- what was her maiden name?  
SPELLS: (inaudible). Huh?  
JACKSON: What was her maiden name? Ardella?  
SPELLS: Ardella was (inaudible).  
JACKSON: OK.  
SPELLS: I think it was that. It might not be Woodberry. I think Woodberry, it might not be Woodberry. I think Woodberry, I think.  
JACKSON: And what was her father's name?  
SPELLS: Her father?  
JACKSON: Yes.  
SPELLS: (inaudible).  
JACKSON: OK.  
SPELLS: Russell, Russell.  
JACKSON: OK, all right.  
SPELLS: Russell Braxton.  
JACKSON: OK. Now, your father's name was...?  
SPELLS: Dan.  
JACKSON: And his mother's name?  
SPELLS: Melinda.  
JACKSON: Melinda what?  
SPELLS: (inaudible)?  
JACKSON: What was her maiden name?  
SPELLS: Her maiden name, I think, was Hobbes.  
JACKSON: And what was your daddy's father's name?  
SPELLS: Daddy's mother's name was Melinda.  
JACKSON: His -- father's name?  
SPELLS: Jack.  
JACKSON: [05:00] Jack Lee?  
SPELLS: Jack Lee.  
JACKSON: OK. Now, when is your birth date?  
SPELLS: That was (inaudible).  
JACKSON: What year?

SPELLS: Thirty-one.  
JACKSON: Nineteen thirty-one?  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: And what is your present age?  
SPELLS: Eighty-one.  
JACKSON: Well, you've been really blessed.  
SPELLS: (laughs) So I am.  
JACKSON: You are blessed.  
SPELLS: Yeah, I thank him every day.  
JACKSON: Yes, indeed. And what is your current address in New York?  
SPELLS: Two eighty-one Brook Street, Westbury.  
JACKSON: Westbury, New York?  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: Do you know the zip code?  
SPELLS: One-one-five-nine-zero. Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: OK. And what about your telephone number? I've got that number. OK. At what age --  
SPELLS: (inaudible).  
JACKSON: OK, at what age did you start to school?  
SPELLS: I started school when I was -- I think I was six when I started school.  
JACKSON: OK, do you remember what year that was?  
SPELLS: That would be -- (inaudible). (laughs)  
JACKSON: OK. And so, it must have been around about 1936, if you was born in -- or '37, one?  
SPELLS: Yeah, yeah, somewhere around there.  
JACKSON: OK. Now, what was the name of your first school that you ever went to?  
SPELLS: Bennett Grove.  
JACKSON: Bennett Grove. OK. What was the second school you went to?  
SPELLS: Scarborough Grove.  
JACKSON: And what was the third school you went to?  
SPELLS: Willow Hill.  
JACKSON: And did you go to a fourth school?  
SPELLS: I didn't go to a fourth.  
JACKSON: So, Willow Hill was the last school you went to?  
SPELLS: Uh-huh.  
JACKSON: OK. And so, when you were at Willow Hill, that was the high s-- a junior high school, at that time?  
SPELLS: Yeah.  
JACKSON: OK, so, you went to Willow Hill Junior High?  
SPELLS: Uh-huh.  
JACKSON: Now, what is the highest grade that you ever went to?  
SPELLS: Eighth.  
JACKSON: You went to the eighth grade?  
SPELLS: Mm-hmm.  
JACKSON: OK. Now, when you were at Bennett Grove, and you first started to school, do you remember some of the subjects that you had?

SPELLS: We had arithmetic, and (inaudible). Started off with (inaudible), then went to the (inaudible) arithmetic, and English all that.

JACKSON: Uh-huh, OK. Now, who was your teacher at Bennett Grove?

SPELLS: (inaudible). I know it was some (inaudible), because the teacher stayed with (inaudible) -- with Bennett. But I can't -- I have -- I don't remember none of them.

JACKSON: OK, Miss Levanna taught you?

SPELLS: Yes, she was teaching at (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK.

SPELLS: She wasn't -- she didn't teach there all the time, but she just taught sometimes.

JACKSON: Did Miss --

SPELLS: She's the only one I can remember.

JACKSON: Did you know a teacher named Miss Fairbanks Love.

SPELLS: Hm...

