

Interviewee: Wharton . Albert

Last First Middle

Date of Interview: July 22, 1980

Total Number of Tapes:

Place: Winston -Salem

Cassette: C-45 C-60 C-90

Interviewer: Patty Dilley

Reel: 1 5" 7"

Context of the Interview (e.g., study of a special topic, the interviewer's particular interests, focus of the questions, anything significant about the setting or circumstances)

List topics discussed in the order they occur on the tape.

Tape # 1 Side 1 Was born in a four room house in the country, got water from a spring Doesn't remember his mother. Father and older sister took care of him. Sister "didn't marry until she was 20 years old." Went to church at Hickory Grove.

He never really went to Reynolda Church much, always went to the home church.

He never joined church until he was 20 years old. Men didn't join usually until they were older. Women would join earlier. He joined his wife's church in Center Grove.

Other people at Five Rows would go home to church at Brookstown, Old Town, etc.

Talks about his brothers who worked at Reynolda---George first took care of the boiler, then machinery in the dairy, then drove the Reynolda bus, then he was mechanic, then Dick Reynolds used him as a chauffeur, worked for Dick until he died, at 58 years. George took wife and ~~daughter~~ children with him when Dick went down to Sapelo, Devotion. George's wife is still living, Annie Wharton.

Talks of work he likes and why---outside work. He never did have any choice about jobs. When they asked him to change he had to change. He never thought about getting a job elsewhere---he could have gotten a job working in Reynolds Tobacco Co. When he was working on his father's farm, he work<sup>ed</sup> in the factory sometimes ~~out~~ several months out of the year when the crops were laid by. He talks about why he didn't like that kind of work. He ~~could~~ could have gone back any time, had a supervisor there who wanted him to come back. Two other men from Reynolda went to the factory and left the farm---Marvin Scales and Marvin Smoot. Mr Clint Wharton let them live at Five Rows even though they no longer worked for Reynolda until they found themselves some other place to live.



TAPE INDEX  
(continued)

Tape # 1

Side 1

When he was working at the house, he got one Sunday a month off work.

Talks of jobs he's held since he's retired---mowed lawns, and now does odd jobs for a woman here in Winston -Salem.

Compares domestic work to factory work.

Was making 50\$ a week when he retired in 1960.

Talks of what his wifes's children are doing now---one in service work; son works for contractor.

The status associated with working for the Reynolds.

While he was working up at the house, he often drove the housekeeper, Miss Gunn places. She'd pay him.



Albert Wharton  
Interviewed July 22, 1980 (#2)  
Winston-Salem, N.C.  
Reynolda House Oral History Project  
Interviewed by Patty Dilley  
Transcribed by Allison Blount DuBuisson  
Tape II, Side 1

Patty Dilley: I'd like for you to tell me about the house where you were born out in the country. Can you describe the house that you lived in, and the farm that you worked on out there?

Albert Wharton: Well, it was just an ordinary four-room house. Got water from the spring. Back then you worked horses, didn't have no tractors or nothing. Doing muscle work.

PD: What can you remember about your mother?

AW: Can't hardly remember her. She passed when I was about six, seven years old. I don't remember enough to say anything about her.

PD: Who took care of you?

AW: My father and my older sister, Liza.

PD: When was it that your sister left home and left you sort of on your own?

AW: She didn't marry until she was about twenty years old, I reckon. She stayed with us 'til she married. All of us were--you might say--grown when she got married.

PD: Do you think she waited until the kids were old enough?

AW: That could have been.



Albert Wharton

PD: Did you go to church back then, when you lived on the farm?

AW: Oh yes. Hickory Grove. Down on Reynolda Road.

PD: Did you later start going to Reynolda Church?

AW: No, I didn't go to Reynolda Church much. I usually went to a country church. My home church, you might say.

PD: Hickory Grove.

AW: No. After I left Clemmons, I came up here . . . I never did join Hickory Grove. Up here Center Grove was where I joined church at.

PD: How old were you when you joined a church?

AW: I reckon I was about thirty years old. [laughs] I attended church, I just never did join it.

PD: Was that normal for young boys back then?

