

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

TELEPHONE: (205) 782-5632

Gift and Release Agreement:

We Geraldine Taylor and Kenny Clevenger
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at _____ on the date(s) of November 11, 1995 for the oral history collection being compiled at Jacksonville State University.

This collection will be maintained by Jacksonville State University for research into the history of Northeast Alabama and the South. We further grant researchers permission to quote from the interview on this tape.

Geraldine Taylor
(Interviewee's signature)

Date 11-11-95

27 Lakefront Ave.
(Address)

Gadsden, AL 35904

(205) 543-2356
(Telephone)

Kenny W. Clevenger, Jr.
(Interviewer's signature)

Date 11-11-95

402 Whispering Pines Rd.
(Address)

Rainbow City, AL 35906

(205) 442-5027
(Telephone)

Interviewee Background Information

Name: Geraldine Taylor
Address: 27 Labefront Ave. Gadsden, AL 35904
Phone Number(s): (205) 543-2356
Approximate age or date of birth: 8-12-25
Mother's name: Vessy Fitts
Father's name: Lorne Fitts
Places lived and when: 1925 - Born in Whorton's Bend (Etowah County)

Education: Whorton's Bend School; John S. Jones Elementary; Southside High School (10th grade)

Religion: Baptist
Business, political and social memberships (past and present):
Member: Oak Park Baptist Church

Present occupation: Retired
Former occupation(s): Weaver - Dwight Cotton Mill; Weaver - Beemston Cotton Mill; Assembly line operator - Gadsden Chicken Plant and EMCO; Weaver and Instructor - Crown Cotton Mill.
Special skills: Operation of a cotton loom.
Major Accomplishments: Ms. Taylor has lived for seventy one years and resides alone as an active grandmother.

Local events in which you have participated: Celebration of the ending of World War II held in Alabama City.

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: None.

National events in which you have participated: None.

International events in which you have participated: None.

Natural born U.S. citizen? Yes/No
Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: _____
Country from which you emigrated: _____
Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession: _____

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: Michael R. Moon, Sr.

Additional information: _____

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVESITY

FROM FARM GIRL TO MILL WORKER: THE LIFE OF GERALDINE TAYLOR

HISTORY 444
HISTORY OF ALABAMA

BY

KENNY CLEVINGER

JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA

NOVEMBER 1995

Chronology of American Events 1925-1970

1925

- March 4 Calvin Coolidge is inaugurated President of the United States.
- March 13 Tennessee makes the teaching of evolution illegal.
- June 17 League of Nations agrees not to use poisonous gas and bacteria during war.
- July 10-21 Scopes trial; John T. Scopes is found guilty and fined \$100.00.
- August 8 KKK parade in Washington with 40,000 people marching.

1926

- February 26 Revenue Act reduces income tax, surtax, and estate tax.
- July 2 Army Air Corps is created by an act of Congress.
- September 25 Henry Ford introduces the 8-hour work day and 5-day week in Ford Motor Company plants.

1927

- January 7 Radio telephone service is opened between New York and London.
- May 20-21 Charles Lindberg makes non-stop flight from New York to La Bourget Field in France.

1928

- May 25 Muscle Shoals Bill is passed by Congress but pocket vetoed by Coolidge.
- June 12-15 Republican National Convention nominates Herbert Hoover for President of the United States.
- June 26-29 Democratic National Convention nominates Alfred Smith for President of the United States.
- August 27 Kellogg-Briand pact is signed outlawing war.
- November 6 Herbert Hoover is elected President of the U.S.

1929

- March 4 Hoover is inaugurated President of the U.S.
- July 24 Kellogg-Briand Pact is formally announced in Washington.
- October 24 The New York stock market collapses.
- October 29 The blackest day in stock market history.

1930

- Summer An unprecedented drought hits the Midwest and South.
- September 3 Thomas A. Edison tries out the first electric passenger train.
- December 11 The Bank of the United States in New York City closes its doors.
- December 20 Drought Relief Act appropriates \$45,000,000.

1931

- Unemployment is now between 4 and 5 million.
- February 24 The U.S. Supreme Court says the 18th Amendment is constitutional.
- September 18 Japan marches on Manchuria breaking the Kellogg-Briand Pact.

1932

- January 29 Japan attacks Shang-hai.

