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Helen Adams

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Helen Adams

- SM: 1824 Norway avenue was born on January 13, 1898, my name is Sara McAllister. One of the first things I wanted to ask you about was a place called Strange Creek. I've heard it mentioned before, tell me something about where it is or.
- HA: It's in Braxton County and it's a little village, country village.
- SM: Small town?
- HA: Small.
- SM: Bout how many families did you say lived there?
- HA: Uh, bout 25 er SM: Oh, that's all? 30, we had two country stores and a post office.
- SM: Uh, how were they situated, were they spread out or they HA: Yes they were spread out over . . . over the hills?
- HA: Yeah on the hills and in the valleys and different places.
- SM: How'd the place get it's name?
- HA: Uh, years ago before it was settled very much it was sort of a wilderness, they found, uh, a man's, uh, skelton, the bones of his dog and his gu-gun belt at the foot of the beech tree and he had carved on the tree "Strange is my name and I'm Strange Brown and strange it is I can't be found." After that they give the creek that was running by it the name of Strange Creek. And uh, that's, uh, how it took it's name.
- SM: Um, mmm, is the place still there?
- HA: The place is still there.
- SM: Any of the same family, have any ancestors live there?
- HA: No some of the, uh, ancestors, uh, SM: Of the Strange family? yes still living there but not many of the original people that I use to know.

SM: Um, mmm. Did you come from a big family . . .

HA: Uh, yes, a, very large family, there were seven of us children and my dad and mother raised two other children.

SM: Two others? Who, who's were they?

HA: Uh, one was a cousin of mine who's dad and mother both died and left him with a little boy, my father took him and another was a boy that didn't have no parents nor home and my dad raised him too.

SM: Till they were men er . . .

HA: Huh?

SM: Till they, till both of them were men or what?

HA: Till both of them were manhood and one was married.

SM: Was something like that common, did most people open their home like that?

HA: Not too common I don't know of it in any other place up there I guess it is in some places.

SM: Um, mmm. One thing I wanted to ask you about was, uh, your schooling, education what?

HA: Uh, oh schooling it was, it was pretty bad at that time course we didn't think of it as that, we had a, uh, one room schoolhouse and we had to walk about two or three miles through the snow and rain and mud to school.

SM: (Laughs) oh.

HA: And, uh, we uh, at uh, we stayed in school until about the sixth grade and then we went to normal school to prepare ourselves for teaching.

SM: That's what normal school was?

HA: Yes. After we went sessions, sessions of summer school then we went to normal school, and uh, I, uh, graduated

from normal school and taught three years at my original school where I went as a child.

SM: How big was the school, bout how many students?

HA: Bout, uh, I'd say twenty five or thirty children and they were all ages and grades from the first grade up.

SM: How long did you all go to school, did you go year round with your breaks?

HA: No there was six months schooling at that time and six months vacation. The, uh, children were needed to help their parents on the farms.

SM: Um, mmm.

HA: And they all lived in, uh, their living was made by farming all together.

SM: How big a part would, uh, children play as far as the work? Was, I know it wasn't just the men who worked in the family.

HA: Oh, women, women, the girls and the boys and women all worked down to the age of six.

SM: Hard work most of it?

HA: Yes the, uh, we had our own crews we lived on, uh, all the products that was raised on the farm, we raised, uh, beef and hogs and cured the bacon and the hams.

SM: What cured the ham, what's that do?

HA: It, uh, I don't know the process right now but I know it was smoked with something, and uh, it's something similar to the cured hams we have today.

SM: Um, mmm.

HA: They wouldn't spoil you could hang um up in a, uh, cellar house and keep um and about once or twice a year some of the neighbors would kill a yearling, that's

a young heifer [SM: Um, mmm.] and they'd, uh, kill it and divide it up at that time we didn't have no ice boxes and we couldn't keep fresh meat. And uh, so uh, that's about the way we got our own meat, we didn't know what it was to go to the store and buy, we had our own chickens and eggs and, on the farm.

