

Ben Mitchell

Early Settlers' Personal History Questionnaire, WPA
Interviewed by Arthur R. Hill Hempstead County, Ark. April 3, 1941.

Transcribed by Andrea E. Cantrell, University of Arkansas Libraries, 2003. [See transcriber's notes](#)

1. Early settler's name
Ben Mitchell "Colored" Uncle Ben
2. Address
709 South Walnut St. Hope, Arkansas
3. Present occupation (most of the old timers are now retired).
Restaurant operator
4. Previous occupation or occupations.
Hope Lumber Co. (Lumber hauler).
5. Date of birth.
September 22, 1844.
6. Place of birth.
Macon, Ga.
7. Married? To whom? When? Where?
Catherine McGee.
8. If an immigrant give particulars. City and country of derivation, name of ship on which arrived, etc.
Released from slavery in Georgia when 1 year old. Moved to Winn Parish Houma, La. I was owned by Bill Dixon as a slave.
9. How long has the individual resided in Arkansas?
50 years.
10. If not a native tell of the voyage to Arkansas. Boat? Wagon train? etc.
Came in a covered wagon to Magnolia from Louisiana (came to Arkansas by choice).
11. Why did the individual come to Arkansas?
[question skipped]
12. Get details of construction of early homes. (In the southern and southeastern parts of the state chimneys were frequently built of clay and split wood or trimmed branches due to the scarcity of stone and the lack of brick kilns. Some of the more pretentious houses were built with brick imported up the rivers. In the northwestern part of the state stone houses occurred much more frequently. Pay particular attention to these and similar regional differences.)
Log houses dirt floors. (Rough puncheon cut from pine trees.)
13. What form of lighting was used in the early days? Pine knots? Tallow dips? Candles poured at home? Oil or fat lamps? etc.
Tallow candles homemade and brass finger lamps.
14. When were electric lights first used in your community?
Magnolia, Arkansas 1891
15. What kind of fuel was used? (This was wood in most parts of the state, of course, because it was plentiful and convenient, but in some of the western counties coal may have appeared early.

- Wood and pine knots.
16. What kinds of food did the early settlers have? Were fish and game depended upon for the meat supply? Was game plentiful? What kinds?
Hot meat, deer, turkey, squirrel[sic], fish and farm products.
 17. What kinds of clothes were worn and how manufactured?
Jeans cloths and home spun stockings.
 18. Were there any interesting customs or incidents connected with early courtships? Was bundling ever practiced? (It is highly improbable but possible.) Were charivaries (usually pronounced 'shivaree' in Arkansas and the lower Mississippi Valley territory) frequent?
Met at girls home mother and father present. Dances churches and scools[sic].
 19. Compare some early food, clothing, etc. prices with those of today. (Since staples were usually bought in barrels, hogsheads, bushels, and similar large units, present prices will have to be quoted on the same basis.)
Flour \$12.00 to \$24.00 a barrel.
 20. What were some of the incidents pertaining to the sharing of food and other supplies in times of common need?
Shared food in common 1856.
 21. What were some early cultivated crops? Domesticated animals? (For instance, when did tomatoes cease to be known as 'Love Apples,' regarded as poisonous? When moved from the flower garden to the vegetable garden?)
Cotton, corn, whest [wheat?], rye, oats, sorghum.
 22. What were early farm implements? Any homemade? If purchased, where? Prices?
Wooden homemade plow stocks. Bull tongue solid sweeps and turning twisters.
 23. What were early industries in the community?
Water mill, gin, sawmill, blacksmith shop.
 24. What were some native wild plants used as food or for flower gardens? (For example: mullein, sassafras roots, sweet gum resin, sun-flower seed, paw-paws, sumac berries, poke salad-- or salet, or salud. There are stories told of various food substitutes used during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. These might supply interesting sidelight.)
Polk salad, wild onions, sassafrass, sheep shears, wild cabbage.
 25. Relate interesting incidents of the early days. Tell of childhood impressions and memories. Tell of group activities such as house raisings and warmings, quilting bees, corn huskings, brush arbor meetings, dances, games, socials, hunts and game drives, hog killing, sorghum making, play parties, and the like. Compare early farm and town life with that of today. Tell any experiences relating to the Indians, their customs and habits.
Hog killing, sheep shearing, log rolling quilting bees.
 26. Tell of early methods of combating forest fires, town or building fires.
None but fighting with brush tops, plow furrow[sic] keep fire off land,
 27. Get origin of place and thing names such as hills, valleys, rivers, soughs, bayous, plants, animals, etc.
Flat lake, buck cree [creek], Dorchur river,
 28. Tell of early taverns, hotels, boarding houses, stagecoach stations, boat landings, etc.
Monroe, La, no taverns.
 29. Tell of early schools.
Rureal[sic] schools, log houses, 1871, with split log seats and no backs.
 30. Location of school? Late?