1932

- February 27 Glass-Steagall Banking Act gives Federal Reserve Banks more credit.
 June 14-16 Republican National Convention re-nominates Herbert Hoover for President of the U.S.
 June 27-Jul 2 Democratic National Convention nominates Franklyn D. Roosevelt for President of the U.S.
 November 8 Franklyn D. Roosevelt is elected President of the U.S.

1933

- February 6 The 20th Amendment goes into effect.
 March 4 Roosevelt is inaugurated President of the U.S.
 March 5 Roosevelt proclaims a nation-wide Bank holiday and an embargo on gold export.
 March 12 The first fireside chat is broadcast.
 March 27 Japan formally resigns from the League of Nations.
 March 31 Civil Conservation Corps is created.
 April 19 The U.S. goes off the gold standard.
 May 12 Federal Emergency Relief Administration is created.
 Agricultural Adjustment Administration is created.
 May 18 Tennessee Valley Authority is created.
 June 16 National Recovery Administration is created.
 Public Works Administration is created.
 November 9 Civil Works Administration is established.
 December 5 The 21st Amendment goes into effect (repealing the 18th Amendment).

1934

- April 21 The Cotton Control Act gives the AAA power to control cotton quotas.
 June 6 Securities and Exchange Commission is established.

1935

- June 26 National Youth Administration is established as a division of the Workers Progress Administration.
 August 14 The Social Security Act provides the Social Security System.
 August 31 First Neutrality Act comes into effect.

1936

- January 6 U.S. v. Butler; Supreme Court deems the Agricultural Administration Act invalid.
 February 29 Second Neutrality Act extends the act until May 1, 1937.
 June 9-12 Republican National Convention nominates Alfred M. Landon for President of the U.S.
 June 23-27 Democratic National Convention re-nominates Franklyn D. Roosevelt for President of the U.S.
 November 3 Roosevelt is re-elected President of the U.S.
 November 25 Japan and Germany agree to Anti-Comintern Pact.

1937

- January 20 Roosevelt is inaugurated for his second term.
 May 1 Third Neutrality Act is passed.
 August 12 Hugo L. Black is appointed to the Supreme Court.
 December 11 Italy withdraws from the League of Nations.

1938

- January 28 Roosevelt asks Congress to build up the Army and Navy in the possibility of war.
- June 23 Civil Aeronautics Act is created to regulate air traffic.
- June 25 The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act is passed.
- October 3 Hitler enters Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia.

1939

- January 5 Roosevelt submits budget to Congress with \$1,319,558,000 for national defense.
- March 14 Hitler invades Czechoslovakia.
- April 7 Mussolini invades Albania.
- September 1 Germany invades Poland beginning World War II.
- September 3 Great Britain and France declare war on Germany.
- September 5 United States officially declares neutrality in the war in Europe.
- September 17 Poland is invaded by the U.S.S.R.
- November 4 The sale of munitions is declared legal by the Fourth Neutrality Act.
- November 30 Finland is invaded by the U.S.S.R.

1940

- April 12 The Reciprocal Trades Agreement Act is re-instated.
- May 25 Roosevelt establishes the Office for Emergency Management.
- June 10 Italy declares war on Great Britain and France.
- June 14 German troops enter Paris.
- June 22 Armistice is signed between France and Germany.
- June 24-28 Republican National Convention nominates Wendell Willkie for President of the U.S.
- July 10 The Battle of Britain begins.
- July 15-19 Democratic National Convention re-nominates Roosevelt for President of the U.S.
- September 27 A ten year military alliance is signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan.
- November 5 Roosevelt is re-elected President of the U.S.

1941

- January 20 Roosevelt is inaugurated for the third time.
- June 22 Germany violates the non-aggression pact by invading the U.S.S.R.
- August 14 The Atlantic Charter is announced.
- October 28 Roosevelt establishes the Office of Lend-Lease Administration.
- December 7 Pearl Harbour is bombed.
- December 8 The United States declares war on Japan.
- December 11 War is declared on the U.S. by Germany and Italy. The United States declares war on Germany and Italy.
- December 18 The Office of Defense Transportation is established. The First War Powers Act is passed.

1942

- January 14 The Atlantic coast of the U.S. is attacked.

1942

January 26 The first U.S. troops land in North Ireland.
 February 6 The U.S. and Great Britain form the Combined Chiefs of Staff.
 March 27 The Second War Powers Act is passed.
 May 5 The rationing of sugar is instituted.
 June 3-6 Battle of Midway is Allied victory.
 June 5 War is declared on Bulgaria, Hungary, and Rumania by the U.S.
 June 25 Dwight D. Eisenhower is appointed commander of U.S. forces in Europe.
 August 7 U.S. troops land at Guadalcanal.
 October 24 William F. Halsey is appointed Allied Commander in the South Pacific.
 November 7-8 Allied forces land at Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers in North Africa.
 November 28 The rationing of coffee is instituted.
 December 1 Nationwide gas rationing is instituted.