SM: What other type of food did you have?

HA: Oh we had anything that was raised on the farm [SM: Um, mmm.] we had, uh, [SM: Corn?] corn and country molasses, we planted cane and made our own molasses we had um in big barrels.

SM: Uh, huh.

HA: And we had our own pickled beans.

SM: What, how do you fix pickled beans, I often wondered?

HA: You cook um and you let um, uh, go through the process of souring so far and after they get to a certain point then you put um in jars and seal um. And then when you can open and fry pickle beans, we always used um fried and they were really delicious. And uh, oh we had just about all kinds of food you can mention, we picked our own berries and had peaches and [SM: Uh, huh.] apples and . . .

SM: What were some of your favorites that you remember?

HA: Of fruits, er?

SM: Uh, huh, anything that you . . .

HA: Well I always liked peaches, blackberries and anything that was growed on the farm, [SM: Uh, huh.] apples was very common everybody had plenty of apples but sometimes peaches and berries and certain times we'd be a little bit short.

SM: Um, mmm. What about, you said something about your meat before that, uh, uh, a yearling, is that what you called would be cured?

HA: Well that's a young beef. Yes they call um yearlings and heifers er . . .

SM: And they'd be shared with other families?

HA: Yes they'd be shared, one farmer does it at a certain time and he, everybody would get a certain portion of it.

SM: Was there much sharing of food or what [HA: I would . . .] what was the relationship among the people, were they close or?

HA: Very close and, uh, one neighbor get in trouble the others would, uh, help um out. They had what you call barn raising, if one wanted to build a barn the others would all, uh, flock in and help and, uh, then they'd have apple peelings when the fall of the year come they make apple butter. And they, they'd have bean stringings and they they'd have social af-afterwards, they'd all go together and work and when they'd get through they'd usually have a social of some kind, something to eat and dancing for the young people and sometimes they would meet at a house and sing and play the organ, they had organs [SM: Um, mmm.] instead of pianos. It was very, uh, it wasn't dull in the country we all had a good time at that time.

SM: Uh, huh.

HA: And then we'd have to walk to church two or three miles at church.

SM: Uh, huh [HA: Sunday school.] did you go to church every Sunday?

HA: Every Sunday, church and Sunday school.

SM: How long that last you for?

HA: Until we growed up and, and left the country and (laughter).

SM: Uh, what was your church service like?

HA: Well we had a country preacher we call um circuit riders

[SM: Oh no.] at that time. He rode a horse and he was preacher of different churches, he'd preach at some church one hour and then go somewhere else and preach another hour. He, he took care of sometimes two or three churches the same man.

SM: Uh, huh. Did you ever have any of the members of the church do anything?

HA: Oh yeah we had, uh, socials, we had box suppers and. . .

SM: What's a box supper?

HA: Well we got to raise some money for something out in the country for the church er for somebody, er something we'd have box suppers, we'd all fix fried chicken, bake cakes and fix goodies what we called um in boxes and take um to church and auction um [SM: Hum.] auction um off [SM: Um, mmm.] and the young girls boyfriends would bid um in sometimes they'd bid um up as high as ten, twelve dollars [SM: Oh.] we thought that was an awful price at that time (laughter). And then they'd get together and sit down and eat and [SM: Uh, huh.] enjoy it.

SM: This was, uh, alot of fun on top of social gathering like, [HA: This is what . . .] I mean all together it'd be alot of fun?

HA: Oh yeah, yes, that's what it was intended for and then to raise money for some kind of a charitable organization [SM: Uh, huh.] that the country wanted to sponsor at that time.

SM: Was the church very strong in, in the community?

HA: Well yes it didn't have too many members there wasn't too many people but they was very devoted [SM: Um, mmm.] to their church.

SM: What were the services like, was there alot of singing, you played the organ?

