

August 17, 1978

Interview with Arthur Hill of Strieby, North Carolina

R----Robert Stephens

A----Arthur Hill

R--When were you born?

A--1887. September the Thirteenth.

R--Wow that stretches a long way back. You look so young.

A--I wish I felt that way.

R--Do you remember what it was like when you were growing up?

What was your work like and how did you live?

A--Well my father he . . . I mean I farmed right over there about three hundred yards. He farmed a little and worked some on public money. And then at that time after I was born there wasn't but two boys of all these children he had. I grew up over there. My other brother stayed around until he was eighteen. He went to Springfield, Massachusetts when he was eighteen. There was several women . . . girls and boys that went back north to work. They went back there and stayed and after a while one would come, another would come and see. There were about thirty-five to forty houses in here then. Coloured and some white. Now the first store I remember was right out there. All of this here then was cleaned up. You could see everywhere. You could see houses all around. It don't look like it now.

R--No, its really grown up.

A--When I got big enough to farm some around here I plowed all these trees around here, plowed all around here.

R--Your dad . . . your father must have been born around the Civil War? Do you know when he was born?

A--He was born . . . I forgot now what year but when he died he was sixty-nine. He died in 1933. Can you count that out?

R--That would have meant that he was born in 1864 which was the last or the last year or two of the Civil War.

A--How's that?

R--He would have been born in 1864. But what was it like back in those days. Can you remember at all how it was in the 1890's when you were real young?

A--Oh yea.

---pause---

R--What was it . . . did the people go to school? Did they . . . What kind of farming did they do?

A--Right through here? Corn and cotton. Wasn't no tobacco much. Only what they used themselves but no market.

R--Did people just split labor because there wasn't much money?

A--There wasn't no money. I worked many a day for fourty cents a day.

R--Doing what?

A--And didn't get no money then. That was when I was small. Take corn, wheat, meat. Do something like that. Part of that was tax. Pay the tax. Why . . . give just a little to pay the tax. Why they could get just a little bit from the store. Why people who were hard. Didn't have no money to pay them. Give 'em the order to the store and when they get to the store you see they could carry them wheat or corn or meat or something like that to pay for it. Pay the store man.

R--Who owned the store?

A--What's that?

R--Who owned the store?

A--There was James Parks. He run a store about a half a mile up the road. And there was a store right there. James Redvine. He had a little store. He was coloured James was. But Parks was a white man. One had a store here and the other had a store back east about a mile and a half.

R--How did you settle here? Were you given land? Did you buy the land or how did the families come to be settled around this area?

A--Well my grandfather he belonged to the Quakers. I mean his father belonged to the Quakers. They didn't have no slaves . . . Quakers didn't. The rest of the people did. But that was while I was a small boy. And my father . . . he was born around here in this community.

R--Was there a school around here?

A--Yes I went to school here. Many a day there'd be fifty or sixty children. We had just one teacher. Didn't have but one lesson a day. I started in with the first reader. I reckon you don't know what kind of books they had back then. And finally the North built the church. They tell me of course. I wasn't born then. But the North built the first church we had here. Congregational Church. After the slave time. After that, after I got up to be a good size boy, go to school we have, the North furnished two and a half months of school after the county schools would get out.

R--Was this for anyone?

A--What?

R--Was this schooling for anyone?

A--Coloured, yea.

R--Who were the schoolteachers?

A--The first schoolteacher was Easley Waldon and his wife Eleanor Waldon. But then after he died she married another Waldon. So he was the schoolteacher here-----inaudible----- Then our pastor would teach sometimes his wife and after that others would teach college school.

R--But there were . . . these people who taught this special school funded by the North they were from the South weren't they?

A--Oh yea, people from right around here.

R--Were there any . . . this was before you were born but did you ever hear of any army troops around here, Northern troops? If they built a church they must have been in the area, the North?

A--Yea there's some North down here in Montgomery County. Our Church here was Strieby Church. That was a name given to the church by some of the ones from the North that hoped build the church here.

-----Skip repetitious passage-----
R--Is that still a Congregational Church?

A--Its merged with others. Congregational, Christian . . . United of Christ. Got the sign. You didn't notice out on the highway when you turn.

-----Skip over-----
R--How did you meet your wife?

A--Schoolhouse.

R--How long did your schooling last?

A--Last? Let's see. The county gave us three months school back then . . . three, three and a half. The North give us a month and a half and then they finally give more. But anywhere from five months to six of schooling. That was what the North would do. They'd call that free school.

R--How long did the free school last?

