

OH
80-17
George and Jessie Davis
Recollections

OH
80-17

An Interview with

GEORGE DAVIS, JR. & JESSIE DAVIS

February 28, 1975

Interviewed by

Robert Bowman

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Yazoo County Library System
Oral History Project:
Yazoo City and Vicinity

OH
80-17 George and Jessie Davis
Recollections

OH
80-17 George and Jessie Davis
Recollections

YAZOO COUNTY BICENTENNIAL

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEES: George Davis, Jr. & Jessie Davis

INTERVIEWER: Robert Bowman

DATE: February 28, 1975

RB: Okay, Wee, you are retired now, aren't you?

GD: I work a little bit. In two years, I made eight hundred dollars.

RB: Are you getting your strength back (after ruptured appendix)?

GD: I get it back some. They told me not to pick up nothing that weigh over thirty pounds. They got me plated insided.

RB: They got you what?

GD: They got four little plates inside me. When I do something over strain, it gets sort of tender inside.

RB: How old are you, Wee?

GD: My next birthday I will be sixty nine, next July.

RB: Are you the youngest in the family?

GD: No, there's two under me, Lelia and Clara. I'm next to Willie. Zet (Rosetta) is the oldest, then one they call Ida Bee - she live in Cleveland, Ohio. They got another one named Josephine- she's dead. Had another son named Bill - he named William after my granddad. Everybody called him old man "Nat". He's dead. You remember the old house, don't you, right over there behind John Douglas by the big barn? My granddaddy built the house.

RB: Let's go back as far as you can remember. Did you know your grandpa?

GD: Yes, I was eight years old the same year he died. That was around about 1913.

RB: Now this was George Davis, Sr.'s daddy. (His name was William Davis.) Let's start back on your grandfather. Now, he was a slave, wasn't he?

Davis

GD: He was a slave. He fought in there. He was a soldier.

RB: Was he a soldier on the south or north side?

GD: Must be on the south side, because he said when he got free, he got free in Vicksburg. His name was William. My brother was named after him.

RB: What was his wife's name?

GD: His first wife's name was Rebecca. He had four children by her: George, Jim, Josie and Jennie. He married again after that, and she was a Brumfield. She was kin to old man Todd Brumfield. She was just about half, too. She had one son, and he was just about half. Her folks stayed up there by old Concord - white folks' Concord - go on around there. There were some Brumfield's place way back up in there.

RB: Where did your grandfather live? Did you say he lived up there around Meadow Perry?

GD: Right up there in front of Mr. Riley, that was a little house up in there, and when Mr. Meadow Perry got up in there, they turned that little house into a grist mill.

RB: When he was freed in Vicksburg, did you say he and his brother walked home from Vicksburg?

GD: Yes. He and his brother walked back from there. His brother was named Obie Cowan.

RB: Was he Robert Cowan's daddy?

GD: Yes, his daddy.

RB: Name your granddaddy's brothers.

GD: William Davis, Obie Cowan and the other was old man Wallace Gartley. He died up there on Stuckey. He lost his place up there. Old man Tommy O'Neal's mind got bad, and he took his place. He mortgaged it, you know, and he took it for sixteen hundred dollars. It was behind the Stuckey place. They call it the Manor place now. It went all the way to the Terrell place. Mr. Tommy O'Neal took it. They all dead now. One of his daughters - Mr. Sug Manor's wife - she stay behind Mr. Ernest Ferris's. She offered it to him back for sixteen hundred dollars. I reckon they all scared to pay it. If one pay it, the other will want his part out of it. If all of them get together and pay it, they could have it back. Ain't been long ago.

RB: Looks like they would get together and pay it and get it back.

Davis

Who owns it now, Mrs. Manor?

GD: Mrs. Manor. She owns a little trailer right behind Mr. Ernest Ferris. See, she was raised right over there - we call it the Joe Ferris place; then she left there, and they moved to Anding. There was an old man named Bradley. One of them Kelly boys married Mr. Bradley's daughter, and he got sick and died. Then Mr. Tommy O'Neal, he bought Mr. Bradley's house. He used to buy cows and sell cows - that's the way he made his money. He bought old man Bradley out, and he run that store in Anding. The store on the corner belonged to old man Barr. Up farther was the store that belonged to old Bradley. Right next was a barn; Robert Cowan bought that barn.

RB: Now, let me get this straight. Your grandfather, William Davis, and Robert Cowan's daddy (Obie Cowan) were half brothers, and they had one more half brother, Wallace Gartley.

