

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

700 PELHAM ROAD N.

JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA 36265-9982

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

TELEPHONE: (205) 782-5632

Gift and Release Agreement:

We Earl Floyd and Kelli Jones
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at Earl Floyd's ~~own~~ house on the date(s) of 1-22-96 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.

Sheraldine R. Floyd
W.E. Floyd
(Interviewee's signature)

Date 1-22-96

805 Williams St.
(Address)

Boaz, AL 35957

205-593-5928
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Kelli Jones
(Interviewer's signature)

Date 1-22-96

7013 JSU
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Jacksonville, AL 36265

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JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

700 PELHAM ROAD N.

JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA 36265-9982

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

TELEPHONE (205) 782-5622

Gift and Release Agreement:

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INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: William Earl Floyd MF

Address: 805 Williams St Boaz, AL 35957

Phone number(s): 205-593-5928

Approximate age or date of birth: 5-5-1919

Mother's Name: Ruth Cleveland Floyd

Father's Name: Andrew Jackson Floyd

Places lived and when: Born in Boaz. Lived in Youngstown, OH during service and Europe/Japan.

Education: high school

Religion: Baptist

Business, political and social memberships (past and present) _____

Present occupation: retired

Former occupations: military service and Gadsden Steel Mill

Special Skills: Welder

Major Accomplishments: World War II veteran

National Events in which interviewee has participated: _____

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: _____

National born U.S. citizen? Yes No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes No Date: _____

Country from which he/she emigrated: N/A

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee: _____

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____

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Table of Contents of the Interview

- I. Introduction about William Earl Floyd and a brief history.
- II. Floyd's life during the depression.
 - A. His childhood on Sand Mountain, Alabama.
 - B. What they did for entertainment.
 - C. Sharecropping, cotton, the food they ate, and how much it cost.
- III. World War II and the Steel Mill.
- IV. King David Cleveland-the story of William Earl Floyd's grandfather.
 - A. His migration from Hartwell, Georgia to Friendship, Alabama.
 - B. His life at Friendship, Alabama.
 - C. His life during the Civil War.
 - D. His job as a farmer and a peddler.
- V. History of various members of his family, such as King David's wife, his daughters, and Earl Floyd's sisters and brothers.

Word List

1. Sand Mountain -- This mountain is located in North Alabama. Albertville, Boaz, Friendship, and Fort Payne are all located on Sand Mountain.
2. Boaz -- This is a city in Marshall County.
3. Friendship -- This is a very small community in Marshall County. It is about fifteen miles from Boaz.
4. Hartwell -- This is a city in Hart County, Georgia. It is located in the Northeast of Georgia in the Piedmont "black belt."
5. William Earl Floyd -- He is my, Kelli M. Jones, grandfather on my mother's side of the family.
6. King David Cleveland -- He is my great, great grandfather. He is Earl Floyd's grandfather on his mother's side of the family.
7. Republic Steel -- This is a steel plant located in Gadsden, Alabama.
8. "The Panic" -- This is what my grandfather refers to as the Great Depression.

**"King David Cleveland's Migration to
Alabama at the End of the Nineteenth Century"**

by

Kelli M. Jones

Jacksonville State University

Jacksonville, Alabama 36265



"King David Cleveland's Migration to Alabama at the End of the Nineteenth Century"

In 1898 King David Cleveland and his family decided to leave their home in Hartwell, Georgia and move to Friendship, Alabama.¹ They packed everything they could fit into a small covered wagon and started on their journey. King David Cleveland is my great, great grandfather. The purpose for my writing this paper was to find out why he would want to leave his home in Georgia and how he lived once he arrived in Alabama. His family were prominent planters in Hart County, Georgia. His grandfather, Reubon Cleveland, had bought a plantation in Hartwell on Whinnery's Creek in 1837 and his brother, T. J. Cleveland, had kept it successful. There are a few possible reasons for King David's migration. The various reasons include the financial panic during the 1890s, or the impoverished lands due to annual wood burnings, or because some his closest friends, the Adams' and the Dyars, were already settling in North Alabama.²

Hartwell is a part of Hart County. It is located in Northeast Georgia in the Piedmont "black belt." This area was popular for producing abundant cotton crops. Many of the first settlers owned slaves and acquired large plantations. The growth of industrialism in the South had resulted in a economic decline for farmers. The price of cotton, the major crop in Georgia, dropped rapidly after the Civil War. After the economic collapse from 1893-1897, farmers

¹King David Cleveland was not an actual king. My family has a custom of naming their children after famous people. Besides King David, there is also George Washington Cleveland, Thomas Jefferson Cleveland, and Andrew Jackson Floyd.

