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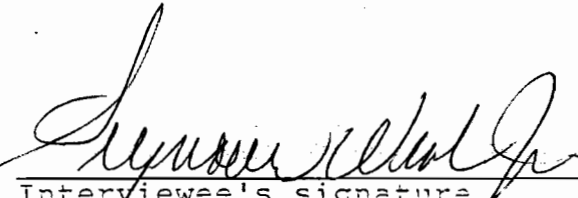
We Seymour West and Kerrie Bentley
Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

do hereby give and grant to Dr. Suzanne Marshall, Assistant Professor of History, Jacksonville State University, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at

West Realty Co. 104 Pelham Rd. S. Jacksonville, AL

on the date(s) of March 19, 1995

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.


Interviewee's signature

Address 404 E 6th St.
Jacksonville, AL 36265
Phone 435-6557

Date March 19, 1995


Interviewer's signature

Address 605 8th Ave. N.E.
Jacksonville, AL 36265
Phone 435-3532

Date March 19, 1995

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Seymour West, Jr. M/F M
Address: 404 E 6th St. Jacksonville, AL 36265
Phone number(s): H-435-6557 W 435-2181
Approximate age or date of birth: Age 73 May 19, 1921
Mother's Name: Lillian West
Father's Name: Seymour West
Places lived and when: Jacksonville, AL 1921-1923
A Kron photo 1923-1924, Jacksonville, AL 1924-present
Education: Jacksonville High School, Auburn University
Religion: Methodist
Business, political and social memberships (past and present) Democrat, First National Bank-Board of Directors.
Present occupation: owner - West Realty
Former occupations: Construction Company
Special Skills: Athletic skills
Major Accomplishments: Successful in business, raising 2 children, Built first apartment complex in Jacksonville
National Events in which interviewee has participated: former campaign manager for a George Wallace election
Local Events in which interviewee has participated: City Council, Numerous school and church events
National born U.S. citizen? Yes/No
Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: _____
Country from which he/she emigrated: _____
Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee: book "The Jacksonville Story"; family photographs
Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: Ray Hartwell (brother in law)
Additional information: It was a pleasure to participate in this project.

Childhood During the Depression
in Rural Jacksonville, Alabama

Kerrie Bentley
Jacksonville State University
T-Th 11:00-12:30

Mr. Seymour West Jr.
by - Kerrie Bentley

Childhood During the Depression in Rural Jacksonville, Alabama

It was a great privilege to interview one of Jacksonville's most prominent and well respected citizens. At age 73, Mr. West is very articulate, informative, and entertaining. His clear recollections and memories of his childhood during the Depression paints a very typical but colorful portrait of life in this small southern town.

In 1929, when the stock market crash occurred on October 29, Mr. West was 8 years old. Since the earliest sufferers from the crash were investors in securities and depositors in banks, for a while there did not seem to be much of an impact on this community. Jacksonville was well established as a college town, manufacturing area, and successful farming community. Mr. West's honesty and frankness was surprising at times as when he candidly remarked that his parents did not want him to attend an integrated school. He says "Alabamians weren't accustomed to that at that time." Mr. West's father worked in a large tire manufacturing plant and his mother was a homemaker. Life seemed simple and carefree, but changes were becoming more obvious. Local residents began to talk about people losing their jobs, businesses closing, and the homeless. Citizens received most of their local and national news from public radio news broadcasts and newspapers from Atlanta and Birmingham. By 1930, people began to realize that millions

of Americans were now unemployed. Common sights in urban areas were men selling apples to earn money and the jobless waiting in bread lines for free food. In some areas, homeless people ate in soup kitchens and lived in clumps of shacks they called "Hooverilles".

As a child, Mr. West did not know much about politics and just remembers that Hoover was president and a lot of people said he made promises he couldn't keep. For the most part, people tried to carry on their daily lives as normally as possible. Many children worked to help their families as did Mr. West who delivered newspapers and ice blocks. Local families took in boarders for extra income and farmers set up tenant farms to help the poor earn food shares instead of paying rent. The government began several assistance programs to aid the poor and unemployed. One of these was the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which Mr. West's father worked for and helped build the Jacksonville Courthouse. Another program was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). They built bridges still in use in The Talladega National Forest. The Public Works Administration (PWA) assisted the very poor.

