

The WPA Life Histories Collection

[Ella E. Gooding]

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Title Ella E. Gooding 80 years old. Robert E. Gooding 82 years old (white)

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W. W. Dixon

*Childs*

Winnsboro, S. C.

ELLA E. GOODING 80 YEARS OLD. (WHITE)

ROBERT C. GOODING 82 YEARS OLD. (WHITE)

Mr. Mrs. Robert C. Gooding are husband and wife. They live in a two-story residence on the north side of Bratton Street, Winnsboro, S. C. On the south side of the same street, immediately facing their residence, is the beautiful high school building recently completed as a Public Works Administration project, of the United States Government.

Mrs. Gooding: "My people are of English and Scotch descent. My grandfather was Clerk of Court in Fairfield County for sixteen years before the Civil War. My father, Henry Laurens Elliott, was a large land and slave owner and president of the Winnsboro Bank before that war. He first married Mary McMaster. There were five children by that union. On the death of his first wife, he married Tirzah Ketchin, my mother. By this marriage there were nine children. Do you wish me to name all of the children? As many as I care to? Well, the five by the McMaster wife were Mrs. J. P. Matthews, Mrs. [?] R. Rosborough, Mrs. A. F. Ruff, Mrs. Joe Cummings and a son, John Elliott, who was killed in the Civil War. By the Ketchin wife there were T. K. Elliott, Mrs. T. K. McDonald, Mrs. J. P. Caldwell, Henry L. Elliott, Mrs. Lula McAlpin, Mrs. Oliver Johnson, Helen, who died in childhood, and myself.

"I was born about two miles northeast of Winnsboro, in our plantation home on the Peay's Ferry road, February 5, 1858. I learned my A.B.C.'s, how to spell, and how to read in a school of twelve pupils, taught privately in Winnsboro by Miss Susan A. Finney. Then my two older half sisters took me in charge for a year. Following such preparation, I was again sent to town to Mr. Benjamin Rhett Stuart, a teacher in a private tuition school in the old Beaty house. The house is next to the Carolina Theatre building on South Congress Street. When I was fourteen years old, an Episcopal rector undertook my preparation for Woman's College, at Due West, S. C. He was a splendid teacher. He afterward attained his D. D. degree, and for many years was rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Charleston, S. C.

"Dr. J. I. Bonner was in charge of Woman's College when I was there in 1872 to 1876. After I was graduated, I taught in my Alma Mater one year. In 1877, I accepted a position as teacher here in Mt. Zion Insitute.

"The society girls in our set were Sallie McMaster, Hattie McMaster, Annie McMaster, Mattie Beaty, Lula Center, Bell Gooding, Kittie Rion, Anna Phinney, Mary Shaw, Lill and Marion Elliott, and my sisters.

"The boys in our set were T. K. Elliott, T. K. Ketchin, W. H. Flenniken, W. T. Crawford, J. E. McDonald, W. J. Elliott, J. M. Beaty, W. A. Beaty, J. F. McMaster, H. [?]. McMaster, and my husband, R. C. Gooding.


"We had regular monthly dances in the Thespian Hall on Washington Street. The music rendered was by an amateur string band. The Gordon Light Infantry, a fine military company, was part of our social life. They took prizes in company drills, once in Charlotte and once in New Orleans. They gave an annual picnic in Fortune Park every year. This was a great event in the social life of the town. A target practice and shooting match came off then, and speeches and prizes were given for the best drilled man in the company and for the best marksmanship. I remember W. A. Beaty was best in the manual of arms, and Mr. J. C. Boag was the poorest marksman. His attempts were always laughable and none enjoyed it more than he did.

"Now I had best let my husband tell you about some things, and I'll probably want to have the last word before you."

Mr. Gooding: "I was born in the State of Kentucky, October 20, 1855, but my father, A. F. Gooding, and my mother with the family, moved to Polk County, Missouri, when I was but a child. My father joined the Confederate Army, although we were living in a state that didn't go with the seceded states.

"Yankees came often to our house in search for father, and they showed mother the tree on which they proposed to hang him if he was ever caught by them. They took off all our slaves without our leave, for which we never received any compensation. Mother decided to take the family, consisting of my two young brothers, Sterling and Charles, my sister, Bell, and myself back to the old home in Kentucky.

"After the war in 1869, father moved us to Winnsboro. Here my wife and I were married. Our children were all born here, married here, and have given us grandchildren, the joy of our old age. My son, Robert, married in Brooklyn, New York. He died early. His son, Robert, is in the freshman



class at the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md. My daughters, Nellie, Laura, and Christine, live here in Winnsboro.

"The military rule in Winnsboro was not oppressive; however, it was distasteful to have a Negro company of U. S. troops located here. There was no marauding, no insolence, although they were stationed here six months on Mt. Zion campus. They were transferred later and white soldiers sent in their stead. Their barracks were in the Presbyterian woods in the southern part of the town. I remember there were a good many Germans in this company who couldn't speak English to amount to much.