AW: Not too many boys joined until they were eighteen or twenty. Not many of them did.

PD: Would the women join earlier?

AW: That's right.

PD: But the boys had to get their wild oats out?

AW: I reckon so. (laughing) A few boys joined earlier, but not many of them. It was usually around twenty-- you might say grown.

PD: I guess you didn't join until after you were married.

AW: It wasn't too long before I married.



Albert Wharton

PD: What church had your wife gone to?

AW: Center Grove.

PD: Did you all go most of the time to Center Grove?

AW: Most of the time. She attended all the time there. That was her home. See my home was in Clemmons.

PD: Did either one of you go to the Reynolda Church sometimes?

AW: Oh yes'm, we'd go sometimes.

PD: When you'd go home on the weekends, how would you get out to the country?

AW: I had an old piece of car. Always had some way to ride.

PD: Were there other people out here going out there?

AW: Not to my wife's home. Some of them lived in Brookstown, some of them lived in Old Town--they'd go to their home every once in a while.

PD: What year was it that you first started working up here?

AW: It was in the twenties. I reckon when I first started it was around '22 or '23.

PD: It was right after Katharine Reynolds had died, so it was somewhere around '24. I want to find out a little bit about your brothers that worked there with you.

AW: Oh, they started there before I did. They started in



Albert Wharton

(AW) '18, I reckon. Two of them did, I know.

PD: Can you tell me about your brother George, the one that was chauffeur for a long time? What was his first job up there?

AW: They had a boiler before they built the heating plant. He took care of the old boiler in the barn, he took care of artillery up there in the dairy or something. Sort of a janitor around there. Then he drove a bus, what run back and forth to town. Then he was mechanic down there--took care of the trucks and things. Then he finally--Mr. Dick he come there and stayed in the house a while and he took him.

'Course they were all working for the company then. So he was a chauffeur, and he worked for them until he passed.

PD: He worked for Dick Reynolds?

AW: He worked for the company, then he worked for Dick Reynolds.

PD: Did he work for Mr. Reynolds until he passed away?

AW: That's right.

PD: That was a long time. How old was he then?

AW: About fifty-eight I think. Fifty-some years old.

PD: So he went everywhere with Dick Reynolds?

AW: Yeah, he stayed down at Sapelo with him when they first bought that. They'd go down every winter or



Albert Wharton

(AW) something. Come back and stay so many months down there, and so many months here.

Mrs. W.: And up in the mountains at that place.

AW: Devotion.

PD: Did he have a wife and a family?

AW: His wife's living yet. And one of his children. Daughter.

PD: What's his wife's name?

AW: Annie. She was a Miller. Annie Wharton. On Gray Avenue.

PD: Did she ever work at Reynolda?

AW: No, she never did work. She was a housewife.

PD: Was he able to take her to places, like if he was going down to Sapelo?

AW: If she wanted to go. That's one thing about the help--you could carry your wife with you. If she wanted to go.

PD: Did he have any children?

AW: Three. The girl's living, and the rest of them have passed.

PD: Was that considered unusual, for them to let them take their families with them?

AW: Well back then, most of the servants could carry their families with them. I wouldn't say all of them. The Reynoldses were good to work for, I'll say that.



Albert Wharton

PD: You didn't ever do any traveling with the family, did you?

AW: No ma'am. Kept me in the house. I was what you call the flunky man around here. [laughs]

PD: Was it considered a better job to work up at the house than working out on the farm?

AW: Well it was easier in a way, but you know I just like outside work. Day like this, you fare better inside; and when it's real cold you do. But I just like outside work. I never did like inside.

PD: But you had to do some of it.

AW: Oh yes. [laughs] I done it for twenty-five years.

PD: If you were somebody who really did like outside work, and they asked you to come up to the house-- could you say no?

AW: That's a hard question. That's a sixty-four dollar question. I don't know whether I would or not.

PD: But it did happen to you. When you were out working on the farm, you had to come in.

AW: Oh yeah, I went in and done it. I don't know now . . . little trick-around  
my age . . . if I get a job like I is  
now, I'd rather have that.