GD: Yes, they all had the same mama.

RB: Who did they belong to back in those days? Who was their master?

GD: I don't know who was their master. I didn't get that straight. See, my daddy's grandma was named Margie.

RB: There were some Gartleys back in there. Do you reckon that they owned her?

GD: Yes, they not only owned her - that's where them babies come from.

RB: In other words, the child she had, was it part-white?

GD: All three of them were half-white.

RB: Also, the Davises were connected to the Gartley family.

GD: Well, all three of them children were half-white, and she give all three of them different names. One was named William Davis, one named Obie Cowan and one Wallace Gartley. They lived right up there in front of Mr. Meadow Perry. That was done right up in there - plumb on back to "Rose Hill". Then them Johnsons was good friends to them, too.

RB: Did you ever hear them mention any of the old families that lived up in there before the Civil War or after the war?

GD: No, no more than I heard Papa mention that all them places belong to them.

Davis

RB: Did you ever hear them talk about what hard times they had during the war?

GD: Yes, he sat down and tell us at the dinner table. He was in that battle down there in Vicksburg. Some days he got one ear of corn, like a mule. Say he parched it, no salt, corn and traveling with them, guns and all. We had one of them guns. Them chaps, after Papa Died, tore that gun up. It would still shoot. Todd and them got one now. An old muzzle-loaded. You know you put that powder in there. Todd Cowan, he got one of them now. They had a sword- you know, one of them long swords. And they had an old steel helmet. It was in Todd and them's house the last time I paid any attention to it.

RB: What did you do with you all's?

GD: Them chaps destroyed it. They tore that house down where Papa died and got all that. That thing would be worth money now, if we'd kept it. Papa had two of them guns. He lent one of them guns to another fellow. He ain't brought it back yet. He kin to her, Jessie (his wife). I saw him down to Concord church, and he never did bring that gun back.

RB: Who were the children of Obie Cowan?

GD: Robert Cowan, C. T. Cowan, Lincoln Cowan, little Obie Cowan, Todd, Clifford. See, Robert was by his first wife, and the others by his last wife. He got some girls: Flossie, Tenner, Bessie and "Biggun" - we call her "Biggun".

RB: Okay, name your grandfather William Davis' children.

GD: George, Sr., Jim, Josie, Jennie..

RB: Okay, now what about the Gartley family?

GD: They got a gang of children. They had a bunch of boys and some girls, and one of them is crazy. She stay in Chicago.

RB: But Margie was the mother of all three of them, wasn't she?

GD: Yes, all three of them. She was a slave.

RB: Now, after they were freed, she moved over there in that little house, and they lived there.

GD: Yes. She was slave of them that got her all the children. Then went Grandpa, and them came back there after the war and stayed there. They rent all that land from Rose Hill back to Mrs. Allen up there on the highway. Plumb on back to Dover.

Davis

There were several old men. Old man Wallace Gartley and my granddaddy and Obie Cowan. And there were some more, some brother-in-laws mixed in there with them. They saved their money, and they come up there, and, you know, they bought - one of them - bought up there where Mr. Toby (Passons) lives. That belonged to old man Coot Wilkerson, Peyton's first cousin. Peyton Wilkerson's granddaddy bought it. You see, him and my granddaddy were boys together, and, after they got free, they bought it. One is about a forty in there - and come on over - and they got nineteen acres in there. One of grandpa's sisters, that was her part, you know, where you said that graveyard was in there (Cage cemetery). That's her part in there; she named Ella, Aunt Ella Wilson. Aunt Ella Wilson. She got the tallest tombstone in Concord graveyard.

RB: Was nineteen acres all she had?

GD: Yes.

RB: How many acres did your grandfather Davis buy?

GD: That was right where Willie stay now. I forgot what he had. He had a right smart in there. In there where Willie (Wilkerson) lives, that was his land, and on farther was where Todd and them's daddy's land. Then on down farther was the Wilkerson's land starts. That was Peyton's and them's daddy.

RB: Was Peyton kin to you someway?

GD: Peyton married my sister, Willie. Everybody was kin to me, either first cousin or second cousin, but me and Peyton are no kin.

RB: Did your daddy, George Davis, Sr., inherit some land?

GD: He inherit some land from his daddy, and he inherit some land from the Stuckeys.

RB: His wife was a Stuckey, wasn't she? And she got some of that Stuckey land, didn't she; that her daddy bought from Martin Anding?

GD: Yes, sir.

