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We OTHELLA M<sup>c</sup>DONALD and AGGIE BARBER  
(Interviewee, print) (Interviewer, print)

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Othella McDonald  
(Interviewee's signature)

Address 270 PLEASANT HILL RD Date 3-2-96  
ROCKMART, GA 30153  
Phone 770-684-7714

Aggie Barber  
(Interviewer's signature)

Address 680 Goodyear St Date 3-2-96  
Rockmart, Ga. 30153  
Phone 770-684-4993

**Interviewee Background Information**

Name: Othella McDonald  
Address: 270 Pleasant Hill Rd Rockmart, Ga 30153  
Phone Number(s): 770-684-7714  
Approximate age or date of birth: Jan. 17, 1920  
Mother's name: Annie A. Pruitt > IN Georg.  
Father's name: Jesse Meek Pruitt >  
Places lived and when: Both lived in Ga; moved to Alabama in 1920's

Education: Finish High School. Bankhead High School

Religion: Methodists - Father Baptist - Lawn Memorial  
Business, political and social memberships (past and present):  
No knowledge of

Present occupation: For govt; Lee cylinders in Cedartown, Ga.  
Former occupation(s): not working

Special skills: Self-pride in herself  
Major Accomplishments: Court case pending for someone taking her land away

Local events in which you have participated: Mother was home person, father died; Brother was involved in CCC.

State and/or regional events in which you have participated:  
No knowledge

National events in which you have participated:  
No knowledge

International events in which you have participated:

Natural born U.S. citizen?  Yes / No

\* Naturalized Citizen:  Yes / No Date: —

Country from which you emigrated: IRISH

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession:  
She has photographs of mill, Cedova

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

Additional information:

## **LIST OF QUESTIONS ASKED DURING INTERVIEW**

1. Date of birth
2. What were your parents name?
3. Where they lived and when?
4. What was your Education?
5. What was your Religion?
6. Did you know if your parents or yourself involved in any economic or social memberships?
7. What did your father die from?
8. What is your current occupation and former occupation?
9. Do you have any special skills or major accomplishments?
10. Can you remember any local events in which you participated in?
11. Did you participate in any national or international events?
12. Asked her about the cotton mill in Cordova?
13. When did the cotton mill shut down?
14. Are you a natural born citizen of the United States?
15. Where did your family emigrate from?
16. Did you know much about your grandparents?
17. Was grandfather or greatgrandfather a farmer?
18. Several questions about the Bankhead High School.
19. Do you remember anything about the issue on black people?
20. Do you remember anything about script money?
21. Do you remember any issues about child labor?
22. Do you want to discuss any issues about your family that we have not discussed?
23. What did you do as far as entertainment as a child?
24. Do you remember any diseases that were wide spread at the time?
25. What do you remember about the depression?
26. How was life like before the depression?
27. What was life like after the depression?
28. What do you remember about Franklin D. Roosevelt?
29. Did you like him and did your family?
30. Was anyone in your family involved with any of the programs associated with the New Deal?
31. What were your living arrangements?
32. How far did you persue your education?

33. When did you move from Alabama and where to?

34. Do you feel the time you lived in Alabama was a happy time in your life?

35. I will ask her to sing her song she wants to sing.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN ALABAMA HISTORY** **1920's-1970's**

1. Industry and buisness in 1920's at it's height
2. The Great Depression in 1929
3. Franklin D. Roosevelt takes office of Presidency from 1933-1945
4. The New Deal and it's effects on Alabama 1939
5. World War II and it's effects on the citizens of Alabama
6. Race and Riots in Alabama from 1955-1970

## TAPE TABLE OF CONTENTS

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

- About her family
- when she was born
- her education and religion
- special skills
- occupation

### COTTON MILL IN CORDOVA, ALABAMA

- who work there
- about the town that surrounded the mill
- why it shut down
- effects it had on the people

### THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

- how it effected her and family
- how it effected the town and mill
- feeling about FDR
- programs involved with the New Deal