- Town and cities, very few rural schools.
31. Name of teacher?
Wesley Strong. Judge Stephens, Miss. Annie Burt.
 32. How were funds provided? Tuition? How much? Was payment made in kind?
Tuition only three months schools.
 33. School books used? Title? Author? (Many of the old plantations maintained tutors either for individual families or groups of families. Sometimes 'school' was conducted on the premises for darkies' [sic] youngsters. Check on such information.)
Blue back speller, McGuffey reader.
 34. What constituted the reading matter of the early settlers? Books? Magazines? Newspapers? Get titles and authors.
News papers Homa La. Almac. [Homa, Louisiana Almanac??]
 35. Where was the first telegraph station in the community? When established?
Hope, Arkansas 1878.
 36. Tell of the early "Horse cars." When were trolley cars substituted? When buses?
Texerkana[sic], Little Rock, 1895.
 37. When and where was the first automobile seen?
Hope, Arkansas 1910.
 38. When and where was the first train seen?
Gibbs, La, to Homa, La. 1888.
 39. When and where was the first airplane seen?
1918 Hope, Arkansas.
 40. When did automotive busses begin interurban operation? (Give descriptions on the five foregoing.)
None
 41. Early theatrical performances? Local people? Traveling stock companies?
Local talant[sic] in school over land circuit.
 42. Tell of any important local celebration in memory of any individual or event.
Grover Cleveland 1885
 43. Does the individual recall any early historical character such as Sam Houston, Co. James Bowie, former President Zachery Taylor, the James boys, etc.?
James Boys 1882
 44. Tell of any duels. Where were they fought? By whom? Why?
Jim Henderson killed Floyd Shaw, La.
 45. Tell of any feuds. Who was involved? Where? Why?
Tuggles feud Homa, La.
 46. Tell of any early tombstone inscriptions. Where?
None
 47. Tell of any bank robberies, stage holdups, executions of horse thieves or other impromptu executions, including lynchings. Give details.
None
 48. Tell of Civil War days, giving the fullest detail possible.
Nothing definite.
 49. Tell of any battles, skirmishes, forays, etc., witnessed.
Saw no battle my self.
 50. Tell of Reconstruction, the Carpetbaggers, scalawags, etc.
Destroyed crops stole cattle and burned house. I saw then [them?] destroy 80 acres of cotton and pile it in wind rows.
 51. Get all information possible regarding the original Ku Klux Klan or similar

organizations.

- Ku Klux organized to drive off carpet bsggers[sic].
52. Tell of any participation in the establishment of any religious or fraternal organizations.
None except Baptist church Hope, Arkansas.
53. Tell of any military affiliations.
None
54. Tell of any Indian mounds, cliff dwellings, caves, etc., that may be recalled. Get as accurate information as possible regarding artifacts, particularly such things as calendar stones, mortars, pottery, baskets, etc.
None.
55. Tell of any other historic sites.
Old State Captiol[sic] Old Tarven[sic] Washington, Arkansas.
56. What is total number of descendants?
4.
57. What are names and addresses of sons and daughters?
Johnnie Mitchell, Lula, Earl, Ola Bee.
58. Name some of the grandchildren and greatgrandchildren, if any.
8 grand children. Oklaomah[Oklahoma?], Louisiana, Arkansas.
59. Tell of any books, diaries, journals, sketches, or newspaper articles the individual has written. Give details.
None.

[Additional information:]

I made bluing in Louisiana for sale, raised indigo processed it and boiled liqued[sic] into bluing and in bottles in early days.

The above questionnaire is intended solely as a skeleton outline to assist the interviewer in giving his subject leads. It is improbable that any one individual can answer all the questions fully but it is advisable to ask them all anyway. Record the answers on plain paper numbering the answers to correspond with the above questions, if possible.

AT THE TOP OF THE PAPER ON WHICH YOU RECORD THE ANSWERS BE CERTAIN TO PUT YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, DATE AND REFER TO ARKANSAS HRS FORM J.

Do not limit yourself to the above questions. If the subject goes off on any tangent follow it to see if it is of historical interest. Remember to get Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why on every possible question. As regards matters of location, such as Indian sites, early buildings, tombstones, etc., be as definite and detailed as possible. Give pertinent data i.e., whether or not buildings are now occupied and if so by what or whom, and in either case, in what state of preservation and repair.

AH/gm-9/13/38