

2012.3.136

GUSS SIMPSON

Recorded in October 1991

*Video opens with MR. SIMPSON seated at a table in front of an audience. His presentation is already in progress, and video begins mid-sentence.*

GENERAL NOTES:

(Audio quality is not very good; low-pitched hum in background; Mr. Simpson is seated some distance from the microphone, and his voice echoes in the large, hard-surfaced room. Mr. Simpson uses no notes and offers his recollections in no particular order but responds to occasional audience questions.)

- Recording begins in the middle of a sentence, so first few seconds (minutes?) of recording is lost.
- In 1905 moved to Ingleside (now Avondale); after a year moved to log cabin on or near what was then called Clarkston Road/Old Stone Mountain Road, near Indian Creek
- In about 1910 moved to East Lake; lived there until 1917
- In and out of construction work
- Married and had children
- In 1932 moved back into DeKalb County
- Wife died in 1965
- Lived on [inaudible—maybe Kirk Road?] in Decatur until 1972
- Moved to [inaudible—sounds like “Stowers” or “Chalmers”?]; spent six years there
- Moved back into DeKalb County
- Went to Indian Creek Baptist Church, 1908; membership later transferred to Kirkwood, where he lived for several years; membership history inaudible, Mr. Simpson apparently transferred membership back to Indian Creek.
- Since then, children have remained in Atlanta; daughter in DeKalb County.
- Mr. Simpson spent time in Charleston [?] and elsewhere, but DeKalb County “just seemed like home.”
- Has seen a lot of change at Rockbridge Road and Memorial Drive area since 1930s.

- Transportation: rode mule or rode in wagon drawn by mule(s). Most roads were unpaved dirt. Hauled sweet potatoes to Atlanta to sell (wholesale price about 60 cents a bushel).

*A middle-aged lady seats herself at the table next to MR. SIMPSON.*

- Got married at the age of 25, and his wife was 23; they had six children, four sons and two daughters.
- Mentions National Linen Service Corporation, but not clear whether he or one of his sons is involved with the company.
- Childhood recreation memory: winding up old socks into a ball and playing baseball, using rocks and trees for bases.
- Mentions a few local grocery and general merchandise stores but says that his parents took him and his siblings to Decatur Street in Atlanta for clothing and brogan shoes. Observes how easy it was to get downtown, park, and shop; but also says that people didn't have much money then and didn't shop frequently.
- Mr. Simpson's father was at first a cotton farmer and later grew sweet potatoes.
- Memorial Drive was cut through and eventually paved (and Old Stone Mountain Drive eliminated) near the former location of the old Rio Vista Restaurant. Mr. Simpson gives a description of various roads (and their former names) in the area, connecting the Indian Creek community with Ingleside (Avondale) and Scottdale.

*The lady who seated herself earlier next to MR. SIMPSON gets up and moves off-camera.*

- Recalls a childhood incident in which his stepmother gave him a funny Valentine to give to his teacher [Ms. Cloud or Cloudt?]. (The teacher had red hair and often wore a green suit, and the Valentine featured a "very ugly" woman with red hair and a green suit.)
- At one point soon afterward (possibly indirectly or directly related to the Valentine incident above), Mr. Simpson decided to drop out of school; and Ms. Cloud(t) came to the family home to try to convince him to come back. Audio quality is such that I can't understand if he returned to school or not, but the word "Valentine" seems to figure into the account.
- School lasted only seven months because of the farming and harvesting seasons, but summer school lasted two months. Harvesting prevented him from attending the first few weeks of school every year.

