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### Oral History Interview: Mattie Adkins

Mattie Adkins

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# RELEASE FORM

## Deed of Gift to the Public Domain

I, Mattie Adkins, do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University the tape recordings and transcripts of my interview(s) on Nov 9 1998.

I authorize the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their Oral History Program.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

Concha L Teketo  
(Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program)

Mattie Adkins  
~~Concha Teketo~~  
(Donor)

Nov 9 1998  
(Date)

Andrea Fekete

Soc 432

Fieldwork Project Summary

23 Nov. 98

Upon interviewing Mattie Adkins, I learned much about her life. She concentrated the most on her life as a child, and young adult growing up in Southern West Virginia. She begins by explaining how the family sustained itself, what the children's, women's, and men's roles were in the family, and community. She goes into great detail in discussing what the family lived on, exactly what type of work they did, and how the work impacted other aspects of their lives. Mattie talks about the general level of education of her community in the early 1900's, and also describes the geography of the area she grew up in. She briefly talks about marriage, and burial customs within her family. She also briefly responds to issues on race relations. She discusses the way in which her community helped one another through the rule of mutual reciprocity. She often mentions religion, and expresses her belief in witches, and demonic possession. She mentions specific details about bandaging wounds, and old-fashioned cooking. She tells a few stories of murder, accidents, deaths, and giving to the poor. (mutual reciprocity)

#594

Tape #1

Subject: Field Work Project

An Oral Interview With : Mattie Adkins

Conducted By: Andrea Fekete

Date of Interview: November 1, 1998

Transcriptionist: Andrea Fekete

Interview with Mattie (Carter) Adkins  
November 1, 1998. Cal Creek, WV.

Tape 1 of 1. Side 1 of 2.  
Interviewer=I  
Respondent=R  
Friend of Interviewer=L

Begin Tape.

R: I ain't had my hearing aide fixed in a long time.  
Now, what [do] you want to know?

I: Is there any time of question you don't want to answer?  
About your childhood or anything?

R: No, but we worked hard all the time. Dad never would let us  
go nowhere, when we was growing up. We had to work. We didn't work  
;we didn't eat.

I: What kind of jobs did you do?

R: We worked in the fields. Had to raise stuff to eat back then.  
Couldn't get no job. Once in awhile Dad would get a little bit of  
money, and buy flour. We already had our meats, and corn, and all  
our canned stuff, and everything like that. We already had that  
but all he had to get us was flour, and salt, and sodium bake  
there, and sugar.

I: So, you didn't depend on stores a whole lot? Just grew everythi  
yourself?

R: No, we raised what we eat. Just needed sugar, salt, and baking  
powders. We had our own meat, and we rendered the lard out, I  
mean fat out, and made lard out of it. Then we had meat, beef,  
hog, and all kinds of chickens, and everything like that.

I: So, how big was your garden? Was it really big, or a small  
garden in your backyard?

R: 200 acres. Dad, he cleaned up. Well, he, and my brothers cleaned  
it up. He raised corn, and beans in one side of it, and the other  
side was just potatoes, and stuff like that

Fekete 2

Mattie (Carter) Adkins continued...

in it. And Mommy, she had a garden down there beside the river, a pretty good sized garden, but...

I: How many brothers, and sisters did you have?

R: There was twelve of us. Six boys, and six girls. All of us is dead, but five of us is the only ones living. I'm the oldest.

I: Did any of you go to school when you were growing up?

R: I didn't get to go to school much. We had to work so much, and we got to go to school in the winter time, and that was about it.

I: In the winter what was school like?

R: I went to eighth grade, but lot of the time I didn't get to go.

I: Did you have much spare time at all to just play?

R: On weekends we got to go to my uncle's. We lived at the river. We'd go out to the river anytime we wanted to. I'd liked to got drowned when I was twelve years old, and I never would fool with the river no more.

I: What was the nmost important rules at your house?

R: I don't hardly know.