Mrs. W.: Albert, you wasn't working on the farm at Reynolda when they took you up to the house. You was carrying the mail and cleaning up the office.



Albert Wharton

AW: Yeah, I was flunky man. Took care of the church.  
Outside work.

PD: How did it happen that they asked you? Do you remember  
when they asked you to come up to the house?

AW: Yes. I don't remember the date. I remember it was  
November. The man who had the job was named John  
Frazier. Mr. Dick was living up yonder at Devotion.  
And he had a wreck here, up about Boone-somewhere in  
there. And he never did get over it. He passed. It  
was in November.

PD: Who came and asked you?

AW: I think Mr. Wharton did, he was still working there.  
When they're going to change, they just come tell  
you, I don't want you to work so-and-so.

PD: And you didn't have any choice in it?

AW: Didn't have no choice.

PD: Did you ever think about getting a job anywhere  
else?

AW: No. I could have worked for the company at the fac-  
tory. Ed Tucker, he was the superintendent up there.  
I worked there a little while in the factory<sup>[Reynolds Tobacco]</sup>--I  
didn't like it. It was just about this time of  
year--hot and everything, and they didn't have air  
conditioning. It was hot in there. And I told him I  
was going to quit. He told me to try to stay on, I



Albert Wharton

(AW) said no, I'm going to quit. And I quit, and when I left, he told me any time I wanted a job to come back. I could have left Reynolda and worked . . . but I just like it out there; I stayed out there.

PD: How did the pay compare?

AW: About the same, then. Of course, factory work now pays alot more than service work.

PD: About how much were you making then?

AW: Twenty, twenty-five cents an hour.

PD: What year was this?

AW: In the late thirties. Wages didn't go up until the forties.

PD: How did you happen to go over ther to the tobacco factory?

AW: I just took the notion. I wasn't  
^ working here then. Working on the farm, laid by my crop, got nothing to do. I just worked there two or three months a year.

PD: This was when you were still out in Clemmons?

AW: That's right.

PD: Did you work there any when you came to Reynolda?

AW: At the factory? No, I stayed here.

PD: What were you doing there at the factory?

AW: Well, I packed the jack, swept the floor. What they call pack the jack--cut the tobacco up fine for cigarettes. A machine, they call it a jack.

PD: And you worked a couple of months out of the year?

AW: That's right. Get my crop by. Always could get a little



Albert Wharton

(AW) job if I wanted to. Wasn't getting nothing for it, but I could get it.

PD: What else didn't you like about the job, besides it was hot?

AW: I don't know, I'd just rather be outside.

PD: Did anybody ever--once they got to Reynolda--leave to go to work in the tobacco factories?

AW: One did. Marvin Scales, he worked there. There was two of them there. And Marvin Smoot.

PD: Did they live at Five Row?

AW: Scales did. I don't know about <sup>Marvin Smoot. He did</sup> <sub>^</sub> did now when he went to work in the factory. He was still living out there, too, [at Five Rows] .

PD: Would they have to leave once they started working elsewhere?

AW: They'd let them stay a good while.

Mrs. W.: Marvin Scales, when he left he built his home.

He lived at Piney Grove. He built him a home in Piney Grove. And Marvin Smoot married Sister.

PD: He married your sister?

Mrs. W.: No, it was a girl we called Sister. Her name was Katherine.

AW: Everybody called her Sis. Never did call her by her name.

PD: Did you ever hear them talk about their work?

AW: No, I didn't hear them say anything about it.



Albert Wharton

PD: Was this Mr. Wharton that let them stay on?

AW: Yeah.

PD: When you were working at the house, were you able to get Sundays off?

AW: Oh yes ma'am. We got one Sunday a month, when your time come.

PD: Did you miss not being able to go to church?

AW: Oh yeah. I never did get to attend church but about once a month, 'cause I worked up there. That's

the only chance I had, my Sunday off. And holidays, you hardly ever got off. Thats

^ when they'd have big dinners or something.

PD: When you retired in 1960, did you still do odd jobs for people?

AW: I drove Charles about twelve months. I told them I was getting too old--most of the driving was at night. I told them my vision was bad and I was liable to get killed.

PD: How did he take it?

