

KK-CD-012-098

Elwood Whitmore

Interviewed in the Whitmore home with Carrie Kline and Forest Hazel April 29, 2008

Born in 1923, Whitmore opens with a description of grubbing up new planting beds with human and mule power. He chronicles the invention of the tobacco planter and the tractor. Whitmore's mother, Luella Dixon Whitmore, was raised on a farm in Pleasant Grove. Whitmore paints aural pictures of community work frolics, including wood choppings, which helped clear land for new plots. He describes the process of crop rotation. "You can plant tobacco behind corn, but you can't plant tobacco behind soybeans," because of the various crops' needs for nitrogen.

Whitmore turns to a calendar with signs, telling that the old people used to rely on the Almanac, explaining that there are signs for planting and for fishing. Cold weather crops such as cabbage, onions and peas can be planted in February. He moves on to discussions of his ancestry, including some forebears from Chatham County and a grandfather from Cherokee.

Whitmore describes making play toys such as wagons during his boyhood, and rolling along in an old tire. He and his brothers made sourwood whistles and bean shooters for shooting birds. As a grown man Whitmore operated a sawmill and sawed the lumber for his present home. In the summer he raised tobacco. While the money crop was growing they sawed lumber. Whitmore discusses raising cotton, curing tobacco the old time way, making molasses on a horse driven mill, and his father's raising honey bees. Whitmore describes the process of catching wild bees.

When asked how his father knew what to do, he replies, "He caught it. One to another." That's how people learned. That's how Whitmore learned. He speaks of the making of red oak roof shingles. His father made white oak splits to bottom chairs. He also made white oak baskets. Whitmore paints a picture of the old general stores. Some of them even carried nails to save wagon trips to town. He describes milling flour from home grown wheat. The family went to the mill by wagon, the Red Mill, or the mill in Mebane, or other mills. The interview includes a detailed explanation of the use of home remedies and wild plant medicine.