

Interviewer: Laura Dickerson
Transcribed by Ann Allen Geoghegan

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi

Porter Bond

Foreword: The following is an interview with Mrs. Laura Dickerson and an old Bolivar County negro. Mrs. Dickerson, who has made her home in this county many, many years and is prominently identified with the upbuilding of the Bolivar-Benoit community, gives us this interview in the exact words of this old colored man.

"Uncle Porter, how old are you?" You must have lived in the county a long time."

"Lordy Miss, I just can't recollect just how long I is been here, and den I'se just got so old till what I'se seen and what my old daddy told me all runs together and I can't tell where one starts and de tother finishes, but I does know I'se an old man and I'se seed lots of changes in my days. Why dis was a young country when I first comed down here with Mr. Jim Bond from Franklin Tennessee, way back yonder when he was a real young man, and I was too, but not as young as him. He had already been down here and had a big store in Cleveland, and then he come on over to Beulah and had a store and started farming and thats when he brung me down here with him. He had the biggest store at Beulah and de biggest furnishing in de county I guess. Why on Sadays de niggers and wagons come from every which o way to git grub and den in de fall, here dey come hauling in de cotton and everybody had money and was happy. Why Mr. Jim done so much business he had to send and git Mr. Tom, his younger brother, to help him, and Mr. John Bloodworth kept books and Mr. Henry Martin and Mr. Harris boy all hope out on Sadays. I tells you, Beulah was a hot town in dem days. The worst water, why you could pump it fresh and pour it in de glasses on de table fur dinner and before the folks could get there to drink it, it had a scum on it and had done turned yellow. And de mud was awful. Does you know a cow bogged down in de street one winter and natcherly died. Dey want no bottom to de roads, pore buckshot, and de more you traveled dem de deeper dey git. And whiskey! Well, you see Mr. George Christmas had a whiskey boat in de middle of de lake. Dey say it was anchored on de Arkansas side. I don't see how dey could tell, but it was dere and de supply never run out. Folks (men) would come between trains and walk over to de levee. Dere was always a row boat to meet you, and den here dey'd come reeling back to cetch de down train or up train and sometimes dey didn't cetch up. And Sadays, specially nights, was terrible. Mr. Jim never let any of his women folks go to town on Saday dere would be so many drunks and so much shooting. No, dey didn't

kill anybody much, dey just shot for the fun of hit, up through the roof of the porch to the Chinamans store and some of um would just set down on the side walk and shoot up in de air, jes shooting. Judge Cooper was there and had a buggy and pair of horses that he hired to the drummers to drive to Rosedale. All de roads followed de levees and wound and twisted about till you couldn't scarcely git no where. Mrs. Cooper, who was de war Governors daughter and de fines woman in de land, why she looked after everybody and was a mammy to all de white folks, seemed lack she could do more things and do um better den any body. But she was Ristocrat and had been raised on de cream of de land, but dat just seemed to let her know how to do de nicest kindest things for everybody.

Mound City was a fine place in dem days, and Mr. Frank Bond and de Waltons and de Aycocks all lived out dere and had big places and nice families. But that Hematuria was so bad den, what fum the bad water and swamp and skeeters, till most of de chillun died. It was a bad place fur chillen and de women and chilluns all tried to get away to the hills every summer till de frost. Dat hoped, but dey didn't know it was de skeeters. Why Miss, you'd set in de chairs and rock and dere would be a drove of dem fly in round your head and den folks got mosquito bars and den dey screened dey houses and dey done better. No skeeters seemed to hurt de niggers so bad. Us just sleeps under bars and den we sprays with coal oil and moth balls and it smells so bad dey stays away.

Yes, dem was steam boat days and de river cut lots of ice with de folks. Den de railroads come. Den good roads, till now de country is just like de town, you can go anywhere. But the white folks is getting more plentiful and de niggers scarcer, but de niggers and mules will always be de best bet for cotton. We'se seen de swamp go and de land drained. The woods cleared away till now folks has to haul fire wood seven and eight miles. We'se got de telephones and de radios and de cars. Black and white rides everywhere. Why when I come here, de only way to git around was to ride a mule or walk. Times shorely changed and soon I'll go on with Gabriel and wear my wings and see Jesus. Thanky Miss for de coffee and de sweet bread. Good day."