AW: He said, Albert, you ain't had no wreck. And I said, I don't intend to have no wreck. (laughing). I'd kill you and me both.

PD: So when you quit, did you start doing the job you're doing now? [He works odd jobs for a Winston-Salem woman.]

AW: Not the one I'm doing now. Just mowing yards here and yonder. Took my grand-boys, carried them out, we'd mow lawns. Then I finally got hold of this lady,



Albert Wharton #2

(AW) and I been there ever since.

PD: How long have you been working for her?

AW: About six years, something like that. Caroline Ebeid.

PD: How did you find out about her?

AW: I went to the employment office. Leinbach--she got me this job.

PD: This woman you're working for now--about how old is she?

AW: She's in her fifties. But don't tell her I said that. [laughs]

PD: What kinds of jobs were open to black people back then, back in the twenties when you started working?

AW: Well, service work was the biggest. Most of the people tried to get jobs like that. 'Cause you got your board, and clothes . . . Tobacco factory. Cotton mill. 'Course there weren't too many colored people working in the cotton mill.

PD: Was it generally considered a better job to be a domestic, or to work in a factory?

In service, what you got is every day.

AW: Domestic work. ^ The factory work might be cut down, two or three days a week. You seen your money stop.

PD: So it was a more secure job?

AW: More secure--service work.

PD: Do you remember how much you were getting paid when you finally retired from service work in 1960?

AW: He give me fifty dollars a week.



Albert Wharton

PD: Was that considered pretty good pay then?

AW: Pretty good pay.

PD: Where did your wife's two children finally end up working? Did you have two girls?

Mrs. W.: No, a boy and a girl. The boy worked some at Reynolda. The girl went to school--she stayed with my Mama and them, then she come to live with us. She went to Carver High School, and then she did service work.

PD: What did your son do at Reynolda?

AW: He worked on the farm.

Mrs. W.: You know, there was a bunch of boys worked out there.

PD: What does he do now?

Mrs. W.: He works / <sup>with</sup> a contractor of some kind. Plumbing, all this kind of work. Sewer line work. If you see him when he come in, you say, oh there's Dirty!

PD: When there were a lot of domestics who worked for the different wealthy families in town, was there status to working for the Reynolds family? Were they considered one of the better families to work for?

AW: I think the Reynolds family--most folks thought they were more better to work for, I think. Take the the Hanes and Norfleets and such...It looked like everybody sort of looked to the Reynolds family. It seemed that way.



Albert Wharton

PD: Did you feel, that, working for them?

AW: I imagine so. (laughing) I imagine I felt some of it, too.

You were working for the richest family that there was.  
Mrs. W.: After you went there to work at the house, you

^  
didn't drive Miss Gunn, did you?

AW: No, not after I went to work up there. I had to quit that then.

PD: Miss Gunn. . . .?

AW: She was the housekeeper while they were coming back about twice a year.

Mrs. W.: She worked in the office, didn't she?

AW: Mm-hm.

PD: You would drive her places?

AW: Oh yeah. I couldn't get to go nowhere, she was always . . . She wanted me to drive her all the time. When you'd get off work--Albert, can you drive me so-and-so? Pretty hard to say no.

PD: Was this considered part of your job?

AW: I was just doing it for her. But she paid me to do it.

PD: Where would you drive to?

AW: Oh, we'd go to Rocky Mount, just everywhere. Just drive around sight-seeing. Oh, I've been all around and through these mountains. Since they've built these new roads, I get lost up there.

PD: I'll bet there wasn't much of a road system then.

AW: No, just like this street here.



Albert Wharton

PD: Did Blanche Gunn have her own car?

AW: Yes. A Buick. That's what she dealt in. When she'd trade, she'd get another Buick.

PD: What kind of family was Blanche Gunn from?

AW: I never did know any of her family, you might say, but her. Her Mama. I mean, who she was. Nobody but her and her mother. I think she was the only child.

PD: I wondered if she had an education.

Mrs. W.: Oh yes. She worked down there in the office

until they put her up at the house, housekeeper. She was getting a little age on her.

PD: She never married?

AW: Never married.

END OF INTERVIEW