

Hutchins Library Department of Special Collections and Archives

Disputanta Oral History Collection

Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Mary Thomas

Interviewer: Terry Allebaugh

Date: 1978-1979

Location: Rockcastle Co.

One Audio Cassette Tape: SC-CT-444-028

MARY (Speaking of Protracted Meetings)

"...Two weeks and two days. Then you went to church in the days and night, too. We had some of the wonderfulest meetings. I think it was eighteen saved. All them hillsides were covered with people and horses and wagons and buggies. Course, the hillsides didn't have wagons and buggies up there, but horses hitched all over them hills."

TERRY: "Was this down at Clear Creek?"

MARY: "Yeah, down at Clear Creek Church, one night the light got doing bad and Mr. Spencer Abney got up there to try to fix it and it got worse and worse. So they grabbed it up and threw it out the window, (laughs) It rolled down that hill and one of the Shearers there had his one horse wagon, wagon and a mule, you know. That mule broke out tow and home. I don't know whether they ever caught it. Scared of that light. And one woman jumped out the window and broke her arm but we had a wonderful meeting anyway."

TERRY: "Why'd she jump out of the window?"

MARY: "People outside was trying to get inside to see what was a going on, you know. Wouldn't let nobody out. And this woman jumped out the window. It was Mollie Gatliff. Anyway, it was 16th day of September, nineteen and sixteen when they had the baptizing. It was a real pretty September morning. That water looked so pretty and green and people all around there. It was a sight, the people that was there. Berea and Paint Lick and all to see that baptizing. That went no telling how far. Huey Ponder was our pastor and I can't who was our evangelists."

EARL: "In them days most of them pastors didn't have an evangelist."

MARY: "Maybe they didn't but a lot of the times there'd be five or six preachers there. Uncle Elijah Abney's wife said the preacher had said we've had neither fan nor fire. That was a different preacher said that. That was Preacher Lambert. We've neither had fan nor fire through this meeting. Mrs. Abney said after the meetings over that she had had the fire but she hadn't a fan. She had so many people come for the meeting and stay there all night. She's a good ole soul. Well, them days the house was full whether Sundays or Saturday nights most of the time. These days they're not so full but we still have mighty good meetings."

TERRY: "Why you think that is, Mary?"

MARY: "Well, I think it's just a falling away. People got where they don't care and they've got cars to go other places and do other things. That's one reason. When people had to walk, they'd walk and go to church. Now they got cars and go see their folks on Saturdays, Sundays, you know."

TERRY: "Was it at this meeting you was saved, the one you was just talking about?"

MARY: "Well, it wadn't the meeting when they throwed the light out the window. It wadn't that meeting. It was a wonderful meeting both times, though. We still have pretty good meetings down there."

TERRY: "Was you saved and baptized there in the same day?"

MARY: "No, I's saved, then baptized. First, I joined the church and then when I got to the water's edge, I couldn't hardly wait till they baptized me. It just seemed like I was happy as I could be about it. People there were, rejoicing about the baptism."

TERRY: "Did you come out of that water shouting?"

MARY: "Didn't come out shouting, no. (laughs) Come out of there mighty happy, though. People did use to shout and enjoy the Cord more, people don't testify too much anymore. I think maybe a body might ought to go around and try hard to get people to come to church. But I got no way of going. Just never get nowhere hardly."

TERRY: "Did you think you can testify just by example, by the way you live?"

MARY: "Well, I think that's the way a body about has to testify, don't you?"

You can feel like you want to get up there and testify but you don't get there every time. You feel the blessing of the Lord and just feel like maybe you oughta say something, maybe it help someone else. But a lot of times a body sits there and don't get up. I know when I hear somebody else it makes me feel different, somebody giving a good testimony. Makes me like I oughta get up and say something, too."

TERRY: "When you was growing up, was the church the main source of entertainment?"

MARY: "That was about the only thing there was to go to around here, you know. I guess that's one reason why so many went to church. Wasn't nothing much for the young folks to go off to, no way for them to go if they something to go to. It's hard to get out until you got up to twenty or twenty-five years old."

TERRY: "So, if you did anything, you went to church?"

MARY: "They'd be up just a raring to go to church, we was. I know, we had to walk about three miles. We went day and night whenever a revival's going on. Ma go with us of a day, then of a night Pa go with us. We had a good time."

