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John “Jug” Jeffries

Interview with Michael and Carrie Kline and Forest Hazel 4/06/08 at his Hillsborough Residence.

This 94 year-old Occaneechi elder is the beloved of his church and community and may be about the last representative of life from another time. Sitting in a wheel chair, he was in good spirits and eager for the interview to begin. Jug recalled his childhood as one of twelve children raised in a single room log “hut” with pine shingles and a straw tick for sleeping, a fireplace for cooking and lighted by oil lamps and candles. His mother Kate Lillian and father Bartemos Lefarlow Jeffries were tobacco farmers and frequently transported their crop to the auction house in Danville, Virginia in a covered wagon pulled by mules.

Jug grew up hunting rabbits and small game with a bean-shooter, a slingshot loaded with ball bearings. Father taught him to fish with a bean-shooter. In Little Texas, the name of the Occaneechi community since the time of the American Revolution, people seined with nets made from fertilizer bags, a chain stitched along the bottom of the net to drag the bed of the creek. They had wood cuttings and frolics where neighbors would help one another cut enough wood—with cross-cut saws—to fire their tobacco curing operations and for home heating. The women would fix tables groaning with good food, and hard work was turned into a social event, sometimes with music and dancing.

Jug describes in great detail how the family got in a tobacco crop with mule power and hard work. His dad could also bottom chairs and rive out shingles. In the 1930s farmers organized a union and went together to buy a Jersey bull to service all the cows in the community. Jeffries grew up to be a great baseball player and might have played in the big leagues, but Jackie Robinson had not yet broken the color line. But he goes on to say that he live a life everybody would want to live. From tobacco fields to cotton mills, Jeffries’ life experience was archetypical of the Pleasant Grove community and the greater region of Piedmont agriculture.