JACKSON: She stayed with Miss Dolly Bennett and Miss Anne Bennett.

SPELLS: Yeah, I remember (inaudible). But (inaudible) names (inaudible), but I remember.

JACKSON: She was kind of a light-skinned lady.

SPELLS: Yeah, yeah, I remember her.

JACKSON: Was she --

SPELLS: And also -- (inaudible) the other one. I can remember her. She taught there, too.

JACKSON: Miss Beatrice Jones? Or was it Thelma Jones?

SPELLS: There was Miss -- I (inaudible) what it is, but these were the other ones, (inaudible).

JACKSON: Miss Leela Jones?

SPELLS: Yeah, Miss Leela.

JACKSON: So, Miss Leela Jones taught you also?

SPELLS: Yeah, but (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK. And did -- do you remember Miss Thelma Jones being there?

SPELLS: Do I remember a teacher (inaudible)?

JACKSON: Thelma Jones? She taught there also. Thelma Jones, Beatrice Jones, and Leela Jones.

SPELLS: Oh, I can't remember nobody but Miss Leela.

JACKSON: Leela -- you remember Miss Leela?

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: OK. All right. So, can you describe what the Bennett Grove School looked like when you were there? What did it look like?

SPELLS: It was just a -- one big building, and a little -- something -- a little thing, you walked in. So, it was one big building.

JACKSON: Mm-hmm. Was it one room?

SPELLS: Huh?

JACKSON: Was it one room, or was it divided in --

SPELLS: [10:00] Mm-hmm, one room, one room.

JACKSON: OK. So, did you all have desks or tables?

SPELLS: No, we didn't have none of that.

JACKSON: Well, what did you sit on?

SPELLS: We had benches.

JACKSON: You sat on benches?

SPELLS: We had benches, yeah. We had benches.

JACKSON: OK, and were the -- were the benches long benches or short benches?

SPELLS: They was benches on each side, so they had to be so long.

JACKSON: There was benches on each side of the room?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: And then, there was a -- there was an aisle down the middle?

SPELLS: Yes, an aisle down the middle. And then it (inaudible). It was a really long building.

JACKSON: Uh-huh. And --

SPELLS: It wasn't (inaudible) wide, but it was a long one. (inaudible) sitting back there, we used to walk in. And then, we had a (inaudible) sitting up on the other end.

JACKSON: OK. Now, when you said "chairs," you mean benches?

SPELLS: Yeah, benches.

JACKSON: And now, did they have tables in front of the benches?

SPELLS: Yeah, we had tables. We (inaudible) -- she had a table -- the teacher had a table. And there were tables (inaudible), cause they cooked there, too.

JACKSON: They cooked there?

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: What -- where did they cook at?

SPELLS: Right there in the building. Right there.

JACKSON: They had a stove? They had a stove they'd heat it with?

SPELLS: Yes, they had a wood stove.

JACKSON: And what -- was the wood stove in the middle of the building?

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: Well, who would do the cooking?

SPELLS: Well, I guess -- I guess it was the (inaudible). I don't know exactly, but I think the teacher was the one cooking. And she might have been somebody come in and cook, but I know we had what they cooked.

JACKSON: That wasn't every day? That was just sometimes?

SPELLS: No, it was every day of the week.

JACKSON: What did they serve?

SPELLS: They served (inaudible), and we had that.

JACKSON: OK.

SPELLS: Like, beans and (inaudible). Just a little (inaudible) -- they called it "commodities." Where it was just the commodities for (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK. And then, they would put it over the stove in the middle of the building, and they would put wood in the stove?

SPELLS: Yeah, wood, wood.

JACKSON: There was a wood stove?

SPELLS: Uh-huh.

JACKSON: OK. Now, did you all have -- what -- how many doors was in the building?

SPELLS: Say what?

JACKSON: How many doors?

SPELLS: It had two doors, the front door and a side door.

JACKSON: There was a front door and a side door.

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: Now, where was the teacher's desk located?

SPELLS: It was (inaudible) -- they had a -- the side of the building (inaudible). If I could remember that, it would turn right through the building.

JACKSON: So, when you walked in the front door, it was to the right?

SPELLS: No, it was on the (inaudible). When you go in, four or five benches. Go back, and you would sit down there and (inaudible).

