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We _____ and Jason Bice
(Interviewee, print) (Interviewer, print)

do hereby give and grant to 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 Ragland, ALABAMA on the date(s) of September 25, 1989 for the oral history collection being compiled by the Jacksonville State University Library.

Jason Bice
(Interviewee's signature)

Address _____

Date 1/21/96

Phone _____

(Interviewer's signature)

Address 735 Park Ave. Apt 212
Jacksonville, AL 36265

Date 1/21/96

Phone 782-0038

Interviewee Background Information

Name: Curtis "Kid" BICE
Address: _____
Phone Number(s): _____
Approximate age or date of birth: 21 Dec. 1905
Mother's name: Corinthian Day BICE
Father's name: James (J.M.) BICE
Places lived and when: Lived in Bagland entire life.

Education: Through about the seventh grade.

Religion: Baptist
Business, political and social memberships (past and present): _____

Present occupation: Disabled
Former occupation(s): Sold land for timber, sawmiller, worked for National Cement Company and Bagland Head Mill
Special skills: _____
Major Accomplishments: _____

Local events in which you have participated: _____

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: Prohibition

National events in which you have participated: Great Depression,

International events in which you have participated: _____

Natural born U.S. citizen? Yes / No
Naturalized Citizen: Yes / No Date: _____
Country from which you emigrated: N/A
Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession: House was destroyed in Palm Sunday Tornadoes

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____

Additional information: _____

Curtis "Kid" Bice
An Oral Interview

By
Kenneth Jason Bice

History 442

Dr. Harvey Jackson

April 1, 1996

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Curtis "Kid" Bice, 84 at the time of the interview, lives with his sister Ethel, 83, in Ragland, Alabama. Both were born, raised, and still reside in Ragland. Kid has seen allot of changes in the area over his lifetime. Twenty Alabama governors and seventeen US presidents, two world wars, the first man in space, and the first man to walk on the moon. He saw Elvis come and go, so to the Beatles. He saw Watergate and Kent State, the first apple computer and the love canal, the great depression and the latest recession. He was around for the introduction of CD's, CNN, MTV, as well as the BBC and RCA. He was here to see the bicentennial and legionaries disease (ironically both in the same year), as well as the assassinations of JFK and MLK. Though now disabled, Kid has worked as a pulp wooder, sawmiller, bought and sold land for timber, worked for he National Cement Company and Ragland Head Mill.

Through all of this Kid has remained. He is a well known member of his community and has as many friends as he does family (quite a lot). He is quick with a smile and a funny story and will tell you what is ailing him if you have the time.

Kid's family consisted of his mother and father (JM and Corinthian) and nine children. There were for boys: James, Otis, Curtis (Kid), Emeris, Elbert, John Milward, Edward and two girls: Ethel and Cecil. Kid's family is typical of many poor southern whites.¹ Though he was born almost forty years after the civil war, the area still suffered as one of the poorest in the nation. They eaked out a living from the land they stood upon. As many poor farming communities had done, they had sold both land and stock to go to work in the mills. The great depression shut down the mill and left the family, and many others, with little to survive upon.

¹Allan P. Sindler, Change in the Contemporary South (Durham, NC Duke University Press, 1963), P.34.

Kid as well as his sister Ethel and brother Otis (the "o" sound pronounced as in "otter") attended school through about the seventh grade. An open barn like church known as Mt. Castle served as a school that included all grades (1-12). During a period in which the Mt. Castle church was being rebuilt children attended Hardwick's chapel church and school which was six miles away. Two years after the Mt. Castle church and school was completed the Ragland school was opened in 1917 (Kid was twelve years old). At this time most of the children began to attend the Ragland school. Kid never attended the Ragland school and ended his formal education shortly after 1917.

Modern day debates become heated arguments on topics such as the separation between church and state, evolution versus creationism, and prayer in school. While these topics are easily understood and quite debatable now, at the time it was an inconceivable idea in a school that doubled as a church on Sundays. ²Sec. 256. of the Alabama constitution is concerned with the public school system and was widely known as one of the "OLD DILLUTER" acts (the "old dilluter" being the devil) in which the local governments made public education available in an attempt to teach people to read the bible. Thus in many rural societies the church was the reasoning for the school and any separation thereof was unthinkable. This explains why the rural south holds the all important notch in the bible belt.