²See Earl Floyd, Interview by Kelli M. Jones, 22 January 1996, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Ala; and John Baker, History of Hart County (Atlanta: Foote and Davis Company, 1933), 54.

were in desperate trouble. Also, in Hart County, the custom of burning woods for pasturage resulted in the depletion of all litter and vegetable matter from year to year. Cattlemen thought that it improved grazing in the early spring and some people just liked the smell of pine burning. Unfortunately they did not realize that they were ruining their land. Later, the government started a "no fence" or stock law, but much damage had already been done to the land. Farmers would also clear land and lay crops as far as the land would permit, with the rows running up and down slopes. This caused an erosion of the soils because the fertile soils would be washed away into the valleys below and would become unfit for cultivation. So, King David Cleveland may have moved because the land and money in farming was not as good as before in Hart County. My grandfather, William Earl Floyd, said that some of King David's friends, the Adams' and the Dyars, were already beginning to move to Friendship, Alabama. They had sent word of the abundant land in Alabama and this may be another reason why he moved to Alabama.³

In 1898, only a few years before Alabama would create a new state constitution, King David Cleveland and his family left Hartwell and began their journey to Alabama. He traveled with his wife, Jane Vickory Cleveland, and his three daughters, Anna, Caroline, and Ruth, my great grandmother. Ruth said she and her sisters would sometimes walk along beside the wagon until they were tired. Ruth was six years old at the time. A black couple also

³See Albert Saye, Georgia: History and Government (Austin, Tex: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1973), 96 and 178; Leon Wolff, Lockout: The Story of the Homestead Strike of 1892 (New York City: Harper and Row, 1965), 2; M. D. Mobley and Robert Hoskins, Forestry in the South (Atlanta: Turner E. Smith and Company, 1956), 224; and Floyd, Interview.

traveled with King David and his family. They were slaves before the Civil War, but after they settled in Friendship they became equals to King David and his family. Each of the families helped each other until their death. After the Civil War, the couple had the opportunity to leave the plantation. Even so, they remained with the Clevelands, not as servants, but as friends. They traveled over Sand Mountain in North Alabama and settled in Phil Campbell, Alabama. After two years, they decided to move to Friendship and this is where they remained. The Dyars and the Adams helped King David buy 180 acres of land and he built a dog-trot house. This is a house with only two rooms and a opening down the center to let the breeze come through to keep the house cool. On one side of his house there was a kitchen and on the other side was a bedroom with a fireplace. My grandfather said it was the widest fireplace he had ever seen. After a few years, he had to give the state 80 acres of his land. This happened because he could not pay his land taxes. He did not mind giving up the land because it was not very profitable for planting. They grew almost everything they needed for food, and they had cattle for their meat. My grandfather said he remembers that King David loved to eat cheese and fish, and drink coffee. He also loved to eat wild squirrels and rabbits. Sometimes he would go out to the back of his house and kill a squirrel to make squirrel dumplings. King David was also a peddler, especially during the winter months. He would load a wagon up with plenty of meat and vegetables and leave at 3 A.M. for Boaz, which is about 15 miles away. He would wrap hot coals in a cloth for the purpose of keeping himself warm. He would stop at Cove Springs, about half way, build a fire, and make some coffee with spring water. He knew a great deal of people in Boaz and would usually sell everything he had to them. By the end of the day he had usually acquired a paper sack full of money to take home to

his family. They did not have a great deal of money, but they had enough considering the economic strain on farmers. During this time, government politics supported a laissez-faire economy where the government did not interfere with business and most rural farmers leased land from agribusinessmen. King David was fortunate in the fact that he owned his own land.⁴

