Today is March 10, 1975; my name is Connie Dorris. As a project for History 430, I'm doing an interview today with Mrs. Lulu Cohron, who is a resident at Turtle Creek Convalescent Centre. Mrs. Cohron was born in the south and grew up in the south, and so I want to ask her some things about what life was like for her. Okay Mrs. Cohron, would you tell us when you were born?

Mrs. Cohron: I was born in Oxford, Mississippi, on Buckner's farm, and then my mother and them, they raised cotton, corn, and all that stuff.

Dorris: You worked for the farmer, is that how it was?

Cohron: No, I was just a girl, between eight and nine, I don't know how old I was, but I know my mother would work with my grandfather and grandmother out on the farm.

Dorris: Was ~~your~~ home on the farm -- somebody else owned it and the family worked on it? Is that how it was?

Cohron: His name, I can't think of the first name, but anyway, I know Mr. Buckner was his last name; we always said "Mr. Buckner's Farm".

Dorris: What year were you born?

Cohron: I was born in 1882.

Dorris: Could you tell us something about your family, what life was like?

Cohron: In my childhood days? Well, there was a good many children. There was about eight of us, but I was one of the oldest. I had a sister older than I was and we weren't large enough to work, no more than pick up potatoes and pile them up so the man could bring them up to the house. Now when he'd get them all up, he'd put them down in, it's the basement now, he'd put them in the cellar. I know we'd any time we wanted potatoes go down in the cellar and get those potatoes up. I know I had one uncle, he loved to hunt, and the first possum I ever seen killed, he put a stick across -- he stretched him out and put a stick on each side. Then he stood on that stick and broke the possum's neck. Of course, my mother, also my grandfather, me and my grandmother, we lived in the house; it was a big house, Mr. Buckner's house. We was there on the first floor. So, the house, it was - it had two rooms on that side. Mr. Buckner had the front room up there; he had his office on one side, and we had three rooms over on this side and there was another room on that side. When he got ready to leave, he would always tell Grandmother to watch his room. Her name was Esther.

Dorris: Was he a white man?

Cohron: Yes.

Dorris: So you lived in the same house.

Cohron: Yes, he had a room. Grandmother, she did the cooking. You

see, his wife had passed, and she did the cooking and always would take his dinner up on a tray in his room. He had a big farm. Of course it was just like a big farm, so many farmers would come, white and colored, they'd come to see about work. We could hear the old horses and mules, in the morning and evening, putting them up and then when they ws getting them ready to get them out in the morning, real early. It was dark, about four o'clock in the morning, they'd get all those horses and mules ready to go to the field. It was so far, that to the end of the rows, you could just about discern a man walking.

Dorris: It was huge, then.

Cohron: Yes. And so, my grandfather, he was able to go. My mother's husband, he left with a herd of horses one morning, and he never did return. The only return that we ever got was that he got killed....

Dorris: Did you ever pick any cotton?

Cohron: I picked some cotton; I certainly did.

Dorris: It was a hard job, wasn't it?

Cohron: No. It was -- my mother said: "Now be careful, don't pull a bud that's not open, and pick the buds that the cotton is ripe; you can pull it out like that. Be careful and don't pull the leaves; don't get no leaves in it". And we had us a bag or something dragging it and picking cotton. Then at cotton time, Momma, she would have - we'd have canned beans and canned potatoes. We didn't have a way to can them like now. We'd string the beans on a long thread and hung them in the sun to dry. So when those beans got good and dried, we called them dried beans, we'd put them up. My grandmother had a kitchen with long sticks hanging all the way across with dried beans hanging on them. When the beans had got thoroughly dry, she'd take them down and put them in a bag. We had dried pumpkin, that's something I don't like. We'd raise big pumpkins and cut them around and run a pole through like that and hang it out in the sun and let it dry. It looks just like dried apples. Have you seen dried apples? Then in the winter time, we'd cook dried apples, dried pumpkin, beans and all. We'd gather all the popcorn from outside, that was our garden. Grandmother would make homemade bread. Then when they'd go to the field, I was about the largest girl, my grandmother would prepare the bread, and I would stir it and make cornbread for when they come home from the field. So we'd mix it up with soda and milk. We didn't have any clock at that time, and so we watched the steps. Grandmother said that when the sun got on the bottom step it was eleven o'clock, and then when it got straight up in the door, that was half past eleven o'clock. Then it was time to take and make up the corn bread, put it in the skillet. I'd grease it with lard and fix it like she wanted. I'd fix the fire and put the chips on top of the lid and let the bottom lid get real hot and then put the lid over the skillet. By that time the bread would be done. We'd have cornbread, corn or cabbage, or whatever she had prepared. When

they come (from the field) the dinner would be done. We had a big iron pot, she would have put the cabbage on and cooked it in the fireplace, almost as wide as this window. All the stuff was cooked in this big pot hanging in the fireplace. We'd cook cabbage, potatoes, and put corn on top of all of that. I'd watch to make sure the bread didn't burn, and I'd have dinner all ready when they came home from the field. There was something else I intended to tell you. We always made some kind of dessert. I'd go right down back of the garden and pick blackberries and would wash the berries and make a blackberry cobbler. She (grandmother) washed all the berries; she was so afraid I'd not get them clean. She'd make a great big pan, make a great big crust and put it on top, and that would make a blackberry cobbler.