³Like many of the people who lived in the foothills of the Appalachian Mts., religious conviction ran deeply among the local residence. The inhabitants of the area are descendants of the Scotch-Irish and German Protestant and poor settlers. These early settlers had first migrated to Ireland where they were trapped between their own churches Hierarchy and that of Ireland's Catholic majority. The more sedate Quaker

²Ellen L Trover, Chronology and Documentary Handbook of the State of Alabama, (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1972) p.98.

³Dennis Covington, Salvation on Sand Mountain, (Reading, MS.: Addison -Wesley Publishing, 1995) p.84.

⁴religions of early America encouraged the settlers to seek land on the western front. These settlers were not fleeing religious persecution but migrated westward for purely economic reasons. To reach the fertile valleys the mountains had to be crossed. As life in the mountains came to suit the settlers many of them stayed and "eked out a subsistence." By the beginning of the twentieth century many had been lured out of the mountains by the coal fields and mill towns. These were struck especially hard by the great depression. This is the group of people that Kid's family belongs to.

The differences in religious conviction also ran deep in the small community. Within about a six mile radius was several different churches. These included Mt. Castle, Hardwicks Chapel, Pilgrims Rest, and Bethany. Mt. Castle was a Baptist church. Pilgrims Rest was a split off of the Mt. Castle church. Members of the Pilgrims Rest congregation were referred to as "streaky heads" (like the turtle that is native to the area) by the other Baptist because they were "hard shelled". There is also a rock formation in the area that resembles a turtle (known to the native population now simply as "turtle rock"), this could also be responsible for the nickname. Kid also recalls a local farmer who made it a point to be seen plowing on Sunday because he was a Seventh Day Adventist.

⁵Economic and social factors seem to have set the stage for these separations in southern religion. Religious discontent and revivalism helped produce the Holiness and Pentecostal movements. As cities, towns, and communities grew they grew economically divers. The Protestant church reflected this. The new Protestant groups seemed to stem as a "church of the disinherited". These groups represented a blend of old religious doctrine, ideas, and sentiment with a particular set of social and economic factors. This can be seen among churches of the same denomination. "First Church."

⁴Ibid.

⁵William J, Cooper, Jr. and Thomas E Terrill, The American South, (2 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill,1991) I.565.

"Second Church," etc. which reflected a social and economic geography.⁶ However what these churches did have in common was a link to the popular turn of the century idea of Predispositional Millennialism. This focused mainly on the Revelations and book of Daniel which is concerned with the rise and fall of the anti-Christ and the tribulation. The main divisions between the fundamentalist and the hard core fundamentalist is that the fundamentalist believed the Bible to be the word of god. (Meant to be studied for its meaning in individual cases). The hard core fundamentalist believe the Bible is the inerant word of god (biblical literalism).⁷ These literalist frequently ignored the historical setting or context of passages from the bible. Hard core fundamentalist, the Holiness movement and the increasingly popular Pentecostal movement stressed more charismatic phenomena such as faith healing, speaking in touns and the imminent end of the world and the return of Christ.

Like many rural families, the Bice's had abandoned farming , selling their stock and much land, just prior to the great depression, to go to work in the mills. A head mill opened in Ragland to manufacture the heads (tops) of barrels and kegs. Soon after lack of demand forced the head mill to shut down. The tin building still stands across the street from the Ragland city hall.

Kid recalls what happened afterwards.

⁸"People that had their own stock and their land made it all right. It was pretty hard but we made it. We didn't have us nothing to plow, we bought this little ole bull and broke that little scutter down. We raised a little corn and a few peas with him."

⁶Harvey Jackson, notes from February 23,1996

⁷William J, Cooper, Jr. and Thomas E Terrill, The American South, (2 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill,1991) I.565

⁸Curtis Bice, interview held at his residence, Ragland, Al., September, 1989.

During the great depression Kid recalls not having enough to eat. The Sweat and the Hawkins families lived nearby and trade among swap and trade among the families to ensure that none would starve.

⁹ "If one happened to get hold of two or three messes of peas or something like that he'd divide with the other one. If the other happened to get some, say a bushel of corn or a bucket of lard we would divide it around. It was a site."

Economic trends recovered more slowly in the south after the great depression than in any other area. By 1940 per capita income had drooped to 282(47) from 324(46) in 1929.