In 1893, the depression struck America and brought in social and political turbulence. Farm prices plummeted, workers were fired, and factories were shut down. In the late 1800s, the conservative democrats created the Bourbon democracy. Alabama leaders were conservatives or "Bourbons" which consisted of white middle-class businessmen who shared the belief that industry and commerce could prosper most where they were regulated least. They wanted to restore , or redeem, the "Old South" ideal made up of the old southern aristocracy. The conservatives were dominated by the Alabama "black belt" and the Birmingham businessmen. In 1887, farmers across America began to organize and created the Farmers' Alliance. This group was created by small farmers who felt that they were being manipulated by the big city businessmen. This brought about the Populist party made up of politicians who supported the farmers. During the depression, Alabama farmers demanded help from the state and federal governments which resulted in increased appropriations to the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Auburn University. In 1896, Joseph Johnston was elected governor of Alabama. He was a champion to small farmers and destroyed the upper class

⁴See Floyd, Interview; and Tennant McWilliams, A New Day Coming: Alabama and the Problem of Change, 1877-1920 (Troy, Ala: Troy State University Press, 1978), 176.

control of politics. In Georgia, Tom Watson had become the champion of the rights of farmers and was known as the "Father of Rural Free Delivery." At the same time, Booker T. Washington began his work for the rights of black citizens. In 1895, he delivered an address at the Cotton State's Exposition on behalf of black rights and had established the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama for the purpose of black citizens to receive a better education.⁵

Alabama can be divided into three sections: the Tennessee Valley, the Black Belt, and the Gulf Coast plain. Friendship is a part of Marshall County which is in the Tennessee Valley. Their principal crops are corn and cotton and land cost about \$25 to \$100 an acre. The Tennessee Valley consists of deep red clay soil and the southern rim of the valley or the low ridge of the mountains has rich deposits of coal and iron. Alabama was known to have the best and cheapest land. The state government gave a great deal of land grants to new people moving into North Alabama. Many new settlers were attracted to the Tennessee Valley for this reason.⁶

Friendship is a small community in Marshall County. The children attended Clear Creek School, the only school in Friendship. They had one church--Clear Creek Church. It was a small wooden church, but was later replaced by a much bigger church. The Clevelands eventually tore the dog-trot house down and replaced it with a larger brick house. Everyone who lived there was close and they helped each other through daily life. There

⁵See McWilliams, *A New Day Coming*, 177; and Saye, *Georgia*, 172-178.

⁶See Lowry W. Statler, ed., *Alabama Land Book* (Montgomery, Ala: Brown Printing Company, 1916), 23 and 111; Alabama State Department of Immigration, *Alabama* (Montgomery, Ala: Brown Printing Company, 1911), 167; and Melton A. McLaurin and Michael V. Thomason, *The Image of Progress* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 38.

was a spring behind King David's house which was nicknamed the "everlasting spring," because it never ran out of water. It was always cold, so the children would play in it during the summer. The family would also put their butter and milk in the spring to keep it cold. My grandfather said that he did not think that an electric refrigerator could keep milk that cold.

King David Cleveland had acquired a great deal of intelligence on his own, without much formal education. He was admired by his friends and family, and stressed the importance of maintaining a strong set of principals and values. He continued to take care of his family throughout his elder years. My grandfather remembers him giving Ruth, his mother and King David's daughter, ten to twenty dollars every now and then to help the family out. He was fifty years old when he moved to Alabama and lived to be eighty-four years old.

When doing research on a subject that occurred almost a century ago, it is often difficult to obtain the exact reason why events occurred. I will never know exactly why King David decided to move to Alabama, because I could never find out exactly what he was thinking. However, I can make an educated guess. In lieu of the research I completed, I think that he moved because of the reasons I mentioned earlier in the paper. It could have been simply because his friends were already living in Alabama, but the depression and the impoverished lands probably helped in making his decision.

