

KK-CD-012-101

Doris Wilkins

Interviewed by Carrie Kline on 5-6-08

Wilkins was born a McBroom in 1927 on the tobacco farm owned by her grandfather on Barnett Road. She recalls the store on Barnett Rd., not regularly tended, but opened when people would come and holler, "Store!" Wilkins' grandmother was a licensed midwife, aiding in delivering babies, seeing about the mother, and reporting the names of the babies to the Justice of the Peace, Mr. Sellars, in Pleasant Grove, who would turn over the names to the officials in Graham. Wilkins' grandmother informed her granddaughter that she got these babies out of a stump. Most of the family attended Miles Chapel Baptist Church, except for her grandmother, who was a Primitive Baptist. Her grandfather and most of the family were Reverends in the Missionary Baptist Church but did not have regular congregations. Wilkins' describes old-time Primitive Baptist traditions such as foot washing and demonstrates the difference in singing styles between the Primitive Baptist Church and that of Miles Chapel. Both grandparents were forty-five when Wilkins' mother was born, giving Wilkins access to the ways of a much earlier time through grandparents and great-aunts and uncles.

The neighbors would sit up all night helping Wilkins' mother care for son and her aged parents. Wilkins's older brother died at age 18 in one of the two basement rooms in the hospital available to blacks in the County. Wilkins' mother knew how to delivery babies and was called into service but was not licensed like her mother. Wilkins' grandmother was an Enoch from Caswell County who attended a "Bush Arbor" before the local church was built. Wilkins describes the founding of Miles Chapel by Mr. Pres Miles, from a "Bush Arbor" to meetings in his home, to a building erected on his own land, which he donated to the church.

Wilkins attended Unity School in the Miles vicinity before attending the Pleasant Grove Colored School. She recalls her stepfather's horse and cart from which he sold fresh fish and beef. Wilkins's great-uncle sold fish from his own store in Green Level. Once married, Wilkins and her husband relocated to Green Level and brought her mother to live next door. Wilkins and her husband raised four children. Her husband worked at A & P for thirty years. Wilkins also worked outside at the home including General Electric and other mills. Her husband was related to most of the people at Miles Chapel.

Wilkins recalls carrying her mother to church functions beyond Alamance County during the years of segregation. Oftentimes there was nowhere for a black person to use toilets or to buy food. Wilkins also recalls hearing that around World War One black people left by the wagonload for Tennessee, where they heard life was kinder to people of color. She suspects that this was when the family of Alex Haley of Roots fame moved from Pleasant Grove to Tennessee. Discussing American Indian heritage, Wilkins brings out a photo of her great-grandparents who she feels look Indian, which correlates with stories she has heard about their ancestry.