- While Mr. Simpson lived in Ingleside, his father sent him and his siblings to the small private school operated by one of their neighbors (Mr. Meek? spelling?) rather than send them to public school. Mr. Simpson speaks admiringly of this teacher, who stressed mathematics and who walked (with his own children) to Indian Creek and taught school there for at least one year after Mr. Simpson's family moved.
- Mr. Simpson says that his formal schooling ended with seventh grade, but he is a retired registered engineer with the state of Georgia.
- Lived off Greenwood Place in Decatur (off Greenwood Avenue, off Howard Street)
- Was about fifteen years old when he had his first automobile ride: After a man's car broke down near their house, Mr. Simpson gave him a buggy ride into Decatur to buy a new battery; and the man gave Mr. Simpson a ride in his car after he'd replaced the battery.
- Mr. Simpson says that he doesn't believe there are any pictures of his father in his Confederate uniform. A lady off camera (possibly the one previously seated next to him) adds to the discussion of photographs, but it's difficult to hear exactly what she says.
- The youngest of seven children, Mr. Simpson had four brothers and two sisters, and his mother died in 1904. His father remarried in 1907, while they were living in Ingleside (Avondale). A year or so later one of his older sisters moved in with some friends and went to work in Atlanta, leaving him, at 13 or 14, alone with "two old people," without many other children around. Moved to East Lake when he was 17 or 18.
- Mr. Simpson went into the Navy at 21 and served in World War I.
- Mr. Simpson was born October 29, 1895, and will soon be celebrating his ninety-sixth birthday. He was born in Hall County near the Chestatee River or Chattahoochee River (or both?) in an area formerly known as the Park District, now flooded by Lake Burton. (Could he mean Lake Lanier instead?) The family moved in to Gainesville 1898 and stayed until 1904. Mr. Simpson's father had a sawmill.
- His father was born November 7, 1845. His father went into the Confederate Army for three or four years, and Mr. Simpson's grandfather joined the Confederate Army at the age of seventeen. The DeKalb Historical Society approached Mr. Simpson because of his family history, in particular his father's and grandfather's service.
- Mr. Simpson took his lunch to school every day, typically a biscuit with a fried egg or ham and a cold sweet potato.
- Mr. Simpson's father married at the age of 27. Before he married, he worked at a general merchandise store located at the intersection of "Northern Avenue"—North

Avenue?—and Peachtree, the former location of Stein Clothing Company. Asa Candler? [sounds like “A. C. Cannon”?] worked at a nearby drugstore, serving the Coca-Cola on made at hone on his kitchen stove, and went to Washington, D.C., to have the product patented, all while Mr. Simpson’s father was working at the store on Peachtree.

- Two “old maid” Candler sisters operated a private school, which Mr. Simpson says is the first school he attended. [Does this contradict previous statements about his schooling, or are they just out of chronological order?]
- Mr. Simpson was named for an uncle. When, upon looking in the family Bible he saw that his own name was spelled “Guss” and his uncle’s name spelled “Gus,” he asked his father about the discrepancy. His father replied that he added the extra s simply because he wanted to.
- Mr. Simpson’s mother’s maiden name was Vandiver (Dutch), and is father’s ancestry is Scots-Irish, descended from clans Simpson and Fraser.
- Mr. Simpson’s paternal grandfather was in the Civil War for four years and may have been imprisoned. He tells a colorful story about his attempt to reach home with his brother, who also served in the army, after Lee’s surrender. Apparently both men attempted to jump onto a steamer from a dock in Savannah, but only the brother made it, leaving Mr. Simpson’s grandfather standing on the dock, waving goodbye. Only the brother made it home; Mr. Simpson’s paternal grandfather’s fate is unknown. Mr. Simpson says that his mother was born in 1860 and was only four or five years old at that time.
- The Old Stone Mountain corridor was recut and renamed Memorial Drive near the end of the 1920s, about the time that the carving was begun. The area was previously a cotton field.
- Audience discussion ensues, as people talk about what people of Mr. Simpson’s generation used to eat for breakfast (fatback, etc.), without worrying about cholesterol, and Mr. Simpson is healthy as he nears the age of 100.
- Mr. Simpson is asked if he knew the Albert Jones and John Fowler families; he answers that he did not. He remembers the Shepherds (spelling?). Dobbs Mill was about two miles south of Indian Creek Church. The nearby lake was filled in, creating a recreation area.

- Mr. Simpson is presented with a tray of cookies, and the audience sings “Happy Birthday.” The camera is left on, recording about another 25 minutes of socializing; conversation is varied and unintelligible.

END OF RECORDING