

Historical Chronological Sheet

- 1920- Women's Suffrage, Prohibition, Governor Thomas Kilby
- 1925- Klansmen march at White House, Governor William Brandon
- 1929- Stock Market Crashed, Great Depression, Goodyear plant opens, Governor Bibb Graves
- 1931- Scottsboro Boys Negro Youths on trial for rape
- 1932- FDR nominated for President, promises "New Deal" and wins election, Governor Benjamin Miller
- 1933- National Recovery Administration, Prohibition ends because of ratification of 21st Amendment
- 1935- Social Security Act, Governor Bibb Graves
- 1937- Hugo Black appointed to Supreme Court
- 1941- World War II
- 1944- FDR signs GI Bill of Rights
- 1945- Atomic bomb destroys Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- 1954- Segregation outlawed in U.S. by Supreme Court
- 1955- Civil Rights Movement
- 1956- Negroes boycott buses in Montgomery, bus lines integrated by Supreme Court
- 1960- John F. Kennedy wins presidential election
- 1963- Kennedy sends troops to Alabama to enforce mandate to allow blacks to University of Alabama, Kennedy assassinated, Governor George Wallace
- 1964- Lyndon B. Johnson signs Civil Rights Act
- 1965- Martin Luther King Jr. and others picket court house in Selma Freedom Walk from Selma to Montgomery
- 1966- Edward W. Brooke is first black man elected senator

1968- Civil Rights Bill becomes law, Martin Luther King killed

1969- First astronauts on the moon

Chronological Sheet of Interviewee

- 1908- Annie Vera Cooper born in Etowah
- 1918- Moved to St. Clair County on farm
- 1926- Graduated from high school, got married to Dowling Cooper,
moved to Gadsden
- 1928- Worked first job in dress shop, worked later in a
suspenders factory
- 1929- Stock market crashes, great depression begins, rationing
takes over
- 1935- Worked odd jobs to make ends meet
- 1941- World War II begins
- 1942- Worked for Red Cross and helped to give shots
- 1955- Civil Rights Movement begins, boycott in Montgomery

QUESTIONS ASKED DURING INTERVIEW

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, where you were born and how you grew up?
2. What type of schooling did you have and how were the schools set up?
3. What did your parents do for a living?
4. What did your father do before he was an overseer?
5. Did he work in a factory?
6. What kind of farms were the ones your father bought?
7. Was there anything growing on the farm then?
8. What did he farm?
9. What was your father's name?
10. Was he always the overseer or did he work his way up to being overseer?
11. Who did your father hire for the farming?
12. Did the employees own the farm or just work it?
13. Were they slaves or just workers?
14. Did your father treat him like one of his own kids?
15. Did your dad pay the people to work on the farm?
16. How much did they get paid?
17. Where did the workers live in Gadsden? Own houses?
18. What happened with the farms? Why did he sell them?
19. Did anyone live on the farm?
20. Who lived on them?
21. Was it tenant farming or share cropping?
22. How long did they own the farms?
23. Was that how your father made most of his living?
24. At what age did you start working?
25. What kind of work did you do?

26. Can you tell me about childhood memories, anything going on in Alabama that had an effect on you personally?
27. Any big events in Alabama, wars?
28. Do you remember when the Stock Market crashed in 1929?
29. How did this effect the economy in Alabama?
30. For some people the economy was in shambles, how did it effect you and your family?
31. What do you think caused the Great Depression?
32. How did it effect industry and agriculture?
33. Do you think big businesses caused the depression?
34. What happened and what was life like during the depression how you lived, food work?
35. What kind of things were terrible to buy?
36. What were some of the other things that were hard to by during the depression and around you?
37. What was rationing like?
38. How was the meat?
39. Was it hard to get meat?
40. Were gas prices high?
41. How did things change in the economy after the depressio?
42. How much did your husband make a week, month, salary?
43. How do you think the United States got out of the depression?
44. What do think brought us out of the depression?
45. Do you think the war helped bring us out of the depression?
46. During the war was food scarce?
47. How were the jobs, did women work more during the war?
48. Did you know of any women who had to work because their husbands were in the war??
49. What did you think of the war?
50. After the war, did things get better and the economy pick

up?

51. How long did you stay at home with your child after giving birth before you went back to work?
52. When did you work with the Red Cross, and what did you do?
53. When do you think or realize when Alabama became industrialized instead of being agricultural and why?
54. Did your husband still work at the mill during the second war?
55. What were the effects after the war on the jobs, economy and your family?
56. How were the schools set up?
57. How did segregation effect your children?
58. Can you expand on the black and white water fountain situation?
59. Was this area mostly a white community?
60. What school did your children go to?
61. Was it an all white elementary school?
62. What can you tell me about Alabama politics?
63. Did your husband vote?
64. What did you think about the different politicians?
65. What can you tell me about the Civil Rights Movement?
66. Did you live a good and full life in Alabama?