Salaries were very low at this time with teachers and mill workers earning the lowest and merchants earned the highest.

Changes in their routine daily lives were subtle but noticeable and residents tried hard to maintain a cheerful, happy environment. Everyone participated in community, church, and school activities. Literary societies were very popular for their debates and Spring Fairs. Local boys would hold boxing

matches and dances were held at the Gadsden Civic Center. People entertained in their homes and visiting with friends or relatives was a favorite pastime. Camping on the riverbanks was the West families favorite vacation.

Crime was very low in Jacksonville and at that time the local jail had only two cells which were usually empty. "No one used a house key - no one bothered," says Mr. West. People did not worry about health care back then because medical costs were low and service was never refused to anyone because of their financial situation.

During the Depression the government established a program called the Farmers Home Administration (FHA) to help people afford homes at a low 3% interest rate. Mr. West's father built the first FHA home in Jacksonville and continued to build homes for many years.

Mr. West feels that the Depression did not seem to have effected the daily life of his small rural community as severely as in other larger urban cities. "Back then, everyone was alike. The problem today is that some are a lot better off than others and that creates problems," says Mr. West. He feels that more people could take care of themselves today if we didn't have such a huge welfare program. He recalls, "Back then there was no welfare system and people took care of each other". Farmers would share their excess food to help the hungry. Mr. West's father was one of the farmers who planted extra peas, potatoes, and other hearty crops for families who needed food. There never seemed to be a great food shortage in this area and there

were no soup kitchens or bread lines. Hitchhiking was a very popular and safe form of transportation and people were more than happy to offer someone a lift.

The only prejudiced behavior he can remember was towards the edge-of-town people who worked at the mill and were known as "Lint-Heads". Their children did not attend school and the towns people did not associate with them.

One of the few bad memories that Mr. West shared with me was about an accident he had at age 9. He had gone to a grist mill with his father to have some corn meal ground. Mr. West was a curious child and while playing around with one of the belts on the mill, he got tangled up and received a broken arm and a head injury which later kept him out of WWII.

Mr. West gave me an excellent book to read called The Jacksonville Story, which describes the history of Jacksonville and contains many beautiful pictures of it's historic buildings and famous citizens. Mr. West himself is pictured in this book with the Board of Directors of the First National Bank of Jacksonville. He also has some very old yearbooks from the college which was once an all girls school called The State Normal School.

He has seen Jacksonville grow and go through many changes in the past 70 years and his devotion to preserving it's integrity is outstanding.

Mr. West says, "Growing up was a lot of fun in Jacksonville even during the Depression. People were nicer back then and I worry about future generations."

I beleive it is historically significant to note that the somewhat economically challenged rural communities in America seemed to fair better during the Depression than did the wealthy urban communities. The natural resources that were available to these rural communities and the hard working nature of their citizens were major factors in the success and growth of these areas before, during, and after the Depression.

*Contd paper
& interview
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Mr. Seymour West, Jr.
by: Kerrie Bentley
March 19, 1995
West Realty, Jacksonville, AL
Childhood during the Depression
in rural Jacksonville, Alabama

Table of Contents

I. Personal Family Background

1. Seymour West, Jr. was 8 yrs. old when the Depression began in 1929. As a boy he worked delivering ice and newspapers.
2. His father's occupations included rubber company employee, home builder, and grocery store owner.
3. The West family was active in many church, school, and community activities.
4. Mr. West's grandparents also lived in the local area and were farmers.

II. Historic facts about Jacksonville, AL.

1. Long before the Depression began, Jacksonville was well established as a college town and continued to grow during the Depression.
2. Jacksonville was also a mining and manufacturing community including a yarn mill, ice plant, telephone exchange, hotels and banks.
3. There were also many farms in the area which provided jobs, produce and cotton for the local industries.

III. Local Effects of the Depression.

1. Government Assistance Programs were established to aid the poor and unemployed. Some of these included Public Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps.
2. Local families turned their homes into boarding houses to earn extra income.
3. Farmers set up tenant farms to help poor families earn food shares instead of paying rent. Farmers also shared their excess crops so there were no noticeable food shortages as in other parts of the country.

