

over his property and inspect the work and inspect what the work trees and things that they were working, that was what he did.

(Dr. M. Jones) Do you know how old he was when he died?

(Ms. Jenkins) Ah my father, no I don't, I certainly don't. I don't have any idea.

(Dr. M. Jones) I guess your mother was relatively young.

(Ms. Jenkins) She was thirty-three.

(Dr. M. Jones) She was thirty-three, then he died three years after she did?

(Ms. Jenkins) Right.

(Dr. M. Jones) Hum, was he ill?

(Ms. Jenkins) Wait a minute, three-years he died in twenty.

(Dr. M. Jones) In 1920, and she died in 1917?

(Ms. Jenkins) That's right, that's three years.

(Dr. M. Jones) Was he ill?

(Ms. Jenkins) I don't know, but I think that they said he had typhoid fever, some kind of fever, but I never found out.

(Dr. M. Jones) His last name was Marshall?

(Ms. Jenkins) Marshall, William James Marshall. In one place, he is on one of these things, I have the names of the people that - my aunts and uncles and my mother married.

(Dr. M. Jones) Alright, are you eager to get back to the hotel to get a little rest?

(Ms. Jenkins) Yeah, a little rest.

Interviewer: David Colburn
Interviewee: Mr. Elmer Johnson
Place: Sanford, Florida
Date: November 10, 1993

Questions asked of Mr. Johnson concerning Rosewood.

Mr. Johnson: We were not in Rosewood. We were in Sumner and my father was a mill foreman in Sumner.

Mr. Colburn: What was the name of the plant there.

Mr. Johnson: The Cummer Lumber Company. We were a separate community about a mile or mile and a half away. Actually Rosewood was not a community, it was just a bunch of houses spread out through the woods and they had a couple of churches a masonic hall, which was a little run down black building. There wasn't a whole lot to it - a little bitty thing. The only store in Rosewood was Mr. Wright's store. It wasn't even painted. One of his main sales was ammunition because it was in the Gulf Hammock there and big hunting area. He had a few groceries and stuff like that. He lived in a great big white house that you could see by the road. We knew him quite well and visited him quite frequently. During the grape season, he had a great big grape orchard out there and we really enjoyed his grapes. They were really nice people. These guys threatened to kill him because he had sold ammunition to the Negroes. What get me is all this talk and the main black family were named Bradley. You don't hear of them at all. 60 Minutes, a year and half or two years ago, had an article on the thing, and Bradley(CBS Television Interviewer) put it on and nowhere in the whole show did they ever mention the name Bradley.

Mr. Colburn: That was ironic, wasn't it?

Mr. Johnson: It was contrived as far as I'm concerned because it never happened like people say it did. I know-see our colored woman was named Liza Bradley and she was the daughter of Raleigh and Nancy Bradley.

Mr. Colburn: Was she the one that attended to you?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, she came every Tuesday over from Rosewood to do our laundry. Liza was very nice. I was just starting school at the age of five years.

Mr. Colburn: How old were you at this time, 1923?

Mr. Johnson: I was eleven days short of being six years old.

Mr. Colburn: How big of a community was Sumner?

Mr. Johnson: I'd say probably about a thousand people. Sumner was a sawmill town. Everybody that lived in Sumner worked at the sawmill. They had the colored area and the white area. The longest street leading out to Cedar Keys was where the whites houses were and then over in another part was where my father's house, who was a sawmill foreman, and then they had the mill superintendent, Mr. Pillsbury and several others. We lived in a sort of excluded area, you might call it 400 or something and in that area was the community building where they had the cake supper. The ladies bring a cake and some guy buy it and the lady had to eat supper with him.

Mr. Colburn: When did you know that something had happened in Rosewood? Did you realize what had happened? Did your parents tell you? Was it after the fact that you knew about it?

Mr. Johnson: No, I knew from the outset. It happened in Sumner. This guy, his job was to go out at 3 o'clock every morning to fire up the mill. In other words he had about three or four hours to bring the steam up so that at 7 o'clock when everyone else came to work, the steam pressure would be up. He lived in this little row of houses on the road out to Cedar Keys and about 7 o'clock in the morning apparently this black knocked on the door. It was about time for her husband to come home so she was in the kitchen cooking breakfast and she came out and unlocked the door and went back into the kitchen. Nobody came in so she went and opened the door and at that time this black, who was a Bradley, one of the Bradley boys, he broke in on her and she had a

child about three or four months old. She had presence of mind enough to say James, John, or whatever his name, bring a gun and shoot this goddamn nigger. He didn't know he had shot him, the kid was only three months old, he thought maybe he was fifteen or sixteen or maybe even an adult. So he panicked and he went out the back kitchen door and they had a garden with these scantling, which was long strips of lumber they trim to make it square. What they generally do is that with so many deer in Gulf Hammock that when they plant a garden they put the scantling up so the deer couldn't get in. He jumped over the fence and broke down several scantling and took off for the swamp.