At the age of about 25 Kid had an operation to remove his appendix. He could not recover from the operation and case of pneumonia that followed. Kid was diagnosed with hysterics. After some prodding from his doctor and a woman who had the same ailment, Kid spent three weeks in Tuscaloosa at Brys the state mental hospital.

Kid describes the hospital as "a big house with wide halls with rooms on the side, like a doctors office". Kid explained that a certain schedule of life was important to recovery for most patience. There was a certain time to go to bed and a certain time to get up. Meals were served on a precise schedule at a group setting. No patience ate in their room. Nutrition was as important as the rest and care that the patience received. Kid says that most of his food was boiled, not fried, and recalls eating allot of beef. "Man they really threw the beef to you."

It has been widely rumored that patience at the hospital were abused. When Kid was asked about it he replied that he had never been mistreated. However, the abuse that patience could inflict upon themselves is another matter. Kid tells of his three week stay in Brys and a roommate that committed suicide:

"There was generally one to a room but they put one in there with me and he hung his self that night. He got the sheets off his bed and just worked

⁹Ibid.

all the time here and yonder. Finally, I went to sleep. I was scared to death, but I finally went to sleep. So the next morning that scutter was hung. Got up there and tied it around his neck and jumped. He was hanging there when I woke up. You talk about being scared, I was scared."

Kid also recalls a fellow patient who thought that he was Alabama governor Bib Graves.

¹⁰"Let's see now... That Bib Graves was governor long about that time. See allot of people would just drink till they was goofy. A lot of times them that was already in there got fixed up and in good shape. They was full of life you know. Telling old tales and doing every thing they could do to one that came in. He walked up there and says, 'My name is governor Bib Graves. One of 'em says, 'Hell yea, that's what I thought too when I came in here!'."

While Kid was growing up his family owned a and operated a saw mill and logging business. ¹¹ Although Alabama remains one of the lowest land tax states, land was inconceivably cheap during this time. Apparently the Bice family would buy and sell the land literally for the timber that stood upon it. J.M. Bice, who was Kid's father, held up to five hundred acres at one time. Timber was not clear cut with heavy machinery as it is today. Instead it was snaked out by horse one log at a time. The timber was cut eight to ten inches from the ground in a way that there would be another cutting in eight to ten years time. The pulp wooding profession remains a thriving industry for those who still work it in Ragland. A railhead for the transpotation of logs is still located in Ragland as well as a chipper mill in nearby Ashville. A local superstition forbade cutting or burning of any tree which had been struck by lightning. ¹²By 1916, lumber production in the south rose to 20.5 billion board feet.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹William J, Cooper, Jr. and Thomas E Terrill, The American South, (2 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991) I.481.

¹²Ibid.

7.

The animals that helped the Bice family to farm and cut timber off the land were as integral a part of success as the land was. When asked about the mules that Kid farmed and logged with, he laughed out loud and recalled several hilarious stories. Kid recalls two particularly ornery mules named Jack and Tom. Jack belonged to Kid, and Tom belonged to his brother Otis.

¹³"Uncle Thomas and Aunt Almedy owned a little store... We had borrowed some lard from them... So Mama was gonna send me to the store, she said 'sein as how you gonna go by Almedy's take this" We had old four pound lard buckets... We had a dandy saddle. It was red with a horn sticking up there and had strings hanging off it."

"When I got down to the foot of the hill and let my mule drink... Well it was a little slanty going through there so I split out. Dreckly that scutter started to buck. I had that lard bucket over the horn of that saddle and every time that buckit hit boy he got right. He kept buckiing and I kept staying with him... He bucked up on a bank about half way and it cave off... When he done it I fell between him and the bank on the right side. My left foot didn't come out of the stirrup, it same across his back. Then he jumps up about that time... I was turned backwards walking on my hands... I kept talking to him... He stopped and bowed up... long enough to get my foot out... And there was a pine limb laying there... I come back with both hands hard as I could, hit him upside the ear and down he went... He came to... I got back on him and went back to the house.

¹³Curtis Bice, interview held at his residence, Ragland, Al., September, 1989.

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This is the focus of the paper and goes into quite a bit of detail on certain aspects of southern life.