HA: They was singing and, uh, and prayers, and uh, uh, preaching

the sermon, and uh, sometimes they would, uh, have speakers from different parts of the country to talk. Something similar to what we have today but not as elaborate.

SM: Um, mmm. More simple.

HA: Yes it was simple back there in them times.

SM: What do you think you like better?

HA: Well I think sometimes I'd like to go back to the old times (laughs) course I was young then that makes alot of difference.

SM: Is there really a big difference in the type of feeling and attitude towards life that they had then and they have now, is that different?

HA: No, no it was about the same sometimes I think people were more devoted in their church work than they are today but maybe that's the way I looked at it at that time. It was just simple country life is what it was back there it was very enjoyable and people didn't seem to have the troubles and the worries now a days that they had back then. I said that wrong (laughter).

SM: You meant it the other way around.

HA: I meant it the other way around, yes.

SM: Life wasn't as complicated as it is now.

HA: That's right, it wasn't as complicated as it is now.

SM: Yet the work was harder that seems kind of funny, they don't have modern conveniences, I mean then like they do now but . . .

HA: No we didn't have any modern conveniences then, I can remember back when we didn't have any screens.

SM: Any screens [HA: For the windows.] on the windows?

HA: That's right.

SM: What'd you do about all the bugs coming in?

HA: Well, uh, when we would eat if we had food displayed somebody would have to take a, when the doors wasn't shut in the summer we'd have to, uh, take a thresh, somebody keep the flies away from us.

SM: (Laughs) they'd get paid for doing that?

HA: (Laughs) no they'd take turns at it, [SM: Oh.] us children would.

SM: Uh, huh. Everyone of the children.

HA: One would do it while the rest of us eat and then one would take over.

SM: Uh, huh. Well did everybody eat at the same time like the adults or?

HA: Well if there was room enough at the table, yes we had a big long table as I remember and ~~there~~ was room around it for all us children.

SM: Do you remember your father as, uh, being like head of the house, I mean what type or relation can you remember?

HA: Oh yes I remember my father he was head of the house and I remember my mother, I even remember my grandparents back there. My grandfather was, uh, Sunday school superintendent and I can remember him very well, we all went to the same church. Is there anything we haven't covered (laughs).

SM: I noted things we did talk about (break in tape). I remember one thing I wanted to ask you about was the doctor, who was. . .

HA: We had one doctor in the whole community.

SM: Then he would do this for everybody?

HA: Yes, he was a regular country doctor and he'd go to every home, and people'd go in to his office.

SM: He had an office?

HA: Yes he had an office but he would really when people was sick and called him he would go to their home.

SM: Hum. What type of [HA: We had a telephone system there.]
A telephone, I thought they weren't in?

HA: Well we, (coughs) we had a country telephone system which would ring when it'd ring in one house it'd ring in all the houses and everybody knowed everybody's ring and they would get on the phone and listen when they heard people call. So most everybody knew everybody's business.

SM: (Laughs) that's how they found out.

HA: It was very useful when you had to have a doctor, call somebody to come and work, er need something in the night, er something like that.

SM: What'd you all do for medicine?

HA: Our country doctor supplied it besides old home remedies that our mothers made for colds and coughs and whooping cough and sore throat [SM: What about . . .] things like that.

SM: Did they use liquor for medicine what, what type of drinking did they do, what was some?

HA: You mean, uh, the men of the community?

SM: Um, mmm [HA: Where they drink at?] did the women, didn't, did the women drink or?

HA: No there wasn't no women at all that drank and men didn't drink but very little occasionally you'd hear somebody getting too much but not usually. There was no liquor in that part of the country, no liquor stores you had to go to Charleston which was about a hundred miles from where I lived and you go down Elk River on a log raft is what sort of travel they had at that time and they usually, the men folks would go in the

fall and get a gallon for colds and coughs and things for the winter. And that's about all the drinking we had in that part of the country.

SM: Well there's something (coughs) I remember you telling me about an incident about some man on a log what was that about?