Mr. Colburn: How old was this Bradley boy?

Mr. Johnson: I don't know. I didn't even remember the name of the white people. I understand from all the articles that the name could have been Taylor. But it was definitely a black man that came into the house.

Mr. Colburn: So he was a man and not a child?

Mr. Johnson: He wasn't a kid, I would say probably a young adult about nineteen or twenty.

Mr. Colburn: Was it Fannie Taylor's house and she was the woman that confronted him?

Mr. Johnson: Right! By ten in the morning they had brought the dogs. You remember when they had the chain gangs. They had a labor camp out on the Cedar Keys/Gainesville Road. So it wasn't to long before they got there with the bloodhounds and in the meantime my brother had crossed the trail. First thing they did was come to our house and my mother had to tell them that certainly there was no one here you could be looking for. So they went back out into the scrub oak and pick up his trail at the swamp. They trailed him to some colored guys house. This guy had taken him a wagon and broken the trail. So I don't know who the guys that were in control of bloodhounds but they probably weren't very nice people anyway. After the

bloodhounds took them to about four or five different place, one of the guys put a gun to the dog's head and blew his head off. It all quieted down. The Bradley kid that I was talking about never ever got caught. He was completely gone and was never a part of it. It was several nights later that all these clowns came in from Bradford County area-Stark and around there. I'm sure after talking with Brown down in Cedar Key that some of them - they were in the smoke fish business. Apparently some of his forebearers had been part of the gang they met up there. This Bradley had a beautiful house. It wasn't painted but it was a big substantial house. Bradley himself was apparently a very intelligent black man and had acquired property. In those days that was not very popular. He had cattle and a lot nicer home than most of the clowns that were there.

This one night, maybe a Tuesday at just about dark, they gathered in the year built a big barn fire and they were loaded with moonshine liquor. All of them were about half drunk. They built a big barn fire in Mr. Bradley's yard and it got worse and worse and finally it broke out into a gun fight. Two of the white men were killed and everybody in the blacks house were run out. I don't recall that any of them were killed that night

Mr. Colburn: The way the paper tell it is that the white crowd, once the two men were shot, they withdrew from the area.

Mr. Johnson: No, I don't agree with that at all. That's when they came in and there were no troops, KKK. All that's garbage. Everything exploded. Nobody withdrew after that when the white people got killed. Everybody came in and that's when (unintelligible).

Mr. Colburn: How did the word get out to the others? Did they telephone?

Mr. Johnson: I doubt it, I don't think everybody had phones. It's not to far up and down Cedar Keys, only 6 or 8 miles. Stark is only about 50-60 miles. Of course, its all dirt road and took you all day to get from Sumner to Gainesville. In the meantime, all hell broke loose. They set up roadblocks and anybody by the name of Bradley was

doomed. If your name was Bradley and they caught you, you were dead. This Liza Bradley, she went into the swamp and stayed all night in well water about waist deep. The next morning at day light she came up to the scrub oak to our house. Mother took her in and kept her there until about noon. Got her warmed up and dry clothes and then the Markim's ran a hotel on the main road and the Markim's boy, who was about sixteen or eighteen years olds, they came over to our house with a big canvas laundry. They put a bunch of clothes and sheets on the bottom and put Liza in on top of the laundry and then put additional clothes on top of her. They put her in back of their pickup truck and went through a roadblock. Fortunately they were able to convince the guys at the roadblock they were just taking the laundry from the hotel into Gainesville. When they got to Otter Creek they put Liza on the train and I never saw or heard from her again. I understand she did get to Gainesville and grew up there but she was definitely wronged. A few days later we went out to Rosewood and I personally saw where they had burned churches and they were burning Liza's house. I saw these two idiots come by and one was wearing her hat and the other was stringing her husband's guitar. It was really a revolting sight. In the meantime, mother, Ms. Pillsbury, Ms. Markim, and others had gathered some colored women and children and put them in the community building.

Mr. Colburn: Where they living at that time? Were they hiding out in the woods?