Interviewee Background Information

Name: Annie Vera Cooper

Address: 1216 Robinson Ave. E. Gadsden, AL 35903

Phone Number(s): (205) 546-3259

Approximate age or date of birth: 1908 - birth 88yrs old

Mother's name: Lilybelle Roberts Mears

Father's name: Charles Henry Roberts

Places lived and when: St. Clair County - child

Gadsden rest of life after she got married

Education: Graduated High School

Religion: Presbyterian

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

PTA, Red Cross, Eastside Pre. Circle

Present occupation: housewife

Former occupation(s): worked many jobs; teller, cafeteria

supervisor

Special skills: very good bridge player

Major Accomplishments: none

Local events in which you have participated: none

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:

pictures of farm

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

Additional information: _____

Gift and Release Agreement:

We Annie Cooper and Donna Beacraft
(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 Annie Coopers home on the date(s) of Sept 30, Nov, 12 for the oral history collection being compiled by the Jacksonville State University Library.

x Annie Vera Cooper
(Interviewee's signature)

Address 1216 Robinson Ave.
E. Gadsden, Al 35903
Phone (205) 546-3259

Date Sept. 30, 1996

Donna Beacraft
(Interviewer's signature)

Address 407 S. 5th St
Gadsden, Al 35901
Phone (205) 546-7737

Date Sept. 30, 1996

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Oral History

Dr. Jackson

November 19, 1996

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Olson, Todd, and Vincent Desomma, and Alice J. Vollaro. Chronical Events of America. New York: Dorling Kindersley, 1989.

Watkins, T.H. The Great Depression: America in the 1930's. Canada: Little Brown and Company, 1993.

The person I interviewed for the oral history is Annie Vera Cooper. Mrs. Cooper was born in 1908 and is the daughter of Lillybelle and Charles Roberts. Mrs. Cooper was raised on a farm during her childhood, in St. Clair County. Her father and two other men bought three farms in St. Clair County near Ashville when Annie was about age ten. Her father was the overseer of the farms and never had to work them. There were hired hands to work the farms, and usually there was a family who lived on the farm and took care of it. The workers were mostly black and got paid according to the amount of time they worked. Some would work for a day, others worked for weeks and months, depending on how much money they needed at the time. "My daddy would go into town every morning and pick up a truck load of them, I don't know how he found them, but he always had a truck load."¹ When Annie didn't help her mother and father on the farm, she went to school. She went to school at Daughters of the American Revolution School (DAR), and attended Gadsden High school until she graduated. Right out of high school in 1926, Annie got married to her sweetheart Dowling Cooper. The two of them moved to Gadsden and built a house on Robinson Avenue, in which she still resides.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, several people felt it and many lives were affected by it in the United States. The day was known as "Black Tuesday" on October 29, the day when the Wall Street stock market crashed, where several stocks changed hands. Many people lost a lot of money and others began to panic. Some believe that the crash caused the Great

Depression, others believe something different, including Robert McElvaine who argued, "When someone becomes ill after 'catching a chill,' it is not the cold itself that causes the sickness. Rather the cold reduces the body's resistance to microorganisms already present in it, which then are able to cause the illness. Some such role is the proper one to assign to the Crash. The cold wind that swept through the lower Manhattan in October and November 1929 lowered the economy's resistance to the point where already existing defects could multiply rapidly and bring down the whole organism."²

In Alabama life was pretty common for Annie and her family. Her husband worked at Cosby Hodges Mill Company as a shipping clerk and she worked several odd jobs including a school lunch room operator, teller at a picture show, and sold milk from her cow. She remembers the Crash of 1929 and recalls how it affected her and her family, "I remember the rationing of things and my husband worked in a wholesale house you see, and we were able to get flour and meal that all that they sold in the way of our eating. I had to stand in line to get a pair of hose and all that stuff. I had to stand in line for lots of things. We always had enough to eat though."³ Annie's family was okay during the depression, but other families weren't as fortunate.

The industry and agriculture was pretty bad in Alabama and many couldn't get what they needed most of the time because the supply wasn't there or there wasn't any money to buy it. "There weren't many jobs and the jobs that were there, paid very little. If there was, the pay was so low that they couldn't

buy anything and you couldn't buy anything because it wasn't there to buy, so I can't explain it."⁴

Several believe that the causes of the Great Depression varied from imbalances in production of things, to capitalism itself. Too many farmers were producing too much food and manufacturers were building more tractors and harvesters that the farmers weren't able to buy. Because Alabama was an agricultural state, it was hit extremely hard by the depression. Unemployment rose, factories and businesses were closed or went out of business making life extremely tough.