A--I can't hardly remember but they keep at it a long time. Of course the North give that because there wasn't no educated people way back then enough to teach. When my father come he went to school to white. That was right after the Civil War. But after they got so they could teach . . . why coloured you know come in and went to teaching. And now these Northern people, these missionaries they'd come south from New York, Boston, Massachusetts. They'd come on a visit when I was a boy. You see they'd be white. They'd come around, visit the schools, wherever they'd be a school congregation that is.

R--Were the teachers in these free schools coloured?

A--Yea, now that was when I was coming up. Now before my time, before I was born they'd be white teachers.

R--What did the Southern whites around here think about these people coming down from Boston and New York? Did they ever try to do anything against these people?

A--No, not around here. Now at Troy down there at the church they had a school just like they had here. But they tried to do something at the churches. I don't know if I remember what they done about the schools. But they'd furnish places like that to where people, teachers could get up and teach their own selves. Put 'em on their own.

-----Skip over-----

R--Did people ever go to college?

A--Oh yea.

R--Where did they go to college if they did?

A--Greensboro . . . there's a school back there. Its run by the North. Some now. Its what they call _____. Some children left here and went to _____ school.

R--Is that a college?

A--Yes.

R--If you went to school til you were twenty-one . . . what did they teach when you got that far in your schooling?

A--Well you went to the ninth grade. That was for high school. Arithmetic, grammar, history . . . that come in the high school.

R--What did they teach you about history? Do you remember . . . where did the books come from?

A--The books sent here . . . county.

R--In the free school did the material, books come from the North?

A--Some of it did.

R--Was this free school in the same building as the other?

A--Oh yea.

R--And this was a one room schoolhouse?

A--Yes.

R--How long did the school day last?

A--6 hours.

R--And did people go home to work after school?

A--Well some of them would.

----pause----

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R--Did your grandfather fight in the Civil War . . . did you ever hear tell?

A--He was a cook. He didn't fight.

R--Which side was he cooking for?

A--He was cooking for the South. I've heard him tell a heap of times he's a cook and then he could take care of the horses. You know they had hot stock. Back then the generals would ride these horses. And about that time they called the Battle of Manassas. You've seen in the history the picture of that battle have you?

R--Yea I have.

A--Well he was there that day tending the horses so the general, they shot him off of the horse and my grandfather he went in to get the horse and he was pulling the horse you know, trying to get hold and there was a little old building which was on the battlefield and he was trying to get behind that, said the bullets were just a going in every direction. Then after a while he had his canteen on his side for water in it. Said he felt something cold running down his leg. Said he know'd he got shot you know and the horse was pulling and he had hold the reins of the horse trying to get him back behind this building, keep to killing the horse. Said after a while, said it just got wet and said he just turned the horse loose and

just dropped down on the ground, just said 'Oh Lord, Lord have mercy. Oh Lord, Lord have mercy,' come find a doctor. The bullet had shot a hole in his canteen, the water was a running out.

R--So the canteen saved his life.

A--That's right. Said that blood was running down you know and that canteen was sitting on its side, that buckle on its side.

R--Did the general get killed?

A--Yea.

R--Who was the general? Do you remember?

A--He told but I don't remember now who it was.

R--Did he volunteer to go into the service?

A--No they drafted him.

R--How long did he stay?

A--Til the war broke . . . yes he stayed til the war broke.

R--Did he tell you about any other battles?

A--Oh yea, a lot of things he told me. I can't just think of them now.

R--What happened to him when the South lost?

A--They freed the slaves.

R--And he came back here.

A--Yea. This was up in Virginia where he was at.

R--Was he ever at Richmond?

A--My grandfather? Yea.

R--What did he say Richmond was like?

A--I don't know if he said. Now they used to have a place where they made salt at. You know like table salt. Now his daddy, my great grandfather was too old to go to the war. So they'd have people around here who'd go to the war you know . . . like drafting them. They'd dodge and lay out in the woods. Lay out in the woods and wouldn't go. Well they'd have what you call Home Guards they said. Home Guards here to catch all the men. Whenever they'd try to get 'em to go they'd slip off and run out and hide. So his father said he didn't want to go to the war but said he'd love to go to Richmond and see how they make salt. So in a day or two these here Home Guards come and took him and carried him to Asheboro, shipped him then to Richmond and kept him there eight months. His family, his children, left them here. Ned Hill was his name. Great grandfather.

R--Did he come back here?

A--Oh yes he come back. There he is . . . about five miles back up that road, an old graveyard, buried in that old graveyard.

R--Was your great grandfather, was he born in North Carolina?

A--Yea.