IV. Communication and Transportation during the Depression.

1. Citizens depended on public radio news broadcasts and newspapers from Atlanta and Birmingham for their local and national news.
2. Many families could not afford automobiles at this time and hitchhiking was considered a safe and common form of transportation.
3. Telephone service was available to some.

V. Crime

1. Crime rates were very low in Jacksonville during this period and few people locked their homes.
2. The local jail contained only 2 cells and was commonly empty.
3. Jacksonville was located in a dry county and alcohol was not a major problem at that time.

VI. Entertainment and Recreation

1. Literary Societies were a popular social activity which help public debates and bazaars and included the entire community.
2. Dance Bands such as Miller and Dorsey would perform at the Gadsden Civic Center and many local residents would attend in groups.
3. Young men would participate in local boxing matches and attending citizens would place bets.
4. Camping on the river banks was a popular family vacation.

VII. Mr. West's Personal Opinions concerning the Depression.

1. The Depression did not seem to effect daily life in his small rural community as severely as in larger urban cities.
2. There was no welfare system then and people took care of each other.
3. Medical care was affordable and available to everyone who needed it even during the Depression.
4. Mr. West thinks people were nicer back then and worries about future generations in good economic times and bad.

Proposal

Kerrie Bentley
T-Th class

Mr. Seymour West Jr.
404 E 6th St. N.E.
Jacksonville, AL 36265
Birthplace - Jacksonville, AL
D.O.B. - May 19, 1921
Interview date - Sunday, Feb. 19, 1995
Place - 605 8th Avenue N.E. Jacksonville, AL

The subject of my interview with Mr. West will be his memories of childhood during the Great Depression. He will be a great source of knowledge on the local depression history since he and his parents are originally from Jacksonville, AL.

This topic is very important to history so we can understand the effects of an economic depression on people and how they survived and sometimes prospered. If we can learn from our past mistakes, then we may be able to avoid the same disaster in the future.

I feel that I will be able to obtain a lot of historic information on this subject through local archives, historic references, and personal interviews.

Since most of the children of the Depression are reaching their elderly years, I feel it is very important to preserve these historic facts from the people who lived through this difficult time in our nation's history.

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Question Guide

Kerrie Bentley
T-Th class

1. You were 8 years old in 1929 when the Great Depression began. Can you tell me about your family at that time?
 - A. Brothers or sisters
 - B. Father's occupation
 - C. Family lifestyle
2. What was the day to day life like for children during this time?
 - A. School/friends
 - B. Work/job
 - C. Activities/hobbies
3. How do you think the Depression affected people living in the country vs. people living in the cities?
4. When you heard your family or others talk about the Depression, what did they think of Herbert Hoover, who was then president?
 - A. Blame his administration? *leading question, take care*
 - B. Blame others?

~~Do you remember who was president at that time?~~
5. How did your family hear most of the local and national news?
 - A. Radio
 - B. Newspapers
 - C. Other
6. Were you aware of food shortages in your area?
 - A. Bread lines
 - B. Soup kitchens

PWA - for the poor
7. Did anyone in your family participate in the (WPA) Works Progress Administration? *or the C.C.C - Civilian Conservation Corps*
 - A. What types of work did they offer?
 - B. How much did they pay?
8. Was religion an important part of your family life during this time?
 - A. Church activities
 - B. Community service
9. What types of activities did families do for entertainment during the Depression?
 - A. Was music important?
 - B. Who were some celebrities of that time?
10. How did people take care of their health care needs during the Depression?

Question Guide (Continued)

- A. Hospitals or doctors/home care , *midwives*
 - B. Medications/home remedies
11. Did you ever feel "poor" during your childhood compared to others around you?
- A. What kinds of things were considered luxuried?
 - B. How did you celebrate special holidays such as Christmas or birthdays?
12. Do you have any photographs or other memorabilia from the Depression era?
- A. Favorite picture?
 - B. Best friend?
 - C. Favorite "happy" memory?
13. What do you think are some of the major differences between your childhood and those of your own children and grandchildren?
14. How did your family life change after the depression years?
- A. Prosperity?
 - B. Community changes?

*Excellent
questions
a model*