For Annie and her family, the times were hard, but not as hard as it was for others in the community. Annie only had one child to feed along with herself and her husband. The child was a bottle baby, therefore food for her wasn't a problem. Annie's husband Dowling worked in a mill so they were able to get the flour, cornmeal, sugar and other items they needed to survive. Annie considered her family and herself fortunate because there were several others in the community who didn't have the food they needed to feed themselves or their families. Annie grew up on a farm, therefore whatever she couldn't buy she usually grew, which is what most people did back then. Food was rationed during the depression, and what food wasn't rationed there usually wasn't any to buy anyway. "I remember they rationed so many things, I had to stand in line for a pair of hose, lots of stuff."⁵

In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was nominated and elected president of the United State. He proposed a plan known as

the New Deal. The purpose of this new plan was to get the economy back on its feet and get the United States out of the depression. Along with the plan, there were several programs set up including the National Recovery Administration, Public Works Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administration, and the Works Progress Administration. All of these programs were set up to employ individuals, give them work, and to ease the tension and try to bring us out of the depression. These programs did help the people make money and take care of themselves and their families, although they didn't get us out of the depression.

The depression unfortunately lasted for about ten years. For some it was the hardest times of their lives, and for others it didn't effect them as critically. The depression lasted until the second world war. It is believed by some that war helped the United States get out of the depression, while others think differently, "The war probably helped, I wouldn't be surprised, although I didn't know the statistics."⁶

The economy did pick up during the war because there were more jobs and more women went to work because their husbands went to fight in the war. Annie was fortunate that her husband didn't have to fight in the war, but eventhough he didn't, she too worked during the war to help feed her family, including working for the Red Cross, "We went out and gave shots to people, I forgot what kind of shots we gave them. We went out at night and gave the shots. I didn't give them, I just got them ready."⁷ The food was still scarce to some extent, and it was still hard

to get some of the things needed, "We didn't suffer like some people but I did do without, and some things weren't there at your finger tips like they are today. I'm just thankful that my husband didn't have to go."⁸

Time went on and the war finally ended in 1945. The troops came home and the economy began to recover. Dowling went to work for the Goodyear plant and Annie still worked and raised her children. There were plenty of jobs after the war, and some the women continued to work after their husbands came back from the war. Annie and Dowling were able to buy land and build their home, "This land used to be a farm, and we could've bought the whole thing for a song and sung it ourself."⁹ There were several people began to buy up the land around there because it was cheap and they could buy a lot of it. Most of the land was used for farming, so the people farmed and built their homes there and made a life for themselves.

The community was mostly white along with the schools. There weren't any blacks that lived in the community therefore Annie's children didn't experience segregation of blacks. There were instances in Montgomery with the boycotting of buses and the integration of bus lines by the Supreme Court, and the troops sent in by Kennedy to allow black students at the University of Alabama.¹⁰ Annie remembers seeing them on television: "you can't help but see it on the tv."¹¹

In 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act giving blacks their civil rights that are guaranteed to them by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. This was a

big step in history for the blacks in America and in Alabama. As one man put it," I just begin to feel like a man. It's a great deal of pleasure in knowing that you got some privileges. My children are going to the same school with the whites and I don't have to umble to no one. I have registered- will vote the next election and there ain't any 'yes sir'- it's all yes and no and Sam and Bill."¹² This led to peaceful protests in several Alabama towns including the Freedom Walk from Selma to Montgomery led by Martin Luther King Jr. There were disturbances in towns, "there weren't any in Gadsden, there were in other places, but I can't recall."¹³

Politics were big in Alabama to most people, but they weren't very big with Annie. She voted in every election and was a Democrat, but never really got involved in the politics of Alabama. She does remember Governor George Wallace, "I guess most of the people liked him, by staying as long as he did. I didn't have any qualms with him."¹⁴ Annie didn't really follow politics too much because she really wasn't interested in them like others were, but she always votes during the elections.

Annie Cooper has really enjoyed her life in Alabama. She has had a full life and the Lord has blessed her. She's had a pretty good life and has no qualms about it. She always got what she wanted eventually, and is happy with everything she has done and achieved. Annie still resides by herself in the home on Robinson Avenue that her husband built years ago, and is very content with life. Annie is an extraordinary woman and I was privileged to get the chance to interview her.

NOTES

1. Quoted in interview with Annie Cooper, (1996).
2. T.H. Watkins, The Great Depression: America in the 1930's.
(Canada: Little Brown and Company, 1993), 40-41.
- 3-9. Quoted in interview with Annie Cooper, (1996).
10. Todd Olson and Vincent Desomma and Alice J. Vollaro,
Chronical Events in America. (New York: Dorling Kinderslay,
1989), 789.
12. T.H. Watkins, The Great Depression: America in the 1930's.
(Canada: Little Brown and Company, 1993), 74.
- 13-14. Quoted in interview with Annie Cooper, (1996).



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