1943

February 6 Eisenhower is appointed Commander in Chief of the Allied forces in North Africa.
 February 7 The rationing of shoes is instituted.
 March 1 Ration coupon books are started for the purchasing of food.
 April 1 Meat, fats, and cheese are rationed.
 MAY 12 German conflict in North Africa is ended.
 July 9-10 U.S. airborne troops and British paratroopers land in Sicily.
 July 25 Mussolini falls.
 September 8 Eisenhower announces Italy's unconditional surrender.
 November 28 Teheran Conference begins.

1944

June 4 Rome is taken by U.S. forces.
 July 25 The Allied forces launch an offensive from Normandy beach.
 August 25 U.S. and French forces liberate Paris.
 November 7 Roosevelt is re-elected President of the U.S.
 December 16 Battle of the Bulge.

1945

January 20 Roosevelt is inaugurated for his fourth term as President of the U.S.
 Armistice is signed between Hungary and the Allies.
 February 4-11 The Crimea Conference is held in the U.S.S.R.
 February 19 Battle for Iwo Jima begins.
 March 16 Iwo Jima captured for the Allies.
 April 12 Franklyn D. Roosevelt dies.
 April 30 Hitler commits suicide.
 May 2 Berlin surrenders.
 May 8 V-E Day ends the war in Europe.
 June 5 The Allied Control Council takes complete control over Germany.
 July 17 Postdam Conference begins.
 August 6 Atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima.

1945

August 8 War is declared on Japan by the U.S.S.R.
August 9 Atomic bomb is dropped on Nagasaki.
August 15 The rationing on gas and oil ends.
September 2 Japan formally surrenders to the Allies.
October 24 Twenty nine nations ratify the U.N. charter.
November 23 All food items except sugar are no longer rationed.

1946

April 8 The League of Nations transfers all its powers to the United Nations.
June 29 Selective Service Act is extended.
December 31 Truman declares the end of hostilities as a result of World War II.

1947

January 29 The United States announces that it will no longer be the mediator between Chiang Kaishek and the Communists in China.
March 12 The Truman Doctrine heightens tension between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.
March 31 The Selective Service law goes out of action.
June 11 The rationing of sugar comes to an end.

1948

May 14 Israel is recognized by the United States.
May 21 Truman asks Congress to make Alaska a state.
August 15 South Korea proclaims itself a Republic.
November 2 Harry S. Truman is elected President of the U.S.

1949

June 29 The last of U.S. troops leave Korea.
December 26 Einstein announces his "general theory of gravitation."

1950

January 31 Truman tells the public he has authorized the production of the hydrogen bomb.
June 25 South Korea is invaded by North Korea.
July 3 U.S. troops go against North Korean troops.

1951

February 26 The 22nd Amendment to the Constitution is ratified.
September 4 The first transcontinental television broadcast is made.
December 29 The Atomic Energy Commission announces the first electrical energy production from an atomic reactor.

1952

June 14 The Nautilus is dedicated as the nation's first atomic powered submarine.
November 4 Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected President of the United States.

1953

July 27 Armistice between Communists in Korea and the United Nations goes into effect ending the conflict in Korea.
August 8 The U.S.S.R. announces that it now has a hydrogen bomb.
September 1 Unemployment is lowest since World War II.

1954

- January 21 The Nautilus is launched for the first time.
May 17 Brown v. Board of Education deems racial segregation unconstitutional.
August 24 The Communist Control Act outlaws the Communist party in the United States.

1955

- February 9 The AFL and CIO merge and go public May 2.
April 12 The Salk vaccine is used to fight paralytic poliomyelitis.
May 31 Brown v. Board of Education (2nd decision) calls for the desegregation of all public schools.

1956

- March 1 The University of Alabama expels its first black student, Autherine Lucy.
November 6 Dwight D. Eisenhower is re-elected President of the United States.

1957

- July 19 The U.S. fires the first rocket with an atomic warhead in Nevada.
September 9 Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1957.
September 24 Federal troops are sent to Little Rock, Arkansas to integrate Central High School.
October 4 Russians launch Sputnik.