### ENTERTAINMENT

- FDR's "*fire side chats*"
- what she did as a child growing up in Cordova

### CONCLUSION

## **INTERVIEWEE CHRONOLOGY**

1. The cotton industry in Cordova, Alabama during the 1920's
  2. The Great Depression and its effects on Cordova and the mill
  3. Memories of the Franklin D. Roosevelt and his time in office
  4. Knowledge of the New Deal and involvement
  5. Knowledge of racial issues in Cordova
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During the early 1920's Alabama's textile and cotton industries seemed to be making a mark on the nation as a way for the state to proclaim itself from the negative prosperity during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Industrial towns were popping up everywhere in the northern half of the state and the cotton industry remained in the Black Belt of Alabama. Cordova, Alabama was one of those towns in which housed a cotton mill by the name of Nashaway Cotton Mill. Mrs. Othella Prewett McDonald grew up in Cordova in the 1920's through the 1940's. Because of her father's excellent skills with cotton Nashaway Cotton Mill moved him and his family to Cordova to work for them. Like most mill industry towns Cordova was centered around the mill. The mill provided housing for their workers and owned most of the houses in the community. Mrs. McDonald explained that their house was a fairly large house in which a boss of the mill used to live in. She said that the houses went from small, medium, to large. Cordova was like most industrial towns. The town was centered around the mill and just about every person in the town work at the mill or had some association with



the mill. This way of living seemed to become a stereotype for most Alabamians as well as all Southerners. Mrs. McDonald explained how she could remember how the town seemed to be booming with the mill. Things were great as she could remember. She reminisced on childhood memories of going swimming at the local creek and learning to smoke her first cigarette at the top of a hill located next to a church. Life seemed to be going good for her family. Mrs. McDonald explained how when the CIO and the AF of L would come to town the people would get excited and have marches. She said that life was good until the depression.

The Great Depression was a period of time in which the nation changed so much in such short a time. It seemed to happen so fast that not many people during that time could figure out how things could go from being so good to so bad over night. The depression literally ripped communities apart and left people not only without money but without hope. (The American Heritage, 252) Most families lost their homes and jobs and had to move in together and provide for themselves by growing food for them to survive on. The depression not only effected people economically but it also effected them mentally. Mrs. McDonald told a story of a man who went down to a creek in Cordova and

shot and killed himself. Cordova like most other towns was drastically affected. Nashaway could not accept the CIO's and the AF of L's terms so it started talking about shutting down. The CIO was the Congress of Industrial Organizations in which they focused on the Southern workers. The AF of L was the American Federation of Labor in which basically had the same ideas as the CIO. The people in the town began to go elsewhere to find jobs. Not only did Alabamians begin to mentally slip into a state of depression the entire nation was right there with them. The mood of the American people in 1932 was a mixture of desperation and uncertainty fostered by the apparent inability of leadership-both in private life and in government- to deal with the malaise of economic depression. (Leadership in the New Deal, 1) By this point people seemed to be desperate for work in order to provide themselves and their families with food and shelter. The quest for leadership from someone to get the country out of this terrible ordeal was on the minds of most Americans. In this type of atmosphere the people began to grasp the hope offered by the name of man known by every man and woman alive as Franklin D. Roosevelt. He seemed to be the man who was ready and determined to provide leadership adequate to the demands of the

crisis. It was during this time in which the New Deal program went into effect for every man living in America at the time.

The New Deal seemed to offer leadership for making progress in getting the country out of this ordeal. The New Deal was the principles and policies adopted by FDR in the 1930's to advance economic recovery and social welfare. (Executive) Many programs were started such as the CCC the Civilian Conservation Corps. This organization was started to provide meaningful paid work for the youth and to conserve the country's natural resources. Mrs. McDonald said that her brother belonged to this organization set up in Cordova. She could remember him leaving to go and build bridges in and around the area. Her mother belonged to the WPA which was the Work Projects Administration. She said her mother would go to someone house in which someone was sick and clean the house. She had a chart in which she checked off her duties in which she had done that day. In return for he work she would get paid. These type of organizations were developed in order to help people start bring in an income once again. As many of these programs went into effect things started looking up for many Americans. Now that Roosevelt had started off his role as presidency on the right foot