Mr. Johnson: Hiding out in the woods when apparently they were burning houses. Everywhere you looked you could see houses burning. It was probably relative to the two guys that got killed. Of course that is only 60 years after the civil war and poor blacks, if he stepped out of line he didn't have much chance anyway. These clowns came in assuming that and playing it up like everyone was out of step except them and my dad was - where he got into trouble was --he told them okay the colored area in Sumner is half of my work force and you stay the hell out it.

Mr. Colburn: Now, who said this?

Mr. Johnson: My father. They threaten to kill him because he wouldn't let them turn on his blacks. And that is when he was written up in the Philadelphia newspaper. In the meantime, the women had all these colored people in the community building. What these clowns were doing was riding around in their Model-T's, trucks, dogs, shotguns and everyone practically had a gallon of moonshine whiskey. They were looking for blacks. My mother was as nervous as a cat because she was afraid they would find the blacks in the community building and burn the building down. The next day they all got together and got them out and asked if they were okay. They said to the blacks that these guys were prowling around all night going up and down the road and how did they keep the kids quiet. They torn up their petticoats and stuck them in the children's mouth. My mother knew there was a Bradley nigger that was grossly crippled. On the road between Sumner and Rosewood you went down and there was a grocery store, a meat market, and then the railroad station and the school off in the roads to the side. This Bradley colored guy, who was working the grocery store, he was sort of giving a charity job because this guy could not do a whole lot but at least it gave him a chance to make his food. My mother came up to the store and saw him there and it scared the heck out of her considering these clowns were looking for Bradley's. She picked up the cabbage and acted as though she was looking it over and proceeded to talk out of the side of the mouth and told this Bradley guy to get the hell out of the store.

Mr. Colburn: Did you see any dead bodies? Do you have any sense of how many people died?

Mr. Johnson: No, I don't think it was that many. I estimated it to be about 7 people died.

Mr. Colburn: So 7 blacks and the 2 whites?

Mr. Johnson: No, I think it was about 7 all total. Anyway, this Bradley colored guy went out the back door. It was kind of arid land with scrub oak and prickly pears and

that kind of stuff and he figured he would escape that way. They caught him and took out to the cemetery and stood him on his father's grave and shot him to pieces. They were an idiotic group of guys, no doubt about it. They were the kind of people that whether they were black or white you wouldn't want to be concerned with them.

Mr. Colburn: What did they do? Do you have any idea what these whites did for a living? Did they work at the mill?

Mr. Johnson: No. I don't know of anybody in Sumner that was involved. They came in from outside up from Cedar Keys and most of them from Cedar Keys were probably commercial fishermen.

Mr. Colburn: How about from Bronson? Did any come from there?

Mr. Johnson: It was possible. Bronson was not too far away. Bronson, Otter Creek, Starke, Chiefland, these were considered rough country. Most of those people, if not all were moonshiners. No I take that back, that was pre-moonshine days. Back when I was kid in Worthington Springs every other guy you saw was into moonshine. But that was in the 30's. These guys were probably just, they might have been moonshiners. You know times were tough. All these people were talking about slavery and all that kind of stuff and actually the slaves were better off than a lot of the poor whites. When I was kid and my uncle was working on a farm and the going wages was \$.50 from cane to cane. That's the way they described it, you get out there as quick as you could see what you were doing and you stayed there until you couldn't see what you were doing and you made \$.50. A white person under those conditions did not make much money. A lot of it probably had to do with the Bradley clan looking like they were pretty prosperous. Liza was pretty well educated. She use to help me learn to read. She wasn't ignorant.

Mr. Colburn: How old was Liza?

Mr. Johnson: She must have been in her 30's.

Mr. Colburn: Was she married?

Mr. Johnson: Well, she lived with a guy. You know back in those days very few blacks were married. They just moved in and out.

Mr. Colburn: Did she have children herself?

Mr. Johnson: Not to my knowledge. Well, I don't know. I understand somebody, Gary had mentioned that he had heard from Liza and apparently she did have a family after she left. I remember her coming into the house. It's not at all they way they describe it. It's kind of frustrating the things they do.

Mr. Colburn: Did you know the name Carrier at all?

Mr. Johnson: No.

Mr. Colburn: This was another prominent black family from the Rosewood area?

Mr. Johnson: The original inhabitants of Rosewood apparently came down there cutting cedar. I was born in Lukin, which no longer exist but it was only just out of the inburns of Cedar Keys. It's between Sumner and Cedar Key and right on the bay.

Mr. Colburn: So they cut the cedar to make pencils:

Mr. Johnson: They sent it off to the pencil factories.

Mr. Colburn: Was the pencil factory in the area?