TERRY: "Was your Dad a pretty strong religious man?"

MARY: "Yeah, pretty strong. People'd come there and talk and argue the scriptures, you know. And I know one ole feller come nearly every Sunday and us children didn't like to hear it, cause they'd get pretty loud. And one Sunday they was just about to get fighting mad. (laughs) But then he kinda slacked off coming; I don't know which one won. They got up out of their chair arguing. Whenever Pa get sick why people come in and talk to him on the scripture. He'd get down sick every once and a while."

TERRY: "Did he sing and play music?"

MARY: "He'd play a French Harp. He'd play hymns, really play them."

TERRY: "Would he play them in church?"

MARY: "No, he never did play them in church. He'd play at home. We'd sing them good ole songs and he'd play them. I've been to Clear Creek a many a time and I guess that's the reason I'll wind up going down there."

TERRY: "Have you ever been to any other kind of churches?"

MARY: "Yeah, we've been to other churches a lot but that's the only one I ever belonged to. Chester took a notion once to move out and he went to Scaffold Cane. I never did go up there, I'd go to church there. They begged me to come up there and I thought he was just sorta worried the reason he went up there. So he soon came back, stayed down there rest of the time. He was just nervous, went back there and he went up to join and I went up to shake hands with him. Well, he grabbed me right in his arms and hugged me real big before he even thought about it. Well, I was glad he come back cause sometimes it was so bad you couldn't get up the hill to go to Scaffold Cane, ice was so bad. Once we started, I stopped at Ollie's down there at the foot of the hill. We'd had a bad time getting that far. He said he'd go on. So he started trying to get up the hill twice but he couldn't make it. Just come on back home. So he soon moved his letter back down here."

TERRY: "What kind of work did your father do, Mary?"

MARY: "He worked in the timber, sawing logs and making ties. He didn't work his sawmill, he just got out logs, he had oxen, snaking logs, cutting timber with crosscut saws."

TERRY: "That'd bring the sweat out wouldn't it?"

MARY: "(laughs) He'd come home so sweaty."

TERRY: "Did right many people here in the community work for your Dad?"

MARY: "Yeah, just a lot did. There wasn't no jobs much for them to work at and they could help in the woods sawing timber and making ties. Use to John Hardin and Jim and Uncle Abe Shearer, just a lot of people would work for him, Jake Ramey and John Coffey, just a lot of folks. That was the only source they had to make their bread. When me and Chester went to Poindexter,

he just got a dollar and half a day for work on the railroad."

TERRY: "Was that right after you all got married?"

MARY: "He was working there right when we got married. He come and got me and we went to Tennessee and got married."

TERRY: "Tell me that story of when you all got married."

MARY: "That's too long a tale. I'm too nervous."

TERRY: "You shouldn't feel that way."

MARY: "Well, times was pretty hard when we got married when he was working for a dollar and a half a day. Still, he got passage on the train, a ride backwards and forwards. He come up and got me and we went to Berea in a wagon and then on to Tennessee on the train to way up there. Then we went on some little schabang on up to the justice of the peace. It was a pretty cold night."

TERRY: "Did your Dad know you was going to get married?"

MARY: "No, he didn't know I was going to get married till I crawled out the window. These boys had heard about me, these cousins of ours. And they knowed I was going to leave. They went around to their sisters then back by, see if they hear anything or see anybody. They went back up toward their house, sat down on the hill and listened. So they heard Chester run the chickens off the ladder to put up there to that window for me to crawl out."

TERRY: "Did you have the suitcase packed?"

MARY: "No, he had to bring the suitcase. He reached it in the window for me to put clothes in. (laughs) I didn't have no suitcase. I remember him stopping just below Grover's and putting the ring on my finger. We went on, John Dee and Jimmy, that was his brothers, they was afraid to leave down here, afraid they'd run on to Pa or something. They went on to Macedonia, waiting up there for us. We went on in on the wagon. We waited until the train came, that was one o'clock. We went on up there. We eat a breakfast and got married and come on back home."

TERRY: "How come your Dad didn't want you to get married?"

MARY: "He knowed I was the best workhand he had on the place, I reckon, (laughs) I was called on to help him."

TERRY: "Did you work with him in the timber?"