1958

- January 31 Explorer I, the first American satellite, is launched.
May 12 The U.S. and Canada establish Norad.
July 7 Congress authorizes Alaska as 49th state.

1959

- March 3 Pioneer IV is launched from Cape Canaveral.
March 18 Hawaii is admitted as the 50th state.
September 15 Soviet Premier Krushchev arrives in Washington.

1960

- May 6 Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1960.
May 7 The U.S. admits the U-2 was the aircraft shot down on May 1.
July 13 John F. Kennedy is nominated for the Presidency by the Democratic National Convention.
July 27 Richard M. Nixon is nominated for the Presidency by the Republican National Convention.

1961

- January 20 John F. Kennedy is inaugurated.
March 29 The 23rd Amendment is ratified.
May 5 U.S. Navy Commander Alan Shepherd, Jr. completes the nation's first manned space expedition.
May 20 U.S. marshals are sent into Alabama to control a mob which had attacked some Freedom Fighters.
June 3 President Kennedy and Premier Krushchev meet for first time.
August 13 The East Germans seal off East and West Berlin.

1962

- February 3 Most of U.S. trade with Cuba is embargoed by President Kennedy.

1962

- February 20 John H. Glenn, Jr. completes the first American orbit of the Earth.
May 8 Court action begins to outlaw the segregation of hospitals built with federal funds.
October 1 James H. Meredith becomes the first black American to be enrolled at the University of Mississippi.
October 22 Arms quarantine of Cuba by the U.S.

1963

- January 7 The Cuban Missile crisis is declared at an end.
April 22 U.S. troops are deployed into the Gulf of Siam as a result of the Laotian Crisis.
June 10 Congress passes legislation granting women equal pay for equal work.
June 11 George Wallace stands in the way of two black students entering the doors of the University of Alabama.
September 10 Three Alabama cities desegregate their public schools after Kennedy orders the state's National Guard into Federal service.
November 22 John F. Kennedy is shot.
Lyndon B. Johnson takes the oath of office as President of the United States.

1964

- March 29 The U.S. provides South Vietnam with an additional \$50,000,000 annually to finance the expansion of their armed forces.
July 2 The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is passed.
August 2 A U.S. destroyer is fired upon by three North Vietnamese PT boats.
August 7 U.S. action in Southeast Asia is approved by Congress.
October 14 Martin Luther King receives the Nobel Peace Prize.
November 3 Lyndon B. Johnson is re-elected President of the United States.

1965

- January 20 Johnson is inaugurated as President of the U.S.
July 30 The Medicare Act is instated as law.
August 10 Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana are made to register many black citizens under the Voting Rights Act.
August 19 U.S. troops destroy a Viet Cong stronghold near Viet Tuong in their first major battle.

1966

- January 31 The U.S. bombing of North Vietnam begins.
February 8 President Johnson and South Vietnamese Premier Ky sign the "Declaration of Honolulu."
July 1 Medicare goes into effect.
September 2 Governor George Wallace prohibits any Alabama school from complying with the desegregation law.

1967

- July 23 Puerto Ricans vote to remain a Commonwealth of the U.S. instead of an independent country or 51st state.

1967

October 2 Thurgood Marshall is appointed the first black associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

1968

January 23 North Korea seizes a U.S. Navy ship, the Pueblo, as a spy ship in Korean waters.

April 4 Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated.

June 5 Senator Robert F. Kennedy is assassinated.

November 1 All bombing ceases over North Vietnam.

November 4 Richard M. Nixon is elected President of the U.S.

1969

January 8 Sirhan Sirhan goes on trial for the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy.

January 20 Richard Nixon is inaugurated President of the United States.

January 21 Clay Shaw goes on trial for conspiracy in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Chronology of the Life of Geraldine Taylor

- 1925 Ms. Taylor is born on August 12.
- 1937 Ms. Taylor's childhood home in Whorton's Bend burns to the ground.
Ms. Taylor's father, Lorne Fitts, dies.
- 1941 Ms. Taylor begins working at Dwight Cotton Mill.
- 1944 Ms. Taylor marries Curtis Taylor in January.
After her marriage, Ms. Taylor moves to Alabama City.
- 1950 Ms. Taylor's first step-grandchild is born.
- 1958 Mr. and Ms. Taylor move to their present residence.
- 1959 Dwight Cotton Mill closes.
Ms. Taylor takes a job in Beemston Cotton Mill in Talledega.
- 1966 Mr. Taylor becomes ill.
Ms. Taylor quits her job in Talledega to help her husband.
Ms. Taylor goes to work at the chicken plant in Gadsden.
- 1969 Ms. Taylor quits the chicken plant for medical reasons.
Ms. Taylor begins working at Emco where she would remain until retirement.