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SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL, & STATE EVENTS
1905-1990

- 1905 Roosevelt begins second term
- 1907 Oklahoma becomes the 46th state
B B Comer, influential planter and buisness leader, becomes governer
- 1909 Taft is president
- 1910 State Population listed at 2,138,093.
- 1911 Emmet O'Neal Lauderdale is governor
- 1913 Federal income tax is introduced to the US
Wilson becomes president
- 1914 Wilson declares the US neutral in W.W.I
Panama Canal is completed
- 1915 The Lusitania is sunk
"Bone dry" prohibition went into effect in the state
Charlaes Henderson is governor
- 1919 Thomas Erby Kirby of Calhoun County is governor
- 1917 US declares war on Germany
- 1920 Adolf Hitler forms the NAZI party
State population is 2,348,174.
18th amendment (prohibition)
19th amendment (women's suffrage)
- 1921 Harding is president
State population is 2,832,961
- 1923 Harding dies and Cooledge is inaugurated as president
- 1925 Chrysler is founded
First radio broadcasting station in state WBRC
- 1928 Convict labor is abolished
- 1929 Hoover is president
- 1930 Stated population is 2,646,248.
- 1931 B M Miller is governor
- 1933 FDR is president
- 1935 Governor Graves second term
- 1333 21st. amendment (ending prohibition)
- 1939 Germany invades Poland beginning W.W.II
- 1941 Japan attacks the US at Pearl Harbor
- 1942 Alabama votes Republican for the first time since reconstruction (Eisenhower)
- 1943 Chaucy Sparks is governor
- 1945 Truman is president
- 1947 US breaks the sound barrier
James E "Big Jim" Folsom is governor
- 1950 UN sanctions aid for South Korea
State population is 3,061,743.
- 1952 1st. hydrogen bomb test
- 1953 Eisenhower is president

- 1954 Segregation in public schools is ruled unconstitutional
- 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott
Governor Folsom begins second term
- 1956 Elvis's first hit - Heart Break Hotel
- 1959 John Patterson is governor
- 1960 State population is 3,266,740.
- 1961 Bay of pigs
JFK is president
- 1963 JFK assassinated
Johnson is inaugurated as president
George C. wallace is governor
- 1967 Lurleen B. Wallace assumes her husbands position
- 1969 First moon walk
Nixon is president
Manson family commits Tate murders
- 1970 4 Killed at Kent State by National Guard
Statepopulation is 3,444,165
- 1972 Watergate
- 1974 Ford is president
- 1976 Bicentennial
Legionaries Disease
- 1977 Elvis dies
Carter is president
First APPLE computer
- 1980 The Love Canal is declared a disaster area
CNN
- 1981 MTV
Reagan is president
- 1983 Car bomb explodes at US embassy and USMC HQ in Beirut
- 1989 Bush is president
- 1991 Gulf War

INTERVIEWEE CHRONOLOGY SHEET

- 1905 December, 21, Curtis (Kid) Bice is born.
- 1915 Prohibition hits Ragland
- 1917 Kid stops going to school
- 1930 Kid is twenty-five years old
Kid stays in Brys institution in Tuscaloosa for three weeks
- 1955 Kid is fifty years old.
Kid is disabled due to several illnesses
- 1980 Kid is seventy-five years old.
- 1989 At time of interview Kid is eighty-four years old.
- 1994 Kid's home is destroyed by Palm Sunday tornadoe.
- 1995 Kid is ninety-one years old

QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE SEPTEMBER 25, 1989
TAPED INTERVIEW WITH CURTIS (KID) BICE

SIDE ONE

1. How old are you?
2. How did you get your nickname?
3. Did you live at the old place?
4. Was there a school?
5. Could you go through twelfth grade there?
6. Why were the people at Pilgrims Rest called "streaky heads"?
7. Tell about the mules.

SIDE TWO

1. Did you buy land just for the timber?
2. Did your family have it's own saw mill?
3. Do you remember the river ever freezing over?
4. How long did you stay in Tuscaloosa?
5. What was it like?
6. Did you have good discipline in the home?
7. Did your mother and father both whip you?
8. Did you have much of a problem during the depression?
9. Do you remember any other big businesses that were in Ragland?

NICKLOS BICE,

SARA KILGORE BICE,

JAMES M. BICE (JIM) #38
FRANCES (RANEY) #116
ELLA #117

JAMES M. BICE (JIM) BICE,

CORINTHIAN (DAY) BICE,

JAMES DALTON #35
OTIS #40
CURTIS (KID) #41
EMERIS #42
ELBERT #43
JOHN MILWARD #44
EDWARD #45
ETHEL #46
CECIL #47

CURTIS (KID) BICE,