I: Was you allowed to have boyfriends?

R: I married \_\_\_\_'s Daddy when I was eighteen. I slipped off. Mommy worked around the house, and she raised the garden all time, and then Dad, and the boys raised the corn, and stuff up in the hollow, and we went to church. Dad never would let us get out, and go places. Sometimes we'd go over to his brother's, and my first cousin's, and we'd have to work half a day on Saturday to get to do that. We'd go over there, and

Mattie (Carter) Adkins Continued...

{ stay alnight.

I: How would you describe your community? Were the houses close together, or far apart?

R: Well, they was in hollering distance. We lived two miles above Gilbert. The main hollow was named Ned Branch, and where we lived was North Fork. We lived right in the mouth of it, and that hollow is the one Dad cleaned up. Whenever ----- was born in January, and then in February they was a washout come out of that hollow. Dad timbered, and cleaned up, and just roll them over in the hollow where they was stripping back in there, and that dirt got behind all that stuff, and [inaudible] we layed [inaudible] the railroad. We moved. I had two brothers killed in the mines. Both of them was killed the same way. They was miles apart though. One of them got killed back this side of Man, and the other was in Virginia when he got killed.

I: There was a lot of coal mine deaths back then?

R: Yes. Ezra, a motor run over him, and my brother in Virginia gone out to open his sandbox up, and he had the throttle on the motor, and it knocked him in front of it. But Ezra, he was breaking on the motor when he got killed.

I: What was your family's traditions like when somebody died?

R: No, they just buried them. Back then they didn't have no embalming whenever they got killed. I had a brother die nineteen years ago. They emblamed him. Whenever he worked on the railroad dust eat his lungs up.

{ I: Do you have any special memories of when you was growing up, or when you got married?

R: Well, when I first got married he worked in the mines. It was

Fekete 4

Mattie (Carter) Adkins Continued...

'36 then, and that's when we had that car wreck. Killed him, and the baby.

I: Were there alot of cars?

R: Well, we had a Model T Ford. In the wreck, we had a loaf of bread, and a mush melon, and [it] never even hurt them, but [it] killed all [of] them. Nothing everhappened in our family except that, and Charlie, and Ezra getting killed.

I: What was a woman's place? A woman's, and man's duty? Did the women work just like the men?

R: Well, I done all the work in the house, and Mommy, she helped work in thegarden. [She] helped hoe corn, and I done stuff like that too. I started [when] I was twelve years old. I cooked, and washed. I done everything.

I: So, the women worked just as hard as the men, then?

R: Yes. The only thing I know is I worked hard since I was twelve years old. Then, after -----'s Daddy got killed, two years later, me, and Golden got married, and we lived in several places. He got his toe cut off, and then he got the same foot tore up, and he died with black lung.

I: Did people travel alot outside of where they lived?

R: No, we just went to church, and it was up the hollow up there from us. Daddy would go down [to] Gilbert sometimes, and get groceries, or something like that. We didn't have nothing to travel in. Wherever we went, we had to walk.

I: Did people have television, or telephones?

R: Nope. Didn't have no radio, or telephone, and we used oil lamps I guess over in here they might have had electricity, but over there where I was growing up, they just used oil lamps; grates,

Fekete 5  
Mattie (Carter) Adkins Continued...

and chimneys in the house. Burnt coal all the time.

I: What about clothes? Did she [her mother] sew?

R: No, Mom never did sew none. She might sew up a ripped place, but she never had no sewing machine. We never did have many clothes when we was growing up. I didn't know whata bra, nor a pair of panties was 'till I got married. Dad couldn't get no work nowhere, and we just, he, we just didn't have no clothes.

I: What were the hardest times you remember?

R: Well, they was several years of it. I don't know. I guess they was about eighteen year we had hard times. Then, whenever the war come, Dad, he got to making props for the mines, and he bought stuff back then, but they didn't get no money like they do now. We'd have to go back [in the] hill, and cut the crops, and timber, and then makes crops out of them.