JACKSON: Mm-hmm.

SPELLS: Sit where she could see us all.

JACKSON: OK. So, she was sitting kind of toward the back of the building then.

SPELLS: No, it was (inaudible) middle of it.

JACKSON: OK.

SPELLS: But the benches was there, and then (inaudible). She would be sitting to the right-hand side of the building.

JACKSON: OK.

SPELLS: Where she was facing all of us, (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK, and they had some benches on each side.

SPELLS: Going down.

JACKSON: Going down.

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: And then, they had some tables next to the wall?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: Mm-hmm.

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: Now, did you all have -- what kind of windows did it have? Did it have wooden windows?

SPELLS: Wooden windows.

JACKSON: OK. Now, did you all have electric lights in there?

SPELLS: No, we didn't have electric lights.

JACKSON: So, how did you all see, when the wintertime comes, to read?

SPELLS: Well, we would (inaudible). (laughs)

JACKSON: So, the --

SPELLS: Sometimes they -- usually, sometimes, they (inaudible) the windows. I know one time, there was a winter where it seemed like we got -- I'm not too sure, but it seems like we got some glass, but maybe somebody else can tell you (inaudible).

JACKSON: Mm-hmm.

SPELLS: But (inaudible) never seem like the windows -- glass windows was there. It (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK, so, but when -- but -- so, how did -- they didn't have any lamps or anything there? How did you see inside of that building?

SPELLS: Well, we didn't have any lamps, so we just -- we had to just be there in the daytime.

JACKSON: Mm-hmm. OK, so, what month did you all start to school, and what month did school end?

SPELLS: Well, we'd start school in [15:00] (inaudible), because we had to be (inaudible) September or maybe October. I think it was September when we started going, but I'm not so sure. But I know we (inaudible).

JACKSON: Mm-hmm. So, what -- when did school end?

SPELLS: (inaudible) about May, because we'd have the -- have the May Day. We had the May Day, so it would be May when -- before we (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK, now, how far -- how many grades was at the school?

SPELLS: (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK.

SPELLS: But I think we -- I don't know. I'm just -- well, I'm going to say I don't know, because, I'm -- like you said, it won't be (inaudible).

JACKSON: Mm-hmm. So, about how many students was at the school when you were there, at Bennett Grove?

SPELLS: It held a good (inaudible), but it was the Bennetts, (inaudible). There was the Lesters, (inaudible) during that time. And it was the Dukes, and it was, I believe, the Bennetts. And I think (inaudible) one or two from the Bennett (inaudible). I believe it was Lois-- I think she went -- was going out there, too.

JACKSON: OK.

SPELLS: And it seems there was some more.

JACKSON: Mm-hmm.

SPELLS: And then one -- just say one, we called (inaudible). But they went, which was (inaudible). But now, because I know (inaudible) a Bennett.

JACKSON: Mm-hmm.

SPELLS: And there's some (inaudible), like Will and Irene. All of them, they was going there.

JACKSON: Mm-hmm.

SPELLS: So -- but then, we had a good many children going over at Bennett Grove.

JACKSON: Did any of the Byrds go out there -- any of the Byrds?

SPELLS: Let me see, I'm trying to think.

JACKSON: Almareen Byrd? Carrie Byrd Mosely -- any of them went up there?

SPELLS: (inaudible) I'm trying to think, did they go there? They might have (inaudible) went to Fish School? And they might have went to -- Scarborough Grove. They might have went to Bennett Grove.

JACKSON: Mm-hmm.

SPELLS: (inaudible). I can't remember, at this time.

JACKSON: OK, now, the school we're talking about now is Bennett Grove, not Scarborough Grove, Bennett Grove.

SPELLS: Yeah, the (inaudible), Bennett Grove. I was just saying that -- (inaudible). (inaudible) went to Scarborough Grove, I know, but I'm just... I can't remember (inaudible) Bennett Grove. She might have, but (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK. And so, we already talked about the teachers. And so, there was only one teacher, and one teacher taught all of the grades?

SPELLS: Sometimes there was two teachers.

JACKSON: There was two --

SPELLS: Sometimes there was two -- sometimes it'd be two. But now, which one it were, I don't know.