Questions for an Oral Interview with Geraldine Taylor

1. When were you born?
2. Where were you born?
3. Where did you attend school?
4. Did you live in a rural area or an urban area?
5. How old were you when you began working?
6. What was your first job?
7. When did you begin working in the textile mill?
8. What were the conditions like in the mill?
9. What hours did you have to work?
10. When did you get married?
11. Was your husband significantly older than you?
12. Did you have any children?
13. Were you able to take vacations, and if so, where did you go?
14. Was there a significant number of women working in the mill?
15. Were wages fair?
16. How long did you work in the mill?
17. Was farm life hard?
18. How was your childhood different from your adult life?
19. What are your favorite memories?
20. What was it like during World War II; the Great Depression; the Korean conflict; Vietnam?

Interview with Geraldine Taylor

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OUTLINE

- I. Farm life
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 - B. Religion
- II. The Great Depression
 - A. Rationing
 - B. Family problems
- III. Mill life
 - A. Conditions in the mill
 - B. Wages
- IV. World War II
 - A. Impact on the mill
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The life of women in Alabama is one of much interest and diversity. In many cases, this life is characterized by hard work and an amazing work ethic. One such case is that of Geraldine Taylor. Born into a farming family from Etowah County, Ms. Taylor was the seventh daughter in the family. Her life as a young girl on a small farm in Whorton's Bend was a hard one. After becoming a young woman, Geraldine sought to escape the life of a farm girl by entering the work force. However, the strict work ethic inscribed into Ms. Taylor's personality by her many years on the farm carried over into her work in Alabama's textile mill industry. The differences between farm life and mill life may be numerous, but Ms. Taylor's experiences seem to show many similarities which are most probably the products of the strict work ethic which Ms. Taylor brought to both lives.¹

Geraldine Taylor was born on August 12, 1925. Her father, Lorne Fitts, was a farmer in the staunchly agricultural society of Whorton's Bend, Alabama. This farming community was situated on the banks of the Coosa River. Mr. Fitts farmed both in regular fields and what Ms. Taylor described as "the river bottoms."² "The river bottoms" was a stretch of land down by the river bank which could be farmed. Cotton, sweet potatoes, peanuts, and various other vegetables were grown and harvested by the family. Ms. Taylor relates that they worked in the fields every day. Having no hired hands, it was the family members who had to do the work of the farm.³

Life in rural Alabama during the 1920's and 1930's consisted

of two things for most people: working and going to church. Church was a big part of life for most of the people of Alabama at this time. People sought an escape from the harshness of life by looking toward heaven. The enrollment in Protestant churches in Alabama in the 1920's increased dramatically. This increase was due not only to bad economic conditions but also to the increase in activity by the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK began an onslaught of attacks on members of the Catholic church at this time, and as a result many Catholic Alabamians changed religious denominations.⁴ This religious fervor in the lives of Alabamians was increased again in 1925 when the verdict of the Scopes trial was passed in Tennessee. While some educated church members were able to consolidate the beliefs of Christianity with the theory of evolution, the more populous uneducated citizens of Alabama saw evolution as an outrage.⁵ Protestant theology taught the literal interpretation of the Bible, and most Alabamians did not question this belief.

Geraldine Taylor's family was not unique in religious beliefs. Every Sunday, her mother, Vessy Fitts, would take Ms. Taylor and her two sisters to the local Baptist church. Ms. Taylor stressed the fact that her mother took them to church rather than just sending them. By this time, there were only three children left at home on the farm. Together, the woman and her three daughters would walk from their farm house to church.⁶ The local church was the center of social life for the rural areas of Alabama. Church socials and barbecues were

many times the only outlets for social activity. Since most were too poor to own a car or did not know how to drive a car, everything had to be within walking distance of the farm. The local church was the obvious gathering place for most individuals.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, many Americans were devastated. Banks began closing, and many people lost the money which they had spent their entire lives trying to save. It is quoted in Alabama: The History of a Deep South State that, Alabamians born during the first third of the twentieth century would live through the most severe depression and the bloodiest war in the history of the world. They were a tough generation and lived in trying times.⁷