I: Where did most black people live?

R: They wasn't any up in overthere. They all lived over in here, but they wasn't none over there. They still ain't none over there.

I: There was alot of segregation? Did they seperate the whites from the blacks? [In the coal camps]

R: Well, they just...now when they built that railroad over there they was some colored people come, but when that railroad was done they left. All but one man, and onewoman, but they died. They was over in there. They didn't stay too long.

I: What was the general feeling about colored people?

[Among whites]

R: All I hear anybody say was they liked them. I liked them. Best friend I had was a colored woman. She'd see me coming up the road, and she'd say, "Hey, you black wench! Come over here!"

Fekete 6  
Mattie (Carter) Adkins Continued...

I'd go, "What do you want, Mary?" "I just want you to eat with me!"

[Mary would reply]

I: Which war were you referring to, when you said "the war?"

R: Cecil, and ----- both were in that second war. [World War II]  
Grover, he died of black lung, and Cecil, I don't know what  
all is wrong with him.

I: What happened when somebody got sick?

R: They was, see, a Midwife. She was a doctor. She was a nurse.  
Everything. [She was] down there in Gilbert, and she doctored  
everybody.

I: Everybody in the whole area?

R: Everybody [would] go to her. Sometimes she [would] charge  
people, [and] sometimes she wouldn't. She was a good person.  
Sometimes she'd go for miles to deliver babies, and wouldn't  
get nothing out of it. Back then, there wasn't no money to get  
hardly, and her husband was a dentist, and he'd pull teeth.

I: Were there alot of professionals? What did most people do?

R: They just farmed. That's about all there was to do.

I: If somebody came in the area, and they were a doctor,  
would they stick out?

R: Well, where we lived they was...N&W had a big water tank,  
and these hobos laid in under it all the time. Dad fed sixteen  
of them one night. He knew he wouldn't turn nobody away.

We never did have nothing but beans, and bread, but they was  
glad to get that because they was trying to find work, you know.  
He fed sixteen though, one night. No, they wasn't no work to  
do until Roosevelt started war, and then it started building up.  
People got to work what didn't have to fight. Dad, then, he got  
to making props for a man for the mines, and I wasn't home then.

Fekete 7  
Mattie (Carter) Adkins

Me, and Golden was married then.

I: So, the war kind of helped the area then?

R: Yes. That war, if my boys had the money that they made they wouldn't have to worry forever, but they spent it as fast, they did. When Golden worked in the mines, he hardly ever got over eight, or ten dollars, and he didn't draw no scrip, or nothing out. Just dues come out of it, but whenever Jimmy, and Alan went to work, why, I wish you could see the paydayes that they drew. Jimmy mihg't have some bonds, or something like tht, but Alan ain't got nothing. He'd go to a restaurant, and buy hotdogs; 20, or 25, and hamburgers, and take them to the house, and they'd eat them.          used to say, "Well, I don't see how Alan can feed that bunch."          is the one that worked there.

L: Mom told me a story about a woman. She said everytime they'd bury her, she'd show up on the porch.

R: Well, a witch put a spell on your mom, and your Dad had to take her to church.

L: Who was the woman?

R: I don't know, but my daughter took your Mom down there to Logan whenever that witch was down there. I don't know why my daughter wants to mess with that stuff. Well, I heard two preachers talking on tv yesterday, and they said them demons would make you sick. Look what's happened to         . She's sick. And them demon's is the devil is what they are. I seen a preacher pray for a colored woman on there one day, and she got down on her hands, and knees, and she first fit [fought] them, and kept on saying, "Come out there!" I wish you could [have] seen what come out on that floor.

And he done another woman that way too. And he said everytime he had a crusade, why, e had to pray demons out of them. They get to messing with that old witch, and she puts a spell on them. ..... had a good Daddy. He was good to work.

L: What was church like?