HA: Oh yes there [SM: Drinking?] was one man that had been to Charleston and got his whiskey and come back and he'd been drinking he got a bit too much and we had what we call the foot pa-er foot log over the creek, Strange Creek, [SM: Uh, huh.] it was a tree that was cut and would fall across which would make a walking log. So this man came back from Charleston with his jug of whiskey and he was a little bit tipsy so he said, his name was Ike, he said, "Well Ike, if you walk this log without falling off," now this is in the wintertime when it was real cold, there was ice in the creek, [SM: Um, mmm.] said, "if you walk this log without fa-falling off when you get to the other side I'll treat you." He got about the middle of the log and he got to shaking and the log got to shaking and he went from side to side and finally fall off through the ice into the creek well he got up and shivered all over and he says, "Well Ike, you done the best you could for me [SM: (Laughs)] so I'll treat you anyway." So he said I'll treat you anyway.

SM: It wasn't the usual thing though?

HA: No that was just one [SM: Oh (laughs).] I heard my dad tell [SM: Uh, huh.] which was true and I know the party that he was talking about.

SM: Um, mmm. What, did you all do any story telling, uh, did you all, like did your father ever tell stories to your brothers and sisters for bedtime?

HA: Oh yes at nights alot of times, yes he was always telling us some kind of story to entertain us.

SM: Uh, huh.

HA: And we would listen very tenetive we loved to hear him talk.

SM: How come?

HA: Well we loved him, I guess is the reason he'd tell interesting stories and he was our father and he was very good to us.

SM: Um, mmm. Was he an educated man?

HA: Uh, ordinarily.

SM: What would . . .

HA: He could write and read and spell, he'd never been to college, he wasn't what you would call an educated man [SM: Um, mmm.] but he'd gone through schools up through the sixth grade and he, uh, had good common sense, "horse sense" they called it up in the country.

SM: (Laughs) that was important then.

HA: Yes (coughs).

SM: What did they do for, uh, funerals, what, if the preacher was a circuit rider?

HA: Oh when people would die in the country we didn't have no, uh, we didn't have no funeral homes, no mode of embalming, it had to be very simple. We couldn't, the body wasn't held over a day and night because it couldn't be embalmed, [SM: Um, mmm.] and uh, we had, uh, our preacher there church was the one to held the memorial service and they was usually taken to the cemetary on either wagons or sleds. That part of the country was rather rugged and hilly so, uh, the mode of getting over it sometimes was very difficult, we didn't have no roads such as we have in these days up in there.

SM: Well did you all have wakes that was, uh, what was the funeral like?

HA: Yes we, uh, they was always people would set up with the body all night long sometimes ten to twelve (coughs) before the funeral.

SM: Who would, uh, were the coffins, who built the coffin?

HA: So, uh, the people of the country, the men folks of the country would get together and make it.

SM: Everybody'd go to the funeral?

HA: Everybody that, yes that knew them.

SM: Um, mmm.

HA: They'd even, uh, I've seen, uh, coffins they made they would, uh, they'd make different from our coffins now a days, they really were coffins then. The caskets then. The caskets now are different. And they'd line um (coughs) they covered um with black and black lace around the lid. And uh, they'd line um inside with some kind of white silk or something very comfortable looking. So that (coughs), that was the way we buried our dead up there.

SM: What, what did, uh, people have on like to be buried, did they dress um up for it?

HA: Oh yes they dress um in a simple plain dress and sometimes they'd make the burial shroud usually make SM: What's a burial shroud? it out of plain white.

SM: What's that?

HA: Burial shroud?

SM: Um, mmm.

HA: It's a dress, a long dress that something similar to the shrouds they have now a days. I know I had a sister died when, real early in life. She was older than I, she was twen-twenty years old (coughs) and I was younger, and uh, they made her coffin, some of our neighbors made her coffin SM: Um, mmm. and they lined it like I said in the black it was a black coffin with lace around the lid and she was buried in a white dress that (coughs) my aunt made for her.