RB: That was where you lived when you sold that land to Bobby Hancock, ditn't you?

GD: I sold it to Bobby Stampley. That was part of the Stuckey land.

RB: Okay, now, George married Nancy Stuckey, Ned Stuckey's daughter.

GD: Yes. That was old man Gibson Stuckey's daughter.

Davis

- RB: Where did Ned come in?
- GD: Ned and Gibson Stuckey were brothers.
- RB: How many acres did the Stuckeys own?
- GD: It was a thousand or something. It was over a thousand. I forgot.
- RB: Where did they get the money for that much land?
- GD: At that time, that land was sold for two and three dollars an acre.
- RB: What year did they buy it in? After the war?
- GD: All I remember was the year that they were getting it back. See, I was big enough to work. They bought that land up there. My mama's daddy was the ramrod up there, he was the boss. And they got in there, and they got rid of him.
- RB: They did? Who did?
- GD: Yes, he killed him. He kin to me. You see, they gave a dance, and he slapped one of Mama's sisters, Liza Jane. And he got after him about it, you know, and shot him and killed him. That was my grandpa Stuckey that got killed. Old man Joe Powell, right there in Yazoo City, he took it. He took that land.
- RB: Did you all get it back?
- GD: No, we got part of it back. Them others scared to get it back.
- RB: How many acres did your mother get?
- GD: My mama and her sister-in-law and her brother got one hundred and something acres. Then my daddy turned around and paid the lawyers for the other half and got it, too.
- RB: How many acres did your daddy own?
- GD: I don't know; Jessie might know.
- RB: It was over three hundred acres, wasn't it?
- GD: Yes.
- RB: Did he build that old house that he lived in when he died?
- GD: That was my granddaddy's house. Papa moved in it when he died. Papa's house was over there by Mr. Toby's (Passons).

Davis

RB: Does your family still own that land back in there where Willie lives?

GD: Yes, Willie and Claudia got that land where Grandpa lived. The rest of the land - Stuckey land - we sold it.

RB: How much did you get out of your land? That was about twenty-five years ago.

GD: I got about thirty-two hundred dollars for mine.

RB: Did Zet sell hers?

GD: Yes. She in Pennsylvania with her boy.

RB: That's all real interesting. But they saved their money and bought that place

GD: Yes, they saved their money and bought the place; then they split it all up. Then they all built homes on it. Grandpa built a log house on it first.

RB: Where the old house was?

GD: Yes, part of that house was logs. Then they add them boards that they roll out of wood and covered them logs with them; then when they got able, they turn around and built another part on it out of plank.

RB: What year did he buy it?

GD: I don't know.

RB: How old was your grandfather when he died?

GD: He was eighty-six.

RB: How old was your daddy?

GD: He was up in his eighties. He always say he thought he was going to make it like his daddy did, but he didn't quite make it.

RB: You know Robert Cowan - all the Cowans are kind of light-skinned, yellow looking - was your grandfather like them?

GD: He had more in him that I think they did. He had a different kind of hair. In my time, when I knowed him, he had black hair. He had hair like a big old African. Now, Todd and them daddy, he was tall, but he was kind of raw-boned.

Davis

RB: I didn't know you were all kin - the Davises, the Gartleys, the Cowans, the Stuckeys.

GD: Now, Todd is not kin to the Stuckeys. And the Wilkersons, they kin to the Gartleys. Old man Wallace Gartley and the Wilkerson married two sisters.

RB: Other words, Wallace Gartley, William Davis and Obie Cowan are all brothers, and they are kin to the Harris (white).

GD: Papa always told me that Bobby was his second cousin. The way he talked was like old man Bobby must have been his first cousin. That's where them babies come from.

RB: You see, old man Gartley's wife was a Davis. (Colonel Will Gartley married Mrs. Davis. There was one son, Robert V. Davis, Jr., and several Gartley boys; one was Capt. William F. Gartley of the Yazoo Rangers. - RB) And they had a young man that lived there that built the old house. He went off in the war and got killed. His name was Robert Davis.

GD: The last time my daddy said he seen some of them was over in there when he was in Canton. He went over there to a livery stable to buy a mule, and he got over there and was talking, and he run up on some of his folks over there.

RB: Some of his white folks?

GD: Yes, some of them over about Canton. (The Gartleys owned more land in Madison County than they did in Yazoo County. -RB) That all started right up there in Dover.

RB: Do you remember where the Old Gartley home was?

GD: No.