R: We were Baptist. Well, we had to go to a schoolhouse. Just school desks in it is all they was, and sometimesthey'd have church until 12 O'clock in the night. There wasn't a very big church house, but they was quite a bit of people. Back then it wasn't like they are now. Our church got tore up, because the preacher got to going with another woman, and we got rid of him, and it's just now getting built back up.

I: Did people own books?

R: We didn't. I don't know about the others. Nothing but school books. We'd get them [from the] schoolhouse, and bring them home, and study them. Then, we'd have to take them back.

No, we didn't have no books. We didn't get no paper. Back then the -y wasn't nothing. Back when I was growing up there was lots of beechnuts, and hickory nuts, and thingslike that. You could crack them, and get the stuff out [of the] inside, and they was good. The beechnuts they wasn't too big, we just peeled the hull out of them. They was an old man up thehollow, and I picked two ten pound meal bags full of them for him, because he liked them so good.

I: Someonetold me you know how to pluck a chicken, and cook it?

R: Yes. I'd get out there sometime. I ain't got none now, but I did. I ring their necks, scald them, and pick the feathers off of them, and cut them up. I buy them at the store whole, and cut them up to make dumplings.

L: Mom says you've only had your hair cut once?

R: I ain't had it cut since I [was] seven years old. My hair is naturally wavy.

I: Did girls wear make-up back then? How did girls act? Did your dad get mad if you went out with boys?

R: No, we got along good. They wasn't about ten or 12 girls on the hollow. We all got along good. Didn't have no trouble. They was like I was. They was poor, and didn't have nothing too, so we got along good. We'd cow hunt with each other. They was one man [who] was awful mean to his girls, but I was going cow hunting one evening, and I went to the house, and one of them run out, and said, "Mattie, my Dad's run me all over this place trying to whip me." I said, "You got any of them nerve tablets of Ebbie Jeans?" She said, "Yeah." Everytime he'd want a drink of water, or a drink of whiskey, she'd give him one, and he wouldn't wake up until three O'clock the next day.

L: What's cow hunting?

R: Yeah, back then cattle run out. You didn't have to keep them fenced up, and we'd have to get out, and hunt them to milk them. Back then, my brother-in-law's Daddy had hogsrunning out in the hills. They was beechnuts, and hickory nuts, and they lived on that, and they had hog meat all the time. Sometimes they'd have 10, or 12. They had a big family too.

I: I read a book that said people didn't eat alot of meat, but that's not what people tell me. The book is wrong.

R: Honey, they killed them back then. Back then, they wasn't no deers to kill, but they [are] plenty of them now. But, we had hogs to kill, nd beefs, and chickens. We never did go hungry. And Dad would raise corn, and we'd take, and sell it when we had what they

call meal sacks. They held two bushels, and they put that corn in them sacks, put Cecil up on top of the mule, and he'd take it about four miles down the river, and they'd grind it for him, and sift it, and get the husk out, and they'd put it back on the mule and put Cecil back on top of it. You talking about good meal, honey. It was good. It ain't like it is now, and Mommy used to make mush. She'd let her water get to boiling, and she'd put meal in there, and keep it stirred up until it got thick, and she'd let it cool, and we'd eat milk, and mush. She'd pop us corn, and we never did go hungry. We had 360 gallon barrels. We had one full of corn. One full of crout, and one full of pickled beans.

I: Where did that stuff come from?

R: We raised it; cooked it, and put it in there, and we put white clothes on it, and then put rocks on it to hold it down in there, so nothing could get in there to it. We canned beans, and dried beans, and we raised 240 bushels of potatoes one year. My 3 oldest brothers was home that summer, and they helped raise everything, and after they got all of it done, why, Charlie went to Virginia.

I: Did people own their land? Their house? My Dad told me a lot of the miner's homes were owned by the company. [coal companies]

R: It was on a lease that belonged to a coal company, and Dad built the house on it. Back then, they built houses out of green lumber, and they was cracks that big in it. [Holds up her hands about six inches apart] Mommy, she took catalogs, and paste them over those cracks. We had two grates. Back then, you didn't have nothing, but [a] table, stove, and beds; almost nothing.