SM: Would you have any, uh, other sisters who got married out in the country?

HA: Yes, I had, uh, I had one I remember I had two older sisters and then this sister died and then two brothers, uh, one older sister was away from home when she got married and the youngest one got married at home. We had big times at weddings up there, they'd put on a big spread, they'd cook for days and invite all the country people and they'd go see um to weddings and, uh, that's the way it was at my sister's wedding.

SM: How long would the wedding last, what (coughs) . . .

HA: Usually for a day and a night.

SM: Oh.

HA: Uh, huh, they'd have eats on the table all day long. People would just mill around and circulate and talk to each other and have a nice time, country style.

SM: Were they young people, were there young people couples and everybody?

HA: Oh yeah, there were alot of young couples and other, alot of mix people, old age and, uh, older people and children at, uh, weddings (interference with microphone).

SM: What system of law did you have?

HA: Well we really didn't have, uh, nothing but a county seat and courthouse where all legal documents were recorded. We didn't have much need for law up there because there was no crime. People never locked their doors, it was very unusual if anything at all happened. And if anybody had a suit and couldn't decide among themselves they took it to (coughs) Sutton to the county courthouse and there that trial was held.

SM: Did the community ever take the law in it's own hands?

HA: Well they was, uh, an incident I can remember up there in the country where there was, uh, a man that was un-

desirable and he lived in the community where there were nice people. He got, uh, some people into lewd practices for immoral purposes and there was a bunch of the citizens and the leading men of the country appointed themselves the Ku-Ku Klux Klan, and uh, went out one night and whipped him and tell him to take his girls and get out and pointed down the road and he went and they never seen him again, left the country.

SM: Um, mmm, it work, uh?

HA: It worked, and uh, people wouldn't stand for anything like that up in the country, they were all law abiding citizens and well respected country people. So any accord of differences was tried in a court at the county seat.

SM: Did you ever have any really bad trouble like when you were teaching school?

HA: Not any really bad trouble but there's a little incident one time I can remember I had a, uh, pupil that was almost grown, he was almost a man and he was a little retarded in a way and he kept giving me trouble with taking the poker out of the stove, we had this big pot bellied stove for heat, he would take the poker and he would heat it and he would burn the blackboard. And the blackboard was, what I mean by that is a board where we would take chalk and write down things and have the peoples to do it and, and uh, learn from it. So, uh, I had to go in the, correct him on that and I whipped him, and uh, he put out the word that he was a going to kill me and my mother cried and begged me not to go back to school she was dearly afraid for my life. I was too but I wouldn't show it [SM: (Laughs).] I went on to school, and uh, when I got to school that morning I was almost shaking all over, and uh, it was in the fall of the year there was chestnuts and rabbits and squirrels up there and he'd been out hunting. Well he turn the corner of the schoolhouse as I walked in, he had a gun in his hand and I thought about the threat he'd made and my mother crying and begging me not to go and it scared me very much, and uh, so he come walking up to me and told me to hold out my hand. I held out

my hand. I held out my hands and he filled um full of chestnuts so [SM: What?] that was the last of that incident. He was a good boy after that. And he brought me them chestnuts to, uh, I guess he knew he'd been mean.

SM: Um, mmm. Is there any other incidents that stand out in your mind?

HA: Well that's about the only thing that stood out in my mind when I was teaching school more than alot of times little children would come to school of the morning in the wintertime, they had so far to walk their feet would be frozen and I had a pan there we had cold water we'd put um in cold water, thaw um out.

SM: Um, mmm. Why cold water?

HA: Well we thought at that time which I don't know whether yet, whether it was true or not but we thought it was better than any warm water to thaw out their feet without that was frozen cold.

SM: Um, mmm.

HA: And then, uh, that's about all incidents I can think of in the, at the, uh, school that's all the trouble I had all my three years I taught. And I applied for school that I'd growed up in and graduated from and, and I got a certificate and taught (break in tape).