JACKSON: So --

SPELLS: Sometimes we had -- because (inaudible) teacher.

JACKSON: I see. So, if there was a lot of students, then a substitute teacher would come in to help?

SPELLS: Yes.



JACKSON: Was that substitute teacher Miss Levanna Lester.

SPELLS: She would come in sometimes to teach, but she sometimes -- she would just have (inaudible).

JACKSON: Mm-hmm. OK. So, you were sitting on benches --

SPELLS: Yeah, uh-huh, like some of the old benches, like they have in church. And then, (inaudible). We did -- they did use, when we all had some little old desks, (inaudible) from another school or something, (inaudible).

JACKSON: So, one time, you all got some old heavy desks?

SPELLS: Yeah, but I don't know (inaudible), school closed down. I know, but I don't know (inaudible). But we did have (inaudible).

JACKSON: So, when they got the desks, did they -- they took all the benches out?

SPELLS: No, no, we used some of the desks to (inaudible). They put the desks in there.

JACKSON: OK, so, you all had desks and benches?

SPELLS: Yes, first (inaudible).

JACKSON: Mm-hmm. Did the benches have backs on the them, or was it...?

SPELLS: Yeah, they had backs.

JACKSON: They had backs to the benches, just like they would in the church?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: I see. So, they had backs to them?

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: About how many people could sit on a bench right next to each other? How many -- about how long was the benches?

SPELLS: The bench was long. It might have been three, four, five, maybe.

JACKSON: Three or four or five to one bench?

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: Now, would that bench be pulled up to a table, or did you have to write in your lap?

SPELLS: Well, we had to put the lap -- had our paper and all right there on the table and laps.

JACKSON: OK, was there a table [20:00] right in front of you all, to put your paper on? Or did you have to keep it in your lap?

SPELLS: Well, we (inaudible) have our bag, and (inaudible). The best I can remember, we had (inaudible) somewhere, for them to sit on.

JACKSON: OK, so, everybody didn't have a table then?

SPELLS: No, everybody didn't have one.

JACKSON: So, some kids were at a table, and some was just writing on -- in their lap?

SPELLS: Yes, uh-huh.

JACKSON: OK, and you had a -- you had one heater in the building, for heating the building. And that was in the center of the building?

SPELLS: Yes, right. It was (inaudible).

JACKSON: And that was the same heater that they used to cook on sometimes?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm. Yeah, but we didn't -- they would just boil stuff. But then, give us fried stuff. But they never did (inaudible) no bread.

JACKSON: Oh, this would be, like, they fried something or they boiled something?

SPELLS: (inaudible) of bread or something like that. Send you a loaf of bread, (inaudible).

JACKSON: Was there a chalkboard? A blackboard in the building?

SPELLS: Yes, there was.

JACKSON: What -- where was it located?

SPELLS: It was located to the left -- to the right. There was a lot of (inaudible) on the left, too.

JACKSON: OK, so, there was two blackboards?

SPELLS: Best I can remember, it was two.

JACKSON: So, when you walked into the building, there was one on the right and there was one on the left?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: OK. Now, how -- where was the first grade -- did they have primary grades? Did they have a primary there?

SPELLS: Well, they would have -- the teacher, like I said, (inaudible). It wasn't that they were taking turns with all the group, (inaudible) that grade would sit over there and study. And we'd be on one side, in what grade we was in. And then, like that. And then, the two primaries -- best I can remember, they'd let the small ones -- they would be at the other end of the building, that (inaudible).

JACKSON: So, would the small ones be closer to the front door?

SPELLS: Huh?

JACKSON: The small children was closer to the front door?

SPELLS: (inaudible) to the back (inaudible).

JACKSON: They were more to the back?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: And the bigger kids were more to the front?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: OK. And, so, you had a chalkboard. And then, when you all were going to school, everybody walked to school?

SPELLS: Yes, sir.

JACKSON: How many miles did you have to walk?

SPELLS: I (inaudible) we might have walked a little over a mile, because we stayed (inaudible). Yeah, we walked about a mile, maybe a little -- it might have been a little further, because some of them would further than that.

JACKSON: So, were you all staying where Cousin Danny and Cousin Inez stayed, when you were going there?

SPELLS: (inaudible). We called it the [Sand Pit?], (inaudible).