Dorris: Your grandparents - they lived during the time of the Civil War didn't they?

Cohron: Yes, they lived during the Civil War.

Dorris: Were they slaves?

Cohron: Yes, they were slaves.

Dorris: Did they ever tell you any stories that you can remember?

Cohron: Yes, during slavery times, my grandfather, he was separated from my grandmother. I think it was about six or seven years, I don't know. They taken him from one plantation to another plantation, but still Grandmother was still at this place and so they all said that Grandfather got killed. He was gone six or seven years. They was separated that a way. Grandmother married again. Soon as my grandfather came back -

Dorris: Oh, so he came back.

Cohron: Yes, he came back.

Dorris: And she was married again?

Cohron: Yes, she was already married again. Anyway, he came back and Grandmother then - now that was another separation - cause Grandmother liked Grandfather better I think than this fellow. I'm just telling it like it is. We used to say "Grandfather's gone; we ain't got no grandfather". He was gone, I know about seven years. We never heard a line or nothing from him. Only someone said they cowhided him to death. They cowhided him to death cause Grandfather had a lot of temper. He didn't want to do things his boss wanted him to do, so they cowhided him to death. After that he came back. And they said when Grandmother first saw him, she threw up her hands and said: "Oh, here comes my husband!".

Dorris: That would be quite a shock!

Cohron: She threw up her hands and said: "Oh here comes Isam!". His name was Isam Hereny. They taken the name from the boss. My grandmother,

she said: "Oh my God, my husband's back!". This other husband, oh what is his name? I know Grandmother got rid of him right away. Oh, what is his name?

Dorris: That's okay.

Cohron: Anyway, I know Grandmother got her first husband back. He was gone long enough, Grandma told us, and Mom and Dad, that they were separated, and he (second husband) had two girls by Grandma. I was telling Opal the other day, I told my niece and nephew-in-law: "Don't come here with no old slave-time names, I don't want to hear them." Grandmother had two daughters, one was named Sally -- Sally and Cally, that was it. I said, "don't come up here with any of those old-time names,".

Dorris: Did they work when they were slaves on a big plantation?

Cohron: Oh yes, it was a big plantation. Momma said when they'd get out at the field it'd be dark. It would be dark when they'd leave and dark when they come in. Sometime she'd manage to cook enough food for the next day. They'd carry it with them in a big bucket to the field. They'd leave about three o'clock to get to where they was going. They'd be there when the sun rised.

Dorris: It was hard work.

Cohron: Oh, hard work, you know it was hard work....
They'd go by the last names of the boss-man...Aunt Sally had a son named Willy Jordan, that was by the last husband.

Dorris: So their last name was whatever the owner, the master's last name was?

Cohron: Yes...From then on the biggest thing I did was take care of all them babies cause Momma and them didn't have no bottles and things to feed them. I had to take a teaspoon and the milk, cause we had plenty of milk, and take a teaspoon and feed this baby this milk from a pan or whatever we had...no, I ain't going back over all that.

Dorris: Well, how long did you live in Oxford?

Cohron: Well, I was born there.

Dorris: You were born there -- did you go to school while you were there?

Cohron: Honey, they didn't have school more than two-and-a-half or three months cause the weather was so bad they couldn't put in the crops, it rained so. We didn't have nothing to do except piece quilts and make up a whole lot of things to wear cause the boss-man, he'd come and say: "Oh, Isam, you'll come out of debt this year; you'll come out of debt.". But he'd get more in debt. And then another thing, we lived close to a lady. She was a farmer too. She had three boys and one girl. These boys was dressed in shirttails, and honey, we didn't pay them boys no attention and them boys paid us no attention. I told Opal them men better

not come around in their shirttails now. To make the shirts was out of this here ducking - ducking, they called it. And I went with the sister down into the bottom to cut the oak bark off the trees and of course we had a lovely, big wash kettle. We'd bring that oak bark up there and boil it. When we'd boil it, it'd turn blue. Let's see, we'd put that oak bark in the kettle and put some copper in there, and that's what make them blue. So my grandmother and them would always have a big sack, dragging up that old oak bark, going to dye those shirts. They made every thing we wore. They'd dye the shirts blue....That's why I got in the habit of sewing so much. They'd dye the pants - blue pants and blue shirt. We gathered up that bark, put it in the kettle and boiled it and strained it out and then had the pants and everything made, put them in there and stirred them over and over to get the blue. Some were dark, as dark as your pants there. And another thing, in the cooking part, they loved to hunt. My uncle, he loved to hunt. He used to go out with a whole pack of dogs, I don't know how many hounds we had, and hunt and come in with sacks full of old possums and all of those things. Honey, I can think of all that stuff. Anyway, we'd take quail and rabbits, we had so many rabbits.- There was this big trough in the smokehouse...we had so many rabbits, we'd salt them down. And the hogs they'd kill, we'd salt them down, and all this here sidemeat, that's what they called it down there; course we call it bacon here. They'd leave them in the salt as long as they wanted to, and they'd take the hams and the jowl, and they'd have the hams all hung up like curtains in the smokehouse. Then they'd fix another partition and smoke them with sulphur, and the hams were rolled in molasses - that's to make them sweet, that old sorghum molasses. They'd roll them in that and baste the hams, and when you cut them down, and when you cook them, oh boy!