The Great Depression brought much hardship to Alabamians. Citizens of Etowah County who had moved away from the traditional Democratic political view of the region returned to the party when Franklyn D. Roosevelt was elected President of the United States in 1932. They moved through these years of hardship looking forward to a day when conditions would get better. Before those conditions did get better, however, America would become involved in the second World War.⁸

For Geraldine Taylor's family, the Great Depression was coupled with great grief over the death of Lorne Fitts. Ms. Taylor's father became sick in 1935, and he would continue to be ill for the next two years. Near the end of Mr. Fitts' life, yet another tragedy struck the family. The farm house which

had been the home of the family for so many years burned to the ground. Mr. Fitts, who was inside the house, had to be carried from the blaze. The family did not only lose their home. Because of the collapse of the banking system at the beginning of the Depression, Mr. Fitts had moved all of the family's money to a holding place in the chimney. When the farm burned, all the family's money burned also.⁹ This is just one example of the rough times experienced by Alabama citizens during the Great Depression.

There was a significant rise in the rural population during the years of the Great Depression. This is partly because people saw farm life as a form of stability and a return to the good old days.¹⁰ However, the Depression was felt by every American citizen. Ms. Taylor, who was a very young child at this time, has very vague memories of the Depression. She says that what she remembers most is what her mother and father told her. What impressed her most was the incredible depression of morale of most people. Most really did not know if conditions would ever get any better.¹¹

Even though the Depression brought hard times to the people of Alabama, Ms. Taylor still has fond memories of her childhood. One of her favorite memories is Christmas on the farm. Before he became ill, Mr. Fitts had taken an active role in holiday activities. He would go out into the woods and cut a Christmas tree for the family. According to Ms. Taylor, the children would pick holly berries and pop popcorn which would be strung

and then hung onto the tree. The children received one toy each along with fruits, nuts, and candy. Ms. Taylor stressed the fact that, "Christmas means the Christ-child was born." Even though they did not receive many presents, the family still enjoyed the Christmas season. Mrs. Fitts would cook a large Christmas dinner for the family. People in the surrounding area also looked out for one another. If a family was too poor to have a Christmas dinner, women in the area would fix extra food to take to that family.¹²

Etowah County began to improve its economic conditions toward the end of the 1930's. Among the industries which helped ease the pain of the Depression were the Republic Steel Corporation and the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. Along with several local textile mills, these industries brought jobs to the area.¹³ Citizens all over the county began returning to the cities and obtaining jobs in these companies. Ministers across the state warned of the evils of big businessmen.¹⁴ However, the prospect of getting a job which might be able to bring their families away from the brink of poverty was enough to make most Alabamians overlook the dangers against which their religious leaders preached.

After Mr. Fitts' death in 1937, the remaining family members took up the burden of chores on the farm. From the dawn until the setting of the sun, Ms. Taylor, her younger sister, and her mother worked in the fields during the summer. They picked cotton, sweet potatoes, and anything else they could grow.

The children attended John S. Jones Elementary School and later Southside High School during the Fall, Winter, and Spring months. According to Ms. Taylor, working on the farm was the only way they could survive. In 1941, just before Ms. Taylor turned sixteen years old, she applied for a job at Dwight Cotton Mill in Alabama City. The legal age for workers in the mill at the time was sixteen years old. However, since Ms. Taylor's mother had become ill, the family was in bitter need of an extra income. Therefore, Ms. Taylor changed her birth certificate in order to be able to get a job at the mill.¹⁵

On December 8, 1941, just one day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, the United States declared war on Japan. Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, and the United States reciprocated this action. The United States had now officially entered World War II. The years to follow would prove to be incredibly bloody and depressing. Many Alabama citizens did service in the armed forces during World War II. It is reported that around 250,000 people from Alabama took part in the nation's effort to rid the world of the threat of Adolf Hitler.¹⁶ For those on the homefront, World War II was also a very important part of history.