MARY: "Nothing more than sawing posts. I could help saw locust posts. Worked in the corn fields, making corn. Then curing it out. We'd let it cure out to Christmas before we'd ever get around to gathering it. We made it along pretty good. We had a lot of big ole hogs to kill. Chester had hogs on his own when he was living on Cruise Ridge. He went to Poindexter that fall, you know, to get up enough money to start housekeeping."

TERRY: "Did you all come back up to Shearer Holler to live then when you came back from Poindexter?"

MARY: "Yeah, we come back to Ma's then."

TERRY: "Your dad didn't meet you with a shotgun?"

MARY: "No, he's the happiest person you ever seen. He thought a lot of me. Thought a lot of all of us. Well, then we stayed at Poindexter till the first day of March. That was 1917."

EARL: "You done more than three or four of your brothers put together."

MARY: "He's baptized the same time I was. We come back the first day of March and went to fixing the ground to raise us a crop. Pa let us have a piece of land up there."

EARL: "Papa bought this from Pa. Bought it for \$1150, one hundred acres. Right now I wouldn't take \$100,000 for it."

MARY: "I wish we had bought us a place in Harrison County. That was when the war started."

EARL: "Harrison County ain't got the water this county's got."

MARY: "No, it ain't got the water but it's got Licking River right through it. He'd go up squirrel hunting when he'd get off the railroad, We lived with his sister a little while. (Edit)

TERRY: "Were there midwives here in the community? Did they change?"

MARY: "Four dollars is all they charge. Now, I guess, it's \$300 a case like that. I've seen it so bad sometimes nobody couldn't have hardly got away from home. Roads was so bad. I remember going up in the head of this holler and it was an awful time for a case like that. There used to be so many more poeple that lived around than do now. Let's see, there were, one, two, three, eight families in this holler where now there's only us. Course, Taylor's here. There on up and down these roads, there's a lot of people lived. Good thing a lot of them got on out where they could do better. Course, most of them that lived here back when I was a young un' is done dead and gone."

TERRY: "Did most people back up here, did they work for your daddy?"

MARY: "Every one of them worked for him."

EARL: "Used to be a lot of people lived in this holler. The Hills and..."

TERRY: "They decided they didn't want to spend their life back up in Shearer Holler, I guess."

EARL: "Jake Ramey lived right around there."

MARY: "And Uncle Abe used to live right up here, too."

EARL: "Used to a old house set over there where that dead mulberry is now."

TERRY: "Have you ever thought you'd like to get out and not live in this holler?"

MARY: "If I was somewheres where I could have a good place, I think I'd enjoy it. I sure have worked in this holler enough. Yes, I'll do very well here if I don't have to do too much work."

EARL: "I was born here and I expect to die here because this belongs to me."

MARY: "You know if there was neighbors a little closer. Now these is good neighbors down here They don't never come up much, but they'll do for you what they can. If there's anything they can help you about, they will. But if a body had some neighbors closer or somebody that'd come around sometime

when you need them. You get lonesome sometimes. If there was somebody a little closer like they used to be. (Edit)

TERRY: "How much formal schooling did you have, Mary?"

MARY: "I just got to the fourth. I didn't get to go much. I wanted to write and learn arithmetic is two things I cared for and I didn't go so much about anything else. But Verda and Hezzie they could just read. I'm telling you, they could just read like everything. But I never did care reading, but writing and arithmetic is about what I got. I got to go some till I was about twelve, I guess, but I never got to go all the time. Them little ones had to be took care of, all of them that was less than me. I's generally the one that had to do that. But they all loved me anyway, (laughs) We had some pretty good schoolteachers then. We had to walk so far. There wadn't any school after December then. School was out about the middle of December."

TERRY: "When'd you start?"

MARY: "July. Didn't have much school then. Some went right along and did good and some didn't."

TERRY: "Did you have any desire to go after anymore education?"

MARY: "Well, I would have liked to went some more, but seemed like there's so many things that had to be done there on the farm. I didn't get to go anymore. But the rest of them went on right smart. Some of them went in to Berea to school. Hezzie started but he didn't go on. Verda and Martha and Ruth and Rachael went a right smart while. Rachael, she soon married and didn't make no teacher but Verda and Martha and Ruth, she taught once, I guess, in school."

TERRY: "Did your Dad have right much respect for formal schooling? Did he think it was important?"

MARY: "Yeah, he was pretty proud of these that to go on up and go to the Berea school. Jim didn't get to school either much, but he got to go some. I'm very thankful I got to as much as I did."