Dorris: That sounds pretty good!

Cohron: They was good and you could smell them...they'd get some sassafras and boil that and some molasses and baste the hams in that and boy, would that smell good! Oh honey, I told Opal I knew I'd never go back to that, I was too near dead now to go back to the farm.

Dorris: Now when did you move to Memphis,- didn't you say you lived in Memphis?

Cohron: Yes, I lived in Memphis. We moved right in the town of Oxford. I could just lay here in that bed and see the courthouse. People come in on Saturdays to get rations, you know - | what rations?

Dorris: Now this was in Oxford that you're talking about now.

Cohron: Yes, and they'd get their rations for the week.
(Had to stop and change the tape)

Dorris: Okay, now you can go ahead and finish what you were talking about.

Cohron: Everybody was trying to go to town,- all those wagons - and the white people had these little buggies, little narrow-top buggies. They hitched them all along the courthouse, and they would

shop at the grocery store. Everybody would come out with bundles and sacks of flour to put in the wagons, and the ones that didn't have wagons and teams would catch a ride. I've sat in the wagon a many a day. I'd get so tired sitting there waiting for that little stick of candy. Grandma and them would always say: "now you all be good,". I'd know they'd always bring us a stick of candy when they come. The children wasn't like they are today. When they said still, they meant still; they didn't mean for you to move.

Dorris: You sat still.

Cohron: Yes, I sat still, waiting around. Sometimes she'd bring us some gingerbread. It'd be some gingerbread, just about that wide, sometimes longer. They'd buy them at Whitkey's Grocery....There was chains all around where you could hook your teams to it, around the courthouse. People were going in the courthouse and people were going out of the courthouse. I was a little girl, but oh my, I remember that. And the first pair of button shoes I ever had, I rode to town on a horse, sitting up behind a lady named Isabelle. I had on some pink stockings; I ain't forgot them, and I got me some button shoes. The shoes had brass toes on them. We sat before a fire, built with a log heap, and Grandmomma and Momma said: "You all don't do nothing but kick them shoes out; we're going to get you some brass-toed shoes,". I remember, the brass come all around, and I wore them, and they laced. Oh, I tell you, the more I think of all that mess I went through as a girl.

Dorris: Now when you moved to Memphis, did you live in the town?

Cohron: Yes, we lived right in town.

Dorris: This was when you were older, right?

Cohron: Yes, I was older. Oh, I lived right in town, looked at all them pretty bright lights, and I'd go up and down Beale Street to Beale Street Market. I never saw such vegetables and fruit, just like they got here. I went down there, I think I had a dime or nickel, or whatever it was, I seen - let me tell you this - the grapefruits, they was awful large you know, and I thought the grapefruit was a orange, and I said that when I got me a dime I was going to buy me one of them. I thought the grapefruits was a orange. When I got that thing home and bit down on it, I was just so disappointed, it was sour and the seeds! Yes, I lived in Memphis, and then I went down in Mississippi where all my girlfriends were, and where I met my husband. Yes, I married when I was seventeen years old....

Dorris: I wanted to ask you - we've been reading a book about laws that were passed around 1900 which wouldn't allow black and white people to go places together - I was wondering what that was like.

Cohron: I was fixing to say that when my grandfather and them lived, they wouldn't allow us to associate, to go, you'd have to have a pass.

But you see I was too small for that. If you was going to another house or over to another plantation, he'd done wrote you out a pass on a slip of paper. Then when you got ready to return, you'd give it to him, and he'd give you a pass and sign his name to it to show that you been there.

Dorris: Well, now that was your grandfather. What about the laws when you were older - they bothered you, didn't they?

Cohron: Oh, they didn't bother me with all the work I had to do.

Dorris: Did you have separate schools and separate churches?

Cohron: We had a little schoolhouse, just about as big as this room; it was a log cabin. I remember it was put together with mud in between those logs and had a great big fireplace. The boys had to gather up the wood in the evening when school was out. They'd take turns, a week at a time, to get there early ehough to make the fire. And about the Presidents and all. Cleveland and Harrison....
When Harrison and Cleveland ran for office, I think it was Harrison that beat Cleveland; I'm not for sure. Now, Harrison beat Cleveland, and they had a song: "Hoorah for Harrison; hoorah for Harrison. Cleveland's in the kitchen washing nigger babies". I was living in Fort Smith, Arkansas....

Dorris: How were you treated by the other people in the town, the white people?

Cohron: There was some white people, they was living right above us, and they was really nice to us children. They had boys and girls, and they'd let them come down and us play together, but you couldn't go to all these big things together.

Dorris: Mrs. Cohron, thank you so much for letting me interview you today. I'm afraid we've run out of time now. Thank you.

Good work - wish I'd be lawyer.

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