I: So, all the kids slept in the same room?

R: They did, but me, and Virginia slept in the room where Mom, and Dad slept, and the boys all slept in the other room.

We just had 2 rooms, and a kitchen is all we had. It was me, Cecil Grover, Ezra, Virginia, and [inaudible].

We had to work in the fields, but I didn't. I done the cooking, and everything.

L: Did your Mom give birth to the kids at home?

I: yeah. Mom, and Dad raised          until she was twelve years old. Dad never would let me have her. She got to playing hooky, and Mommy sent her to me, and she married      when she was thirt-  
-een.

I: So, girls got married young back then?

R: They got married pretty young back then. Some did; some didn't.

I was eighteen. When we lived up here, before we moved, they was bears, and wildcats up there. That bear, he'd come up around the house. Everybody seen it. It was there when we moved there, and it was still there when we left. That family moved there, and I went up there one morning for something, or other, and they got to laughing, and said, "Mama said there was a bear up there this morning." And I said, "They was?" They said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, it's been there all the time." He said, "I told yuns."

[Laughter] What it was was it would come out there after dark, all of them just jumped out of the car, and run in the house, and she was getting something, or other out of the car, and that bear walked up toher. [Laughter] She took off flying. [Laughter]

Now,          stayed with us when school would go out. She'd stay until school startd again if they'd let her. Sometimes they wouldn't let her.

I: Was you wanting to ask her something else? [inaudible]

[Humming]

Fekete 12  
Mattie (Carter) Adkins Continued...

R: She got to playing in the creek with the boys one day, and stepped on a beer bottle. It went plum through her foot, and then, Jimmy carried her into the house, and we tried every way in the world to try, and get that blood to stop, and we couldn't. I said, "Jimmy go in there, and get me a jar of salt." He brought that back out there, and I went, and cooked that blood, and it quit bleeding.       , and        come, and took her to the hospital, and they had to sew up her foot on the inside, and the doctor asked       , and said, "How did you get that blood to stop?" She said, "I didn't. Mommy did." And we [inaudible] her leg. We done everything, and that blood was...wouldn't have been long that she would've been dead. Put that salt on it. That salt cooks the blood, and stops it from bleeding. We had a cow, and a man took her horns off, and he cut too deep in her head. They put tar on her head, and everything. I went down there to where she was at, and she walked up, and laid her head against me. I turned around, I said, "Golden, give me your cigarette papers." He reached them to me. I started down at the bottom, and they got wet as quick as I could put them on there, and I just kept going up until I got up above where she was bleeding. It stopped it. There is a lot of silly old things you can do.

I: I read a little bit about politics in those books I've got. They say that people who was running for mayor, or sheriff back then, they would go door to door, and tell you to vote for them. What was elections like? Is that what they did?

R: [inaudible] Well, once they was a democrat, and the other was a republican, and everytime there was an election they fit. [fought] fit on election ground. That's the only trouble they was. Just them two.

{ They'd steal votes, and everything. They do that yet. [still]

Back then they wasn't asmuch law as they are now.

I: Could somebody get away with murder back then?

R: Nope, they was a colored man staying at the house aboveus, and they send his girl to the hollow all day to work with that colored man. Well, a ----- boy, and a ----- boy they was going to stop it. Well, they went up there, and got after him. That girl hit him with a rock. Dad intervened, and was shot, and killed. Later on he died of Cancer of the liver.

I: What were your parents names? Your brothers, and sisters?

R: Mom's name was [inaudible]. Dad's name was Cleeve. Charlie, Ezra, George, Cecil, me, Harry, Virginia, Everett, Mary, Martha, and Geniveve.

\* All names of the living have been replaced with ----- with the exception of Mattie Adkin's immediate family.