For Geraldine Taylor, the mention of World War II brings back very vivid memories. According to Ms. Taylor, everyone knew someone who took part in the war. The people at home were very worried that their loved ones and friends might never return

home. Ms. Taylor had just begun working at Dwight Cotton Mill when the war began. Workers in the mill worked seven days per week in three shifts trying to do their part for the American soldiers.¹⁷

Life on the homefront changed drastically for most Americans during World War II. Basic foods such as sugar, coffee, and flour were rationed in hopes of aiding the war effort. Clothing items such as shoes were also rationed. Ms. Taylor says, "It was real depressing and it was hard work." Most of this depression was caused by the rationing of products coupled with the natural fear of war that was in everyone's heart. Many boys from Whorton's Bend were sent to Europe and the Pacific. Because of this, Ms. Taylor and other girls who lived on neighboring farms began a close-knit web of friendships. After church on Sunday nights, the girls would get together and walk down the river to the sight of the new Southside bridge. The bridge was a project of Franklyn D. Roosevelt's New Deal, and according to Ms. Taylor, the progress made on this bridge was a way for the girls to get out and kill time. They would walk down to the river and see how far the men had come in the previous week.¹⁸

When Ms. Taylor began working in Dwight Cotton Mill in 1941, her life changed dramatically. She was forced to quit school in order to work during the day shift. Because her family did not own a car, she had to ride to work with an older sister and brother-in-law who did not live far from the Fitts farm

in Whorton's Bend. Conditions in the mill were far from ideal. According to Ms. Taylor, the memories most vivid in her mind are the incredible heat and intense amount of dust present. There were no canteens or vending machines at Dwight at this time. A lunch wagon came by selling sandwiches and other foods. Workers did not get a lunch break. One had to eat while he or she worked on his or her job. Upon exiting the mill after her first day of work, Ms. Taylor vowed never to return. However, the next morning she awoke and went back to the mill. She would continue to do so until the mill's doors were closed.¹⁹

Ms. Taylor's persistence on this job and on the many which she would work later in her life can be explained in one simple way. Her father and mother had instilled into Ms. Taylor an incredible work ethic which she would carry with her for the rest of her life. Working on a farm was hard, but Ms. Taylor never resented what she was asked to do. For her, work was simply a means of surviving. However, she did tire of working in the fields of Whorton's Bend. Ms. Taylor relates that at one point in her early life while picking sweet potatoes from the ground she made a revelation. She told herself that whenever she was able to work a job outside of a dirty field she would never quit. Working in a textile mill in the small Alabama town of Alabama City was a form of freedom for Geraldine Taylor. It was freedom from a hard life working the land day in and day out.²⁰

Mill working also brought another change into the life

of Geraldine Taylor. While attending a Sunday evening service at Malone Freewood Baptist Church with a friend she had met at work, Ms. Taylor met Curtis Taylor. Mr. Taylor worked for the Republic Steel Corporation in Alabama City and served as choir director at Malone Freewood. The following Sunday night, Mr. Taylor asked Geraldine if he could escort her home. She accepted, and three months and three days later they were married. They were married in January of 1944. Their life together was a joyful one and one about which Ms. Taylor has many fond memories.²¹

On May 8, 1945, World War II ended on the European front. On September 2, 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied forces in the Pacific. Troops began returning from all around the world to the large cities and small towns of the United States. The impact felt by Americans was incredible. During the war, the government had installed a Chemical Warfare Training Center near Gadsden known as Camp Sibert. An air corps depot was also built in Glencoe which lies just east of Gadsden.²²

Ms. Taylor remembers the day the war ended very well. Dwight Cotton Mill shut down along with most businesses in Alabama City. According to Ms. Taylor, everyone converged on Wall Street and celebrated the wonderful news. It was somewhat like a day at Mardi Gras for Ms. Taylor. She remembers people running around and yelling and honking the horns of their cars. The celebration lasted well into the early morning hours. However, everything returned to normal the following day.²³

It was time for America to put her sights on the future. The years of the Great Depression and World War II had been hard on the citizens of the United States.²⁴ The men and women of the workforce sought to carry on and form a brighter future for the generations to come.

According to Christine S. Puckett and Joe Barns in their book, A Panorama of Northeast Alabama and Etowah County, two distinct problems plagued the region after World War II. Women had taken jobs during the war. Most did not want to surrender those jobs when the war was over. Also, men who had been stationed at Camp Sibert had decided to settle in the area, but there was not enough housing to satisfy them.²⁵ These problems were not resolved easily and caused tension between many individuals in Etowah County at this time.