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**"Life in the North Alabama Hill
Country: 1919-1959"**

by

Kelli M. Jones

**Jacksonville State University
Jacksonville, Alabama 36265**



Life in the North Alabama Hill
Country: 1919-1959

The hill country of north Alabama is an interesting and unique place to live. The people are mostly small businessmen, subsistence farmers, and factory workers. They live a simple life. Recreation includes fishing, hunting, playing the guitar, and going to dances on Saturday night. A person's character is judged on their ability to raise a good family more than how much money one can acquire. Religion and education are important to them, but raising a decent family and paying the bills come first. People who live in the hill country did not think of this as a bad life. My grandfather grew up on Sand Mountain. He said, "back in the good ol' days people worked hard, but we had fun and we did not need the fancy things people need today. Back in those days people were good, we never once had to lock our front doors. No one would steal from you, except maybe chickens and that's it."¹

My grandfather was born in Boaz, Alabama, therefore I will concentrate on this area of Alabama in my paper. My grandfather's name is William Earl Floyd and he was born on May 5, 1919. His family were tenant farmers. They rented their land and house. He attended school and worked on the farm until he was twenty-one, at which time he was drafted into the army. They grew most everything they needed; cotton, corn, and cane to make sorghum syrup. They raised chickens for eggs, and cows for milk. They bought things they needed from the grocery store on credit, such as salt, tobacco, kerosene for the lamps, and matches. When they gathered their crop

¹Earl Floyd, Interview by Kelli M. Jones, 22 January 1996, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Ala.

in the fall, they would pay their bill. He said, "living on the farm was a hard life, but it was a good life." He seemed to thoroughly enjoy growing up on the farm, but because of modern changes, now he says "people have come in and messed things up. They brought in these [fashion] outlets and modernized things." He said, "people back then had better morals. They didn't say dirty words and everyone came to the dinner table at the same time. Families were closer then. I wish times were like that again."²

Boaz is a small town on Sand Mountain in north Alabama. It was organized in 1836 and it remained very small. In 1872 there was an increase in the number of settlers. This was Boaz's real beginning. In 1896, E. F. Whitmar drew up a charter and Boaz was incorporated as a town. The population of Boaz in 1920 was 1,369 people. The Ernestine Cotton Mill was built in 1925 and its name later changed to Boaz Mills in 1936. During the fall my great-grandfather, Andrew Jackson Floyd, and his family would load the cotton up on a wagon and take it to the cotton mill. They would sell it for usually 8 to 10 cents a pound. One-fourth of the money went to the owners of the land, and the rest was used to pay their grocery bill and buy clothes for the winter. Things were not as expensive in the 1930s, butter usually cost 10 cents a pound, milk was 15 to 20 cents, and a good suit cost around 10 dollars. They made most of their clothes at home and bought things like overhauls and shoes from the store. My grandfather said that people did not have to dress up real nice back then because no one else did. He thought that the farmers were better off than the city people, "we had better stuff to eat and the city people had to buy what they ate." The farmers

²See Floyd, Interview; and James Brown, ed., Up Before Daylight (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 29.

took pride in their work. My grandfather said "any farmer that couldn't raise lard and butter wasn't a very good farmer."³

Prior to World War II, Alabama was an agrarian state. People were closely tied to the land and cash came from cotton, corn, and some peddling of produce grown on the farm. Cotton was the staple crop in every part of Alabama. The state can be divided into four different sections: the Tennessee valley, the mountainous section, the black belt, and the pine belt. The Tennessee valley is one of the richest and oldest sections of the state. It has deep red clay soil that grows cotton, corn, oats, red clover, and alfalfa. The southern rim of the valley is mountainous with rich deposits of iron, coal, and marble, the richest in the world. Settlers came as early as 1804. They were mostly pioneers from North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia searching for new and rich land. The Tennessee valley includes the counties of Jackson, Madison, Limestone, Lauderdale, Colbert, Morgan, Marshall, Lawrence, Franklin, and DeKalb. Boaz is a part of Marshall County. Marshall County is more of a mountainous region, but profitable farming can be done on more level areas such as Cullman and Albertville. Marshall county is made up of 428,760 acres of land. The Tennessee River flows through the center. The county seat is Guntersville. It is known as the "Huntington lily clay loam" and is much esteemed for abundant crops. Land cost any where from \$25 to \$100 an acre in the early 1900s. The climate is considered perfect for farming with an elevation of 600-1400 feet above sea level.⁴

³See Floyd, Interview; and Katherine M. Duncan and Larry J. Smith, The History of Marshall County (Albertville, Ala.: Thompson Printing, 1969), 106-112.