he must keep up the good work. People began to think that a president must have skill in communicating his goals to the people, arousing their interest, and achieve their support. In other words he must shape political opinion. It was during this time in which all Americans became familiar with Roosevelt's fireside chats. These chats were encourage the working man or "forgotten man." (American Heritage, 251) Mrs. McDonald remembered these chats when she was a child. She recalled listening to Roosevelt on the radio in her house. These chats gave Americans the feeling as if President Roosevelt was talking to them personally. They felt as if he was right in your house with you as Mrs. McDonald put it. She said that President Roosevelt was not only talking about problems and the issues that would solve them but he was actually following through with his promises to help the nation out of this depression and on the road to brighter paths. This was the main reason why people loved Roosevelt so much. Roosevelt promised "action, and action now." (Leadership in the New Deal, 3) Mrs. McDonald said that people felt very sure that Roosevelt would do as he promised. She explained how people not only adults but children also would listen to these chats along with other radio announcements. So the adults

were not the only ones who were in tuned to the situations arising the children were to. She said that was one time in which she could remember the entire family gathering around together and listening. It seems that President Roosevelt has found a solution to a problem that at one time seemed to be never ending in hard times. By now American citizens began to start feeling pride for themselves once again. Unfortunately Cordova did not recover from the depression. Mrs. McDonald explained that attempts to reopen the mill were made but all were unsuccessful. She said today most people who still live their work in the Birmingham, Alabama area. She recently visited and said that the mill had been torn down and the town just did not look the same without the operation of Nashaway Cotton Mill. But some mills such as Russell Corporation in Alexander City, Alabama seemed to bounce back after the depression.

The issue of race is always going to play a part in history in the past, present, and future. During the early 1920's most blacks still lived in the area of Alabama known as the Black Belt. Though there were blacks who worked the factories but most still made up the vast number in population in the Black Belt area. I asked Mrs. McDonald if she recalled any knowledge about black

people in Cordova. She only recalled one black man in particular in which she said he was responsible of sanitation or emptying toilets in her neighborhood. She said she did not remember any incidents in which there was any violence that took place towards him. She said that the people respected him as he respected them. He did his job well even though it was not a rewarding job. Mrs. McDonald did say that she recall some knowledge of the KKK. She did not know anyone in particular who was involved but she did know that the organization existed. The KKK was very much an issue in Alabama during this time period. It was an organization start from the very beginning to hate not only blacks but anyone who was not white native born American citizens. Cordova was considered and industry town because of the cotton mill. Because of this the population of blacks was not a lot compared to the Black Belt region of Alabama.

Education was something that most white children received in the south. Mrs. McDonald said she attended school and graduated. Several of her family members went on to college and persue their education however she did not. She explained that her brother who did go to college wanted her to go but she did not want to. Mrs. McDonald was considered one of the lucky

and fortunate ones who came from a family who was able to provide her with a good and stable home. Most children during this period especially black children received adequate education or just enough to get them by. Issues such as this would mark them for the rest of their lives. For example when it came time to vote poor whites and blacks did not stand a chance in Alabama to place their ballot. They had to pass a literacy test in order to get to register to vote. ( Race, Class, and Community,201 .) Most of the test were to hard to pass so they did not get the chance to vote. Mrs. McDonald's family was not rich but they were not poor. They could afford to send their children to school and even some on to college. Mrs. McDonald's sister went the University of Alabama and her brother attended Auburn University in which they both graduated. Her brother was going to send her to college but she went to a business college instead.

During the interview Mrs. McDonald expressed her pride in living and growing up in Cordova, Alabama. She explained that she has some fond memories of Cordova. She did say how when she did revisit Cordova recently it was not the same town it used to be. The Great Depression had such an impact on the town and when the mill shut down it seemed as if the town did to. Mrs.

McDonald was a pleasure to interview and in my opinion is an intelligent woman. She has lived through a lot of major events that has happened over the passed seventy years. I found it remarkable that she remembered some of the information she did. The term "Southern Pride" certainly shined through in Mrs. Othella Prewett McDonald.



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