RB: What about the old Davis home? Well, that was the Davis home where the Harrises lived. So that is where you all got your names. Did you ever hear your grandfather tell of the hard time or good times?

GD: (Response unintelligible)

RB: Did you folks like the Harrises?

GD: Them Harrises, them Rileys, the Johnsons, they about the same kind of folks, you know. Mr. Johnson, he say, "Wee is my folks. Yes, Wee is my kind of folks."

RB: What last name did your great - grandmother Margie use: Gartley, Davis or Cowan?

Davis

- GD: I don't know. Now, willie might can tell you that. She would know. I don't know if she was a married woman or not. But she was half-white, too, you know. She got them children and they were about three-quarters.
- RB: Are the Gartleys all look kind of like your daddy and the Cowans? Are they white looking?
- GD: Yes, just like them.
- RB: Your little granddaughter is light, and your daughter and son.
- GD: Yes, they took way back there. All them Gartley folks - ain't none of them dark. They all got white and got blue eyes.
- RB: Did your grandmother (great) live a long time?
- GD: Yes, she died right there below Robert (Cowan), you know, right there where he lived?
- RB: We were talking about your daddy selling peas to pay for this place.
- GD: He owed Mr. Puffer so much money. And he planted peas, hired them peas picked and scraped and sold them peas and paid Mr. Puffer. Mr. Puffer wanted the land and thought he would take the land if he didn't pay it. Papa had to go back the second time to make him take the money.
- RB: Your daddy must have been a good manager. Did he make you work hard?
- GD: Yes, I worked hard myself. After I married her, I worked hard. I have made forty bales of cotton myself.
- RB: How many acres of cotton did your daddy plant each year?
- GD: Well, one year my daddy had thirteen share hands. He would get half of what they made. He saved his money, and he bought him some high priced mules.
- RB: Is it true what they said about him? That one time he was going to pay for a tractor he bought, and he went out there and went under his house and got a gallon jug of dimes and paid for it in dimes. Is that true?
- GD: Yes, that's true. He saved eighteen hundred dollar's worth. They found a few of them after he died. One of Lelia's boys found some dimes in the wall. He had a sewing machine up against the wall, and they tore that wall down and found a big snuff bottle full of dimes in there.

Davis

- RB: Where did you meet Jessie?
- GD: Anding. She was a Adams. Old man Manning's daughter.
- RB: Did your mother live to be real old?
- GD: She was sixty-something when she died in 1930 or 1931.
- RB: What about Kelly Jackson? Did you know Belle, his wife, who was a Griffin? You know Belle's mama looked white.
- GD: She was kin to them Gartleys. She was kin to the Gartleys and the Davises.
- RB: She looked like a white woman. She was real pale.
- GD: She was in that loop in Grandpa's time. She was kin to the Gartleys and all them folks.
- RB: Did any of the slaves go north after the war that you heard your grandfather speak of?
- GD: One of Obie Cowan's boys went to Arkansas. Little Rock, Arkansas.
- (George Davis' wife Jessie came in and there was some discussion about Kelly Jackson's wife's mother, the blind old lady who was white.)
- JD: I heard my grandmother say when they were slaves, they kept them in a barn and would feed them in a grough like hogs.
- RB: Now, who told you that, Jessie?
- JD: My great-grandmother. This is my mother's grandmother.
- RB: Tell me about it, Jessie.
- JD: They lived in a barn. You see, the master lived in the house, you know. They ate and slept in the barn.
- RB: How did they feed them?
- JD: Everything they cooked, they mixed it up together and bring it out there and put it all in the trough.
- RB: They had to eat out of the trough?
- JD: I told Grandma, I said, "I bet I wouldn't have eat none."

Davis

She said, "You would have et or died, because you sho' go work". Peter Spiars got her picture up there now. You see, I am his first cousin.

RB: What was her name?

JD: Her name was Mary Jane Lungrin.

RB: What was your grandmother's (great) name?

JD: That's the one I'm talking about. Now, my grandmother was married a Henderson.

RB: Did they belong to someone here in Yazoo City, or did they live somewhere else?

GD: They were shipped here from Georgia, wasn't they?

JD: Yes, Columbus, Georgia. My great-grandmother was.

RB: Who did they belong to?

JD: I don't know.

GD: My folks came from South Carolina.

RB: During the war, did your grandmother stay at Dover, or did she go some where else? The Brumfields sent their slaves to Winston County.

GD: She stayed at Dover.

(At this time, their son, Eddie Davis, drove up, and we ended the interview.)

//