⁴See J. Mack Lofton, Jr, Voices From Alabama (Tuscaloosa: University of

Marshall County was never a stereotype of the Old South. The farms were small when compared to the traditional plantation system. The Great Depression of the 1930s was noticed mostly among the middle and upper classes and Marshall County had a more rural, lower class system. The agricultural society was affected by the depression in the early 1920s and did not fully recover for twenty years. Sixty-four percent of all Alabama farmers were tenant farmers. Tenant farmers made up a large number of the population in Marshall County, but they did not feel as if they were living in a depressed economy. My grandfather does not remember the depression, or what he calls "the panic", as a unhappy time period. He says "everyone suffered, but living on the farm was a good life and we grew everything we needed." He told me that no one had money, but the rich man and we all helped each other out. Most everyone was poor so we did not think we were missing out on anything.⁵

The Progressive Era of the 1920s brought in Bibb Graves as mayor and the growth of the new Populist party. The Tennessee Valley Authority funded the development of a new dam in Muscle Shoals for purpose of creating electricity in factories and mills in surrounding areas. Alabama

Alabama Press, 1993), xvi, 6; Alabama State Department of Immigration, The Cheapest Rich Land in the World (Montgomery, Ala.: Brown Printing Company, 1912), 83, 85; Alabama State Department of Immigration, Alabama (Montgomery, Ala.: Brown Printing Company, 1911), 40, 153, 167; and Lowry W. Statler, ed., Alabama Land Book (Montgomery, Ala.: Brown Printing Company, 1916), 23, 111.

⁵See Duncan and Smith, Marshall County, 133; William W. Rogers and others, Alabama: The History of a Deep South State (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 465; and Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects in the State of Alabama, ed., Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 81.

began shifting from a predominately agrarian state to one with more of a balance between industry and agriculture. There was a rapid expansion of cotton mills in Alabama with a gain of 45.4 percent of running bails of cotton in contrast to 6.8 percent throughout the nation from 1913 to 1930.⁶

The mountain people did not think much of all these new developments in Alabama and the United States. They concentrated more on their own culture. After all, they did not have the modern media of today to keep up on the new way to live and would probably not care to change even if they did. They had (and still do have) a strong sense of individualism with great religious influences, a strong sense of honor, and strong morals. There only transportation was to either walk, ride horseback, or ride in a horse and buggy, so they usually never traveled more than fifty miles from home. The Sand Mountain people have a saying "that if you ain't related to someone when you move here, you soon will be." Families and neighbors were close. They had to depend on each other for necessities in life. If someone in the family got sick, neighbors would come out and help. My grandfather said, "not many people went to hospitals. Doctors would come to your house if someone was real sick or to deliver a baby." If a family member was diagnosed with tuberculoses, then the doctor would normally send them to Arizona. The doctors thought that the Arizona dry air and heat would cure tuberculoses.

⁶See Duncan and Smith, Marshall County, 136; Lofton, Voices, 546; Sarah W. Wiggons, ed., From Civil War to Civil Rights: Alabama 1860-1960 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 336; Wendell M. Adamson, Industrial Activity in Alabama 1913-1932 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 30; and Burton Troup, ed., Only Yesterday (Guntersville, Ala.: By the Author, P.O. 982, 1988), 29, 47.