JACKSON: So, you all was --

SPELLS: (inaudible).

JACKSON: There were a lot of houses there then?

SPELLS: Um, yeah, it was -- there was a lot of -- a lot of houses there.

JACKSON: Well, who were some of the people --

SPELLS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

JACKSON: Who were some of the people that lived in them houses?

SPELLS: (inaudible), well, we stayed in one, and they had a woman who did some (inaudible). (laughs) There was this (inaudible) -- they stayed in one. Douglas family, they stayed in one. (inaudible) was there, stayed in one, with that well back there. And Wes Williams - I think it was Williams. I think he might have been -- Wes Williams and (inaudible).

JACKSON: And so, they all were staying kind of like in a little quarters together?

SPELLS: Yeah, in a little quarters.

JACKSON: Was that the turpentine quarters?

SPELLS: Yeah, that was the turpentine quarters.

JACKSON: And so, your dad lived in the turpentine quarters for a while?

SPELLS: Yes, uh-huh.

JACKSON: Now, where was the turpentine quarters located?

SPELLS: Well, there's a (inaudible) tell you about, when we stayed at that end, (inaudible).

JACKSON: Well, was this --

SPELLS: -- (inaudible). Huh?

JACKSON: Was that near where that windmill is, off of the Rocky Point Road?

SPELLS: Yeah, that is (inaudible) -- right in there. That's where he started, right there. That was the (inaudible) -- that was the Boston route. And it all (inaudible) back down there, back (inaudible) on the right-hand side. And it was three or four houses on there -- right there, on the road, was (inaudible) the white daughter stayed. The one -- the boss man. His daughter was staying in one, and then there was two more, three more (inaudible) right side of the road.

JACKSON: Well, who was the boss man? What was his name?

SPELLS: Bubba Parrish.

JACKSON: [25:00] And who -- and what is Bubba's real name?

SPELLS: I guess it was Forrest Parrish. I'm not so sure.

JACKSON: And what was Bubba Parrish's daughter's name?

SPELLS: One was named Mary and one was named Ruth.

JACKSON: OK. Were they related to Ruby Parrish?

SPELLS: Yeah, they was -- they was first cousins.

JACKSON: So, Ruby Parrish and Bubba Parrish were first cousins?

SPELLS: No, the children was first cousins.

JACKSON: Oh, the children were first cousins to Ruby Parrish?

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: So, Ruby Parrish's daddy and Bubba Parrish's were brothers?

SPELLS: Yeah, must have been.

JACKSON: OK.

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: And so, they lived down in the quarters, and all of them that lived in the quarters went to Bennett Grove School?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: OK. And so, what happened when it rained? How did you all get to school?

SPELLS: (inaudible) when it rained, we (inaudible) put our coats on and all. And go in sometimes, when it raining too much, and it be too cold we didn't go.

JACKSON: So, you didn't go to school if it was too cold?

SPELLS: Yeah, we didn't go if it was too cold, ice on the ground and all. And if it was raining, most of the time we would put on our raincoats and heavy shoes and go to school.

JACKSON: Did you all have rain -- did you all have umbrellas?

SPELLS: I'm trying to think. No, I don't think I ever really had (inaudible). And maybe put a plastic bag on our heads to keep them from getting wet. (laughs)

JACKSON: OK. Did it ever snow? Did you ever remember it snowing?

SPELLS: I can't remember it snowing while we were going to school. I don't remember that one. But just having rain and ice (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK. How did your teacher get to school?

SPELLS: Well, she would walk, that's what I'm telling you. Because Miss Melissa, (inaudible). She stayed (inaudible), because she stayed with us (inaudible), too. She would stay round with the people.

JACKSON: I see.

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: And about what time did school start in the morning?

SPELLS: Around eight o'clock.

JACKSON: And about what time did it end?

SPELLS: About 3:00.

JACKSON: OK. Did you all have a devotion at school?

SPELLS: Yes, we did.

JACKSON: How -- who would lead the devotion?

SPELLS: The students, (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK. So, what -- did you ever participate in the devotion?

SPELLS: Yes, all -- we did. We all had to say a Bible verse in the morning.

JACKSON: Everybody had to say a Bible verse?

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: And what did the teacher do?