R--Where did your family come from?

A--Well different places. My grandmother . . . she lived to be a hundred and nineteen years old. She's buried . . . the tombstone is right out yonder. She was a slave. She come. I forgot where they had slaves then. They buy 'em and sell 'em. Her mother was a white woman. Her father was a coloured man . . . so . . .

R--What was her name?

A--Priscilla.

R--Priscilla Hill?

A--She married a Hill. But this was some . . .

child. She was six years old she was. Well her mother took her to this place you know . . . just like a big fair like we'd have here now, a show you know where they sold coloured at. So her mother taken her. Of course her mother was a poor woman so she said, taken her when she was six years old to that day that they was going to sell slaves you know, just like bidden off horses, selling horses, a mule. That was a big day. So took her there. Her mother was a white woman. Nobody didn't want to buy her cause she was mix blooded. So she, after the sale was over with, she tried to tell this one you know in private and not be put up on the block to sell and be bidden off you know. So one man says: 'Well,' says, 'I'll give you a dollar for her,' for he was a going back north with her. But said I'll give you a dollar for her. So she played around there with the other little children that was there too she said. She was six. And said whenever she got ready to go, said she said to: 'Well I'm ready to go I reckon.' They caught her. This man riding a horse had a bunch of coloured that he'd bought. Well she said he's a riding his horse . . . and put her up behind him on his saddle you see. And she was a crying, calling 'Mother, Mother, Mother.' Said her mother says, 'I don't want you,' says, 'you damned little bitch you, I've got shed of you now.' Said that's what her mother told her. But got ready to leave you know on that horse.

-----pause-----

R--Where did this man who paid a dollar for her take her?

A--Went back summers to Baltimore. Went back summers. I don't know if it was there or where. So she went and then stayed there til she got grown. This man and then he sold her somewhere else. Finally she got back to North Carolina.

R--What was her mother's name?

A--I don't know.

R--Did she ever see her mother again?

A--No, she never did see her again.

R--Where did the sales take place?

A--At different places. Troy, North Carolina, somewheres back up this a way . . . in Virginia.

-----Skip over-----

R--When did your grandmother die?

A--She died . . . I believe it was '25. 1925. She fell and broke her hip. I never knowed her to be sick a day of her life unless it was a toothache til she fell and broke her hip. No telling how long she would have lived. Grandmother lived . . . of course that's all grown up there now but she lived right down . . . her and her son . . . about three hundred yards from here. Now there was a road that goes back of them woods there and come on up to the church. She could take her walking stick and come to the church. Got to where she'd lost her eyesight. She'd come to that church just about the same as I

could with my eyes open. For I could see. She just learnt the way you know. She could just feel it by her stick. Guess I can just see her now feeling her way by her stick.

-----long pause-----

R--What was your grandfather's name?

A--Calvin.

-----Skip over-----

A--So my grandfather, his boots come all out, the toe of them. Said they was on the battlefield right after they quit fightin' had stopped . . . said . . . said the North soldiers was a layin' just like you're walkin' on rocks here you know. You couldn't hardly step without you steppin' on the dead you know . . . killed. Said he was a goin' along out. Said he'd seen a northern soldier . . . pretty pair of boots on. So my grandfather said he looked at it and said he was a layin' there, looked like the _____. Said he grabbed hold of one leg and turned it over to pull off his boots you know, said while that man's eyes he thought were open. Said he grabbed his old boot and put it back on.-----laughter-----Said I don't want that boot. Said while he's a workin' and shakin' pulling on it, said the man was lookin' just like his eyes were lookin' right straight at him. Said he turned that leg loose. Put his own boot on. Walked off and left him.

R--Did he ever get a new pair of boots?

A--Yes he got a pair . . . off of the battlefield . . . from a northern soldier.

-----Skip over-----

A--So like my boy when he was in the war (World War II) they had places fixed from the . . . after the soldiers got killed they'd send them, shippin' them back overseas. Said one fellow, a general had him in there helpin' dressin' these folks, puttin' them in the caskets to ship 'em back to the States. Said he said to one of the generals: 'Done pretty good with this. I think you're a pretty good man,' tookin' to likin' to him. Said he was in the place there where they was a fixin' them up, telling him and showin' him what to do and all. Said to the general: 'Aint there said some way I could fix to get away from here.' He didn't like to work with dead folks you know. He said: 'Why yes . . . yes we could fix you a way out.' Said how? 'Get like this man!' -----laughter-----

-----more laughter-----

He's dead you know. They shippin' him back.

R--I bet you he didn't take that advice.

A--No sir.