Ms. Taylor remembers several instances in which she matched wits with men from Camp Sibert. However, most happened during World War II before she was married. Many men from Camp Sibert obtained jobs in Dwight Cotton Mill working alongside the local women as battery hands and loom fixers. Ms. Taylor relates that the young women would often trick these amorous young men into doing the ladies' jobs. They would promise to go on dates with these men if the men would work the looms while the women took breaks. The women would also use the men when the circus was in town. Ms. Taylor remembers several times that the ladies would persuade the men to pay their way into the circus and then leave the misguided boys once inside.²⁶

Mill life for most workers was hard. A weaver had to run anywhere from twenty to thirty looms at one time at Dwight Cotton Mill. In many cases there was danger involved in working these looms. If a weaver was not careful, she might get her arm caught on one of the many shuttles which pushed cotton through the loom. Battery hands were also at some risk. These workers were in charge of filling the storage bins (batteries) which fed cotton onto the shuttles. If a weaver was not paying attention to her job, she might easily catch the battery hand in the loom.²⁷

Despite the bad conditions of the mill, Ms. Taylor remembers her time at Dwight as a very happy part of her life. She attributes most of that happiness to the fact that the workers in the mill were like a family. Workers were constantly playing pranks on one another. In one instance, a worker made a leather boy and leather girl which he positioned on the ends of one of Ms. Taylor's looms. When the loom turned, the little boy and girl would dance together. While Ms. Taylor was working she began to watch this dancing couple. Unknowingly, she began to dance along with them. Just as she started dancing, one of the mill head bosses came by and saw the spectacle. He became very angry at Ms. Taylor and subsequently did away with the dancing boy and girl.²⁸

The union movement for industrial workers in America had been on the rise since the nineteenth century. In conjunction, more women were employed in the cotton industry than any other

textile industry at this time.²⁹ It is no surprise, therefore that Ms. Taylor took an active role in the union which was set up at Dwight Cotton Mill. Along with other women at the mill, Ms. Taylor joined the union hoping to receive better conditions and wages. When Ms. Taylor began working at Dwight, She made \$12.50 per week. Once she learned to weave, she was moved up to \$20.00 per week. With the installation of the union in Dwight, weavers began being paid by production which, for Ms. Taylor, worked out very well.³⁰

Ms. Taylor had many reservations about the unions, however. She saw much abuse of the system during her years at work. According to Ms. Taylor, people would use the union as a reason for not doing what was expected of them. If they knew the union would support them, then they saw no reason to do any more than the bare minimum. In Ms. Taylor's eyes, this was an outrage.³¹

Regardless of the injustices committed by some, Ms. Taylor still remembers the good times more than the bad. Because of this, she was very sad when Dwight Cotton Mill closed its doors in 1959. She relates that many people had built their lives around that mill. When the decision was made to move the plant to South Carolina, many people wept. Ms. Taylor saw the closing of the mill as a very grave experience. She felt that she was not only losing a job, but she was also losing part of her family.³²

Ms. Taylor would move on to several other jobs in textile mills before retiring. Throughout the course of each job, she

would carry the same work ethic. Ms. Taylor had been raised to respect hard work. Her life on a small farm in Whorton's Bend taught her that nothing could be gained without work. For this reason, Ms. Taylor brought a spirit of dedication to each and every job she encountered. In many cases, she made friendships which would last a lifetime. This fact also explains why the times in her life which Ms. Taylor remembers most vividly are those times spent on the farm and in the mill during her married life. She is very proud of the fact that she had a very good husband who was always good to her. She also feels that her parents, although strict, were very loving and kind.³³ It can be seen that Ms. Taylor had a very nurturing support system during the most difficult times of her life. Ms. Taylor may not be unique in her beliefs or practices, but she is certainly a fine example of a poor Alabama farm girl who would let nothing stand in the way of her principles. In her move from the country to the city, Ms. Taylor retained the ethical background characteristic of the Alabama farmer. She represents a time when honesty was paramount and deceit was a sin.

NOTES

1. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. William Warren Rogers and others, eds., Alabama: the History of a Deep South State (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), 462.
5. Ibid., 464.
6. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
7. Rogers, 465.
8. Herbert L. Watson, A History of Etowah County, Alabama (Birmingham, AL: Roberts and Son, 1968), 129.
9. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
10. Rogers, 465.
11. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
12. Ibid.
13. Watson, 129.
14. Rogers, 473.
15. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
16. Rogers, 517.
17. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.
22. Watson, 130.
23. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
24. Christine S. Puckett and Joe Barnes, A Panorama of Northeast Alabama and Etowah County (Gadsden, AL: Starr Publications, 1992), 77.
25. Ibid.
26. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Leon Stein and Annette K. Baxter, eds., Women in America: from Colonial Times to the 20th Century (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 175.
30. Interview with Geraldine Taylor. November 11, 1995.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.

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