Recreation and entertainment was the high point of living on the farm. There are many creeks and streams in Marshall County and most children grew up playing in them. The children would climb trees and play with frogs and "craw dads." They wore overhauls without a shirt and went barefooted. The adults looked forward to the dances at the VFW on Saturday nights. My grandfather said he would sometimes get to play his guitar at them. They would usually cook chicken stew and dance until midnight. He said, "we had a good time in a very simple way--it wasn't as complicated as today." He told me that if there was not a dance on Saturday night, they would sit home and listen to the Grand Ole Opera on the battery- operated radio. Not many people had electricity back then and so you had to use batteries for the radio. Many people also enjoyed hunting and fishing. My grandfather never really hunted, but he did enjoy fishing.⁷

The people on Sand Mountain did not have the luxuries of today, but they were happy. They kept their milk cold in the well which my grandfather says is the coldest milk he ever drank. They heated their water on the stove and bathed outside. They kept their meat in a "meat box" and salted it down to keep it from spoiling. They had plenty of ham, back bone, pork chops, and chicken. He said, "my mother [Ruth Cleveland Floyd] was a good cook and she kept plenty of food on the table." He studied at night by a kerosene lamp, which he said was dim and hurt his eyes. A big day on Sand Mountain occurs every fourth Sunday in May. It is called Decoration. People get together after church and put fresh flowers on the graves of their loved ones. This is a very popular event, so popular in fact, that my grandfather did not even think to mention it. After all, does everyone not have Decoration?

⁷See Floyd, Interview; and Lofton, *Voices*, 19.

Religion was important to the people on Sand Mountain. If they were not talking about religion, they were arguing over local politics to pass the time. Although they were predominately democratic, there were enough republicans to keep things interesting.⁸

By 1940 President Franklin D. Roosevelt had brought us out of the depression and into World War II. My grandfather and his two brothers, Archie and Alton, were drafted into the army. He fought for the Rhineland Campaign, at the Battle of Remagen, and was one of the first soldiers to reach Eagles' Nest. He was a tanker and later was wounded and received a purple heart. During the war years, Alabama saw a growth in the number of manufacturing establishments due to the large demand for metals, cloth, and building materials. From 1939-1947, these establishments increased in size by more than fifty percent. Industrialization in Alabama began to increase rapidly. Factory sites were replacing farm fields across the state. Primary metals and textiles were the two largest employers in manufacturing.⁹

My grandfather returned from the war in 1945 and started working at Republic Steel in Gadsden. He was a burner, a welder, and he drove rivets. He had to layer himself in clothing, because the coal was so hot it would burn his skin. Industrial activity could fluctuate noticeably from year to year. There were also seasonal variations that would cause industrial activity to drop in the summer with the lowest point of the year being in September.

⁸See Floyd, Interview; Lofton, Voices, 291; and Duncan and Smith, Marshall County, 135.

⁹See Floyd, Interview; and Alabama Business Research Council, ed., Transition in Alabama (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1962), 63-65, 68.

Throughout my grandfathers career at Republic Steel, he got laid off from time to time. During this time, he carried the mail. While he worked at the steel mill, he was a member of the union. He said that he was not very active in it and joined it because everyone else did. He began buying more modern luxuries such as a car and a television. Because of the war, he said that "prices jumped up on things like groceries." He said they needed stamps to buy certain things like shoes and gas.¹⁰

In 1952, he was laid off again and went to work at a steel mill in Youngstown, Ohio. He had started dating my future grandmother and would come home on the week-ends and visit her in Boaz. He came home in 1953 for a long week-end and married Geraldine Roe. She went back with him and my mother, Sherrie Floyd, was born in Ohio. They moved back to Boaz in March of 1956 and he went back to work at Republic Steel. He retired in 1981 working in the boiler shop.¹¹

The characteristics and personalities of the people on Sand Mountain are unique when compared to other parts of the country. The citizens are very proud of their traditions. They have their own set of rules and expect everyone living there to follow them. Families remain very close and help each other out in hard times. I think of most of my first, second, and third cousins as a part of my immediate family, and they would think I was odd if I did not. My grandfather enjoyed growing up in the hill country and remembers the 1930s as the best time of his life.

¹⁰See Floyd, Interview; and Adamson, *Industrial Activity*, 4, 69-71.

¹¹Floyd, Interview.

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