"The Ku Klux Klan was a necessary organization and did much to discharge discourage? weak white men and ignorant Negroes from lowliness. When the Ku Klux Klan wished to get rid of an undesirable white man or Negro, they would put an empty coffin at the undesirable person's front door. It usually caused the warned one to disappear. Although not a Ku Klux, one night I witnessed a parade of white-sheeted riders and recognized my own horse in the parade. In the morning my horse was in his stable, as usual. I asked no questions about the occurrence until years afterward.

"I have never cared for any other occupation than that of farming, nor any other method of locomotion than that of horseback riding and buggy riding. I bought an automobile once, but I soon returned to the use of my horse and buggy, which I use every day.

"What is the cause of so much soil erosion? Well, it had its origin in slavery time. The land owner had plenty of land and plenty of slave labor, but he didn't have fertilizer and a scientific knowledge of agriculture.

"In the days of Abraham, people lived in tents with their herds around them. When the grazing at that spot was exhausted, they moved to another spot. Likewise, in slavery time, when a field ceased to be profitable it was abandoned and woods were cleared off to make new ground for tillage, and no care was taken of the old lands, which rapidly washed into gullies.

"After the Civil War, our people had no money. We became a one-crop people. Cotton was ready money. Northern manufacturers and western farmers encouraged this, and we were without scientific knowledge. Speculators manipulated all the profit out of cotton by a system of exchanges,



grades, and quotations. A system of credit was inaugurated by the State Lien Law. By this system the farmer paid tribute to the local Caesar, twenty-five to fifty times the price for plantation supplies.


"The farmer, like the fabled cat, fell year by year further behind and finally was brought to mortgage his lands outright for the year's advances and to secure the old extortionate debt. More cotton was to be planted than ever before, to keep up the interest, compounded in many instances. Foreclosure came on slowly but surely. The lands were usually bought in by the supply merchant, who cared very little about the land but a great deal about the goods on the shelves. The supply merchant usually put Negroes on the acquired lands rather than white people. He sold each one a mule and a wagon, not forgetting the usual 25% time price, and thus calculated how much merchandise he could put out for the oncoming years. He rarely, if ever, visited the land, except in the growing season to calculate the value of the cotton in prospect and the safety to himself of future advances that crop year to the particular man that land was rented to.

"The saddest picture of slavery is the aftermath. Our country is riven with gullies and the old aristocratic colonnaded homes are in dilapidation and occupied by Negroes."

Mrs. Gooding: "My family were members of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. In the early days we used metal tokens in taking communion. We have never relinquished our ideas about singing psalms on the Sabbath.

"When I arrived to the years of womanhood, the hoop skirt was passing out of style, and the bustle and tight long shirts were the vogue. The style lacked comfort, and the corsets were cruel and suffocating and actually injurious to the spirit and health of women and girls.

"The women arranged their hair with a chignon and looped it upon the top of the head. Young girls arranged their hair in 'pig tails' down the back and wore bangs over the forehead. The longer a woman's hair, the more she had to be conceited about. The ladies often bought 'switches,' hair corresponding with her own, in which she used the 'switch' in connection with the chignon arrangement. Is chignons synonymous with rats? I can't say positively, but I am inclined to think so.



"When I was young, every woman and girl had a sunbonnet. The women wore them about the yard and garden, and the girls wore them to school. They did this to avoid sunburn and freckles. Freckles still remain the terror of womanhood, but lotions and cosmetics have put the sunbonnet into the discard or attic.


"Every girl had a sidesaddle, a riding habit, and a crop. In front of the home was the riding block where she mounted and dismounted her pony. Some of these old blocks and hitching posts may yet be seen about the county. The elderly ladies of the family had beaded handbags. They would fill these with tea cakes when they went to church, so they could keep the small children quiet during a long sermon by giving them one occasionally.

"We had portrait painters in my youth but no photographers. The daguerreotype was used to a limited extent. Some of these were exquisite but were exposed to light, and they soon faded and were useless.

"Visiting in my girlhood among neighbors was frequent and more cordial and enjoyable than now. We would go in the morning about ten o'clock, have dinner, and remain until after tea before leaving.

"How do I account for the decline of neighborly visiting? I think, in a great measure, the decline has been due to the multiplication of church circles, social clubs, and automobile rides. Each church denomination has four or five circles that meet once a week. Literary and music clubs and card parties have their meetings, and automobile rides are taken to surrounding towns, which may be reached by good roads. Then, too, the fixed changes of a household have to be taken into consideration, such as electricity, automobile upkeep, and gas. All this precludes the thought of frequent lavish entertainment.

"One of the regrettable changes, I observe, is the seeming lack of respect and consideration shown by young people toward their parents and old people. Boys and men do not exercise the same courtly manner toward girls and women as they formerly did. Just one incident to explain myself: Young men drive up to a young lady's home in an automobile, honk the horn, and sit until the young lady comes down to the automobile door. Men do not even observe



the courtesy to get out of the car and help the girl inside. In my youth, such an engagement would be made first by a written note. If accepted, the man would go to the home, get out, walk to the door, ring the bell, and accompany the young lady down the walk to the automobile, open the door, and assist her inside and see that she was comfortably seated.

"Lipstick and rouge would have scandalized a girl in my young days. The only vanity and affectation allowed was a cutglass bottle with a silver top. They called it the salts bottle, but I never heard of it containing anything other than hartshorn or spirits of ammonia."