SPELLS: She was there, just -- I guess (inaudible) do it right, and participating with it, too.

JACKSON: OK. So, what type of writing did you all have? Did you all papers, slates, or what did you all write on?

SPELLS: We had pads (inaudible) and paper, and little books.

JACKSON: Now, did they -- did they give it to you, or did your parents have to buy it?

SPELLS: The parents (inaudible) -- the parents had to buy it.

JACKSON: Did you all have a report card?

SPELLS: Yeah, we had a report card.

JACKSON: And so, how -- so, do you know where your report card is?

SPELLS: Oh, no, I sure don't. I (inaudible) for a while, but I don't know where it is now.

JACKSON: OK. Now, how did you all get promoted to another grade? If you was like -- say, if you started in the first grade, how did you get promoted to the second grade?

SPELLS: (inaudible) teacher, and (inaudible). I don't know. I don't know, did the teacher do it or what.

JACKSON: OK. So, when you got promoted to another grade, you would be sitting in a different place in the -- in the classroom, then?

SPELLS: With the ones who was in that grade.

JACKSON: Did you ever remember anybody getting left back?

SPELLS: I can't remember, but I know some of them would. I reckon that -- I know most of them (inaudible), but I can't remember.

JACKSON: OK. OK, did you all have a lunch break at school?

SPELLS: Uh-huh.

JACKSON: Where did you all eat lunch? Inside the building or outside?

SPELLS: There was one time (inaudible). In the summertime, we might eat (inaudible) porch on it. We might sit on the little porch and eat (inaudible). And then, when we get out, we would go out there and play around, go to the bathroom, go to the toilet, because (inaudible) -- the toilets was across the road, down from the school.

JACKSON: So, the toilets was across the road?

SPELLS: Yeah, the toilet was across the road.

JACKSON: Across the dirt road?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm, it definitely (inaudible) down from the school, down on the... I'd say about 50 feet from the road.

JACKSON: So, you had to go across a dirt road to go to the toilet?

SPELLS: [30:00] Yes, yes, definitely. Because that was where the toilet at.

JACKSON: Now, did the boys and girls have the same toilet, or different toilets?

SPELLS: They had a different one.

JACKSON: They had a different one?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: And both of them was on the same side of the road?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: OK. Now, did the teacher use the same toilet?

SPELLS: Yeah, she would. Yeah, usually she'd go to the same.

JACKSON: OK, now, so, when you all ate lunch, did you all sit on logs, or always on the porch, or on the ground?

SPELLS: Or in the building. No, we never (inaudible). I just remember, but I know we had a good time. (laughs) After we'd eat, though, we'd get out there and play and have games and that.

JACKSON: What kind of --

SPELLS: (inaudible) water.

JACKSON: What kind of games did you all play?

SPELLS: Hide and seek. They let us go out and (inaudible). We'd do different things (inaudible).

JACKSON: Did the boys and girls play together or separate?

SPELLS: We played together if they wanted to play with us, but most times the teacher was right there. She was looking at us.

JACKSON: OK, and so, did you all have softball, dodge ball, or baseball?

SPELLS: Yeah, we played ball -- I played all of that.

JACKSON: OK.

SPELLS: Yeah, (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK, now do you ever remember any of the teachers having a car?

SPELLS: No, I don't. I sure don't. They might have had one, but I can't remember.

JACKSON: You don't remember a teacher with a car?

SPELLS: No.

JACKSON: So, how did you all get water?

SPELLS: We had a well right there.

JACKSON: Did you have -- you had a bucket where you had to pull it up on a pulley?

SPELLS: Yeah, (inaudible).

JACKSON: You'd draw it up on a pulley?

SPELLS: (inaudible) you'd draw water. It would (inaudible). The tall ones, they would let the little ones get it.

JACKSON: Did you all use the water to wash your hands, too?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: And when the -- when -- as they go to the toilet, they'd come back and wash their hands?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: OK. And how much time did they give you all for lunch and recess? An hour?

SPELLS: Yeah, about an hour.

JACKSON: OK. How many recesses did you all have during a daytime?

SPELLS: We had (inaudible). I think we had two, I'm not sure. But I know we had one at 12:00, at lunchtime.

