

Answer

The WPA Life Histories Collection

[Joseph Stewart]

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Winnsboro , S. C. 6/25/38 (cotton mills, distilleries and tanyards)
JOSEPH STEWART
(white) 81 YEARS OLD

Joseph Stewart is an old bachelor living alone in a four-room frame house on the south side of highway #34, seven miles east of the town of Ridgeway, S. C. He is five feet ten inches tall and weighs two hundred pounds.

"I was born near Mitford, not far from Great Falls, January 17, 1857. I was a boy seven years old when the great War Between the States ended in the triumph of the Union army, the abolition of slavery, and the raiding of our section of the county by Sherman's soldiers.

"My father was Thomas Stewart; my mother, Sallie Stewart. I had two brothers and two sisters. Jane, who never married, is dead. Tom was a bachelor all his life; he was drowned at the age of seventy. Brother William married and had a large family, but died several years ago. Mattie Lavinia married John Haynes. She is still living at Ridgeway, S. C., with her daughter, Mary, who married Bob Ameen, a prosperous merchant and land owner of Ridgeway and Winnsboro , S. C. She is seventy-seven years old. She lost her only son, Harry, last April.

"My father and mother were not rich people before the abolition of slavery; they owned only a few slaves and a small tract of land near Mitford. The destruction of the small cotton mill, the distilleries, and tanyards meant more to my family than the abolition of the slaves.

"My two brothers, William and Tom, and I were not ashamed to work at whatever we could get to do around the cotton mill and gristmill, distilleries and tanyards. Our labor was intelligent and skilled and was preferred to Negro labor after freedom. So the result of the war bore not so hard on our family.

"Sherman's troops burned the schoolhouse near us. It was a private school of the neighborhood. I had gone to it one year and had gotten to the "baker" column in the old blue-back speller, and had learned to read and write. That is about all the schooling I ever got. What I know has come from the school of experience and in reading the newspapers.

"The Yankees burned Mt. Dearborn Cotton Mill, which was owned by Captain Sam McAlilley at the time of the invasion by the Federal army. They also burned and destroyed Gayden's, Montgomery's, Lewis's, and Gaither's tanneries. These were never reestablished, but the two distilleries in the community that were likewise destroyed were afterward restored, and every store sold whiskey. A gallon jug could be bought for a silver dollar, and a barrel, thirty-one and one-half gallons, sold for a ten dollar bill. Now the same quality and amount of liquor would cost six dollars a gallon and not less than fifty dollars a barrel.

"What was the pastime and amusement of men in those days? Well, society had a distinct cleavage. There was a religious crowd who took things seriously and went to church every time the church had anything going on. They got up and established a temperance society, and attended revivals in the summertime. They, led on by the preachers, believed in hell fire and brimstone, and talked against card playing, dancing, gambling, and many innocent amusements that is considered all right nowadays.

"Then there was the other crowd; they raised game chickens and race horses; kept fox hounds; and played cards in barrooms and hotels at Winnsboro and Chester.

"The race course ran parallel with the Rocky Mount road. Colonel Whittaker, Major Berry of York, the Hamptons of Richland, the McCarleys of Winnsboro, the Thompsons of Union and the Harrisons of Longtown raced thoroughbred race horses on this track, or course, and much money was won and lost at these races. The chicken fights were sometimes fought in Chester and sometimes in Winnsboro. I have known as much as \$500 to be bet on the "Main." That is to say, the side winning the most fights would get the \$500. But I have seen \$300 bet on an individual cock fight that didn't last a minute; a blue-breasted, red, game cock of Mr. Pagan's ran his gaff clean through both eyes of an Allan Round Head, game rooster. Who did the Allan Round Head belong to? I'm not sure about that, but the money was put up by three Chester people.

"As to gambling at cards, most of that took place in a back room adjoining the barroom. In the daytime, the game was seven up and turn trump. If you turned a jack, that counted "one". The points to be made were "high", "low",

"jack", and the "game". No great sums of money were lost or won on this game.

"At night in the fall and winter the card game was "draw poker" in the town hotels. Generally a bar with liquors was fixed up in the hotel. One day a fine old gentleman stopped his wagon, which was loaded with four bales of cotton, in front of the Nickolson Hotel, in Chester. He came in just to get a drink, he said. Looking around, he saw a card game going on; he joined it, played a while, and had the game changed to draw poker. He soon lost what money he had, and then bale by bale the cotton was lost. In the midst of a conversation about putting up a mule, his son came in and led him out of the hotel. The grandson of that old gentleman is a lawyer at Barnwell, S. C. You know him well, as he has been president of the State Bar Association.

"Dr. Ira S. Scott, a graduate of the Charleston Medical College, was the physician of the surrounding country. His practice extended from old Beckhamsville to Kershaw. In typhoid fever cases, people believed him more able to cure it than any other doctor. They say he never was known to lose a typhoid case, if called into consultation the first week. He died in 1888. He had been a cripple since childhood, and, because of this misfortune, he always rode horseback on a lady's sidesaddle. You must remember that, until the year 1900, it was regarded as immodest and shameful for ladies to ride astride as men do.

"The first Saturday in May found everybody in wagons and buggies on their way to the picnic at Catawba Falls, as it was commonly called in those old days. Now the place is a large town, a manufacturing center, and is called Great Falls. I have heard old people say that this picnic began as an annual social gathering in 1784.

"Some of the Confederate soldiers who went out from our section were J. F. Arledge, Robert Ford, E. T. Gayden, Sam Kilgo, R. M. Ford, H. J. Gavden, Mansel Hollis, James G. Johnstone, J. F. Nichols, Dr. William Dye, John Cartledge, and L. M. Ford.

"Dr. William Hall was the richest man in the neighborhood. He built, at his own expense, Bethesda Church and gave it to the Methodist Episcopal denomination. Some of the preachers who went out from Bethesda were John R. Pickett, Phillip Pickett, and James Kilgo. Mr. Kilgo had three sons to enter

the Methodist ministry. John Kilgo, one of the sons, became president of Trinity College, now Duke University, Durham, N. C.

"Our family moved here to the Longtown section of Fairfield County about 1884, and bought this farm upon which I have lived ever since.

"I think Fairfield was one of the nine counties declared to be in rebellion against the U. S. Government in the days of Ku Klux, but no great disturbances took place here so far as I recall. I took part in the Red Shirt brigades that did so much to elect Wade Hampton governor in 1876. I wore a red shirt in the parades and did what I was commanded to do by General Bratton, Major Woodward, and the leaders.

"A canvass of the State took place before the election in 1876. It commenced at Anderson and ended at Columbia. Fairfield County organized clubs.

The club members, on the day of a speaking in Winnsboro, dressed in red shirts, mounted on horseback, and rode to Winnsboro in military formation. I have heard that they did this in every county.

"On the day of the speaking here, I suppose there were at least three thousand red shirts on the speaking ground. It was a grand sight; it put heart in the whites and dread in the blacks.

"At other elections, before this, Negro women would dress up in men's clothing and vote. How many, I don't know, but we did catch [one?] at Ridgeway, in 1876, trying to vote for Chamberlain for governor. We were on the lookout for them, and they must have gotten scared and made no attempts, except this particular one.

"Women of the Negro race were more violent in the abuse of the Democratic Party than were the Negro men. It was common for the Negro women to threaten their husbands with separation if they voted the democratic ticket under persuasion of the whites. These women were advised, encouraged, and urged by the Negro preachers and white scalawag politicians to assume this manner and take this drastic action toward their husbands in order to hold them in line for the radical party at the election box."