JACKSON: OK. Now, when the students brought their lunches, would they keep them in one place, or did they -- each student responsible for keeping up with his own lunch?

SPELLS: Keeping up with his own lunch.

JACKSON: Did they put names on their lunches?

SPELLS: Well, everybody knew they lunch, mostly. (laughs)

JACKSON: Did you re-- ever hear about anybody stealing somebody's lunch?

SPELLS: No, no, I can't remember. No, I can't remember anybody stealing no lunches. That might have happened, but I can't remember.

JACKSON: OK. Were there more boys or girls at the school?

SPELLS: (inaudible). They were mixed, like-- think, but (inaudible) just about as many boys as there were girls.

JACKSON: Did a lot of the students stay out because they were sharecroppers?

SPELLS: Not too many stayed out, because of when they would pick cotton, we would just stay out to pick cotton. We would have that (inaudible), where we'd start school. Then we could go home, get out of our school clothing, and go pick -- go to the field and pick cotton.

JACKSON: Who would you all -- who were you picking cotton for?

SPELLS: Well, (inaudible), we would pick cotton in the evening when we'd come out.

JACKSON: Did your daddy have his own place, or was he sharecropping at that time?

SPELLS: Sharecropping.

JACKSON: And he was sharecropping for Bubba Parrish?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: And was Bubba Parrish good to you all?

SPELLS: Yes, yes, but (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK. What was Bubba Parrish's wife's name?

SPELLS: Cassie?

JACKSON: Chassie?

SPELLS: Cassie.

JACKSON: Cassie?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: And she was a good woman?

SPELLS: Well, she was good in her way but (inaudible).

JACKSON: She was what?

SPELLS: (inaudible). (laughter)

JACKSON: So, she would work you for nothing, huh?

SPELLS: (inaudible). [35:00] (inaudible) want you to talk about, "I don't work (inaudible).

Miss Cassie (inaudible) paid me a dollar." (laughter) (inaudible) Miss Cassie (inaudible) dollar. (laughter)

JACKSON: Miss Cassie --

(break in audio)

SPELLS: (inaudible), they wouldn't do it. (laughter) (inaudible).

JACKSON: Well, do you know what Miss Cassie's maiden name was, before she married Bubba Parrish?

SPELLS: Let me see if I know?. She was a Marsh.

JACKSON: She was a Marsh?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: Was she re-- was she related to Clayton Marsh?

SPELLS: Clay, Clay, Clay... No, no, (inaudible). She was brother to Herbert Marsh, I know.

JACKSON: She was the -- Herbert Marsh was her brother?

SPELLS: Huh?

JACKSON: Herbert Marsh was her brother?

SPELLS: (inaudible). Herbert Marsh was her nephew. Her daddy -- his daddy was named Herbert.

JACKSON: OK. Now, how many children did Bubba Parrish have?

SPELLS: Let me see. (inaudible) had three of them -- Larry and Ruth and two -- and two (inaudible).

JACKSON: Did you all get along real good with them?

SPELLS: Yes, sure, yes we did.

JACKSON: Mm-hmm. And they went to school in Portal?

SPELLS: Yeah, they went to school in Portal.

JACKSON: Did they have a school bus to ride?

SPELLS: Yeah, they used to (inaudible) and we were walking. (inaudible).

JACKSON: They would throw paper at you all?

SPELLS: Yes, they would throw paper at us.

JACKSON: And laughing at you, huh?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: Now, isn't that something? They were riding a bus, and you all were walking?

SPELLS: Yeah, that's right. That's true. That's the way it (inaudible). We were walking and they were riding. But you know, (inaudible) either. We were walking (inaudible). And that was (inaudible) walking to Bennett Grove. And then we were (inaudible), after we started (inaudible). He would come by and (inaudible). We had to pay him so much a month.

JACKSON: OK, that was the first bus -- that was the first --

SPELLS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Yeah, that's (inaudible).

JACKSON: Do you know about what year that was?

SPELLS: Let me see now. That was in '40. I guess it was in the '40s -- late '40s, but I don't know what date -- what year. But it was in the late '40s. He was (inaudible).

JACKSON: OK, wow.

SPELLS: Because I remember a lot of times -- the summer time, we had to walk home cause mr. Herbert having problems with the bus, and we would (inaudible) be walking -- walking home.

JACKSON: So, the bus would break down?

SPELLS: Yeah, then we had to walk -- we'd walk home. (laughter) (inaudible). And some boys would get out and (inaudible) -- we'd have to get out and walk all to the school house.

And I remember one or two times he had his (inaudible), and we were all... (laughter)

JACKSON: So, you all -- you all rode in a big truck?

SPELLS: Yeah, he had a big truck where he hauled his cotton and all this. (inaudible).

(laughter)

JACKSON: So, you would be riding in the back of the truck?

SPELLS: Yeah, uh-huh. (inaudible) (laughter) And so, we had -- we had good times. (laughter)

JACKSON: So, there would be a truckload of you all riding in the back, going to school?

SPELLS: Yeah. (laughter) Yes, sir.

JACKSON: That was better than walking, though, wasn't it?

SPELLS: Yeah, it was better than walking.

JACKSON: Did it -- did it ever ra--

SPELLS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). [40:00]

JACKSON: Well, what kind of seats --

SPELLS: Huh?

JACKSON: What kind of seats was in Mr. Mann Hall's bus? Were they wooden seats?

SPELLS: (inaudible), no, they were regular (inaudible).

JACKSON: Regular school-bus seats?

SPELLS: Yeah, uh-huh, the bus -- the school bus.

JACKSON: OK, now, let me go back and ask a few more questions about Bennett Grove. So, you said it had a porch?

(break in audio)

SPELLS: Yeah, we had a little porch on it.

JACKSON: And that was at the front of the building?

SPELLS: Yes.

JACKSON: And did the porch have a roof on it?

SPELLS: Yeah, it (inaudible).

JACKSON: Did the porch go all the way across the school, in front of the building?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm, yeah, it went all the way across the front of the building.

JACKSON: All the way across the front?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm.

JACKSON: Now, did -- OK, what did you all use -- did you all use the porch for school closings?

SPELLS: You're saying what now?

JACKSON: When you all had school closing, tell me what it was like, at the end of the year.

SPELLS: Well, (inaudible). They'd get you together -- get together and have games, especially the May Day (inaudible). Had the Maypole and all of that stuff.

JACKSON: You had that at Bennett Grove?

SPELLS: Yeah, and then at the end of it, we had -- they would have food, and (inaudible) cook dinner, cook food, and cake. And we had lemonade. Oh, we had a good time, for closing. Singing and all that stuff. We had a good time at school closing.

JACKSON: So, where would -- where you all do all of this -- where would you all have -- where was the stage?

SPELLS: (inaudible), they'd make a little thing and put the food on. And they (inaudible).

JACKSON: So, they would --

SPELLS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

JACKSON: They would build a table to serve the food?

SPELLS: Put -- yeah, (inaudible) make a little thing to put the food on.

JACKSON: Then, so --



SPELLS: They'd (inaudible). We had a good time. We would have a good time at (inaudible) closing.

JACKSON: So, was that similar to like they have at Banks Creek, where they have a table on the churchyard?

SPELLS: Yeah.

JACKSON: So, they would have a little table where they would put out?

SPELLS: Mm-hmm, yeah, put food -- yeah, a little table to put the food on.

JACKSON: And then, people would come around and get food?

SPELLS: Yeah, get their food.

JACKSON: Well, was the table near where the well is? Or where would they put it?

SPELLS: They would put it on the side of the building, in the shade, like.

JACKSON: In the shade?

SPELLS: Uh-huh.

JACKSON: Was that the same side the well was on, or was it the other side?

SPELLS: Yes, yes, the same side as the well.

JACKSON: OK. Now, when children did their speeches, where would they stand to give their speeches?

SPELLS: On the porch.

JACKSON: Oh, so, the porch was the stage?

SPELLS: Yeah, there on the porch. And then, they'd bring the (inaudible) chairs and things, if they didn't bring stuff to sit in themselves. They'd just put them out in the yard.

JACKSON: So, they'd put the benches out in the yard, from the school.

SPELLS: Mm-hmm, yes.

JACKSON: And did -- some of the parents brought their own chair?

SPELLS: If they -- if they had one, they could bring that (inaudible).

END OF AUDIO FILE