Mr. Johnson: No it was up north, but they had these crews down there cutting cedar. At one time Cedar Keys had lots of huge cedar trees and they cut them all out and then once the cedar was gone mostly people worked in the turpentine mills. They turpentine the pine trees. None of them I know of --I recall that any of them worked at the sawmills in Sumner. The sawmill in Sumner was full time and they had their own blacks. They talked about the town disappearing--the only thing you'll find in Sumner is the mill. We moved from Lukin to Osceola and the same thing there. Osceola was once a thriving town with a confectionery, doctor's office, post office, two schools. You go out there now and the only left is the vault in the office. The sawmill towns just disappeared. The same way with Rosewood, it was a lot of propaganda.

Mr. Colburn: Did the railroad stop at Rosewood?

Mr. Johnson: No.

Mr. Colburn: It did not stop? Did it stop at Sumner?

Mr. Johnson: Sumner. The station was sort of between Sumner and Wylly. The little swamp by our house, the railroad actually ran on the far side and the school was sort of between our house and railroad station. Then this road came by near the railroad station and on to Rosewood. Rosewood itself did not have a railroad station because it wasn't considered a town.

Mr. Colburn: Do you remember it having a turpentine still?

Mr. Johnson: Probably did, most all of the little towns had a turpentine still in the area of the turpentine. It was still a rather primitive thing, just a boiler room in a big shack. I use to watch them. They would have a big pot of raws in there boiling and what they do is they stick their hand down in the water and stick right into the hot rod. It formed steam around it and nothing happened. If you stuck your hand in it without the water on it you would cripple for life. Everyone had a turpentine still.

Mr. Colburn: After the violence and burning of the town all the blacks left and Mr. Wright left and that was about it in Rosewood?

Mr. Johnson: I don't know. Right after that we moved to Sanford.

Mr. Colburn: Why did you parents move to Sanford from Sumner:

Mr. Johnson: My father bought half interest in a meat market down here on First Street. He had a little farm out on Avocado. He just decided that he was tired of Sumner and this move looked to be good financial move. The business went bust because his partner allowed him to take home \$9.00 a week and said that's all the market was making. In the meantime his partner went out and bought cattle ranches.

Mr. Colburn: Did you parents talk about Rosewood after you left.

Mr. Johnson: Not at all. What gets me is that Ocoee apparently had a lot worse race riot than Rosewood.

Mr. Colburn: Well, Ocoee had a similar incident.

Mr. Johnson: When I was child teenage here in Sanford it was known fact that a black person couldn't be in Ocoee after sundown. I don't know when it happened. I know in the 30's that was serious.

Mr. Colburn: Did you ever hear of reference to Perry and racial violence and the burning of homes?

Mr. Johnson: No. My uncle ran a bus line out of Perry for years. It ran from Perry to Gainesville and Valdosta. I had a lot relatives who lived there. As a matter of fact, Perry was a sawmill town too. When I got my engineering degree at Florida, I almost went to work for Buckeye, which is Proctor and Gamble.

Mr. Colburn: In Rosewood, was there only one white family ?

Mr. Johnson: I don't know of anymore. I couldn't say yes or no. I know the Wright's lived there and he was sort of a big shot. I don't know what the blacks would have done without Mr. Wright because he was MR. WRIGHT. He took care of the blacks.

Mr. Colburn: Did he hide some of the black families to protect them.?

Mr. Johnson: I would not be surprised but I couldn't say. The blacks were on the run. My mother, Ms. Pillsbury, and others did put them in the community building. Mr. Wright was much more close to them. He lived in Rosewood where Sumner was about mile and half away.

Mr. Colburn: Could you describe his business again, what did he have in his store?

Mr. Johnson: It was just a little unfinished building not very big with shelves along the side. He didn't even have a refrigerator. What meat he sold was probably smoked meat. The rest was canned groceries and ammunitions. That was the sign of the times and everyone were buying shotgun shells, 30-30 rifle bullets.

Mr. Colburn: What sort of game did they get out in that area, the Sumner/Rosewood area?

Mr. Johnson: The gulf was loaded down with deer , bear, and turkey.

Mr. Colburn: So there was good food around there for them eat?

Mr. Johnson: Gulf Hammock even back up to World War II was considered to be a hunting preserve.

Mr. Colburn: Sumner you said had about a thousand people?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, about 500 to 1000.

Mr. Colburn: How many of were blacks and how many were white? Was it about half and half?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, probably because most of the labor in the mills was black. I don't remember how much family they had. A lot of the blacks did not have any family to speak of. Marriage was almost unknown. It was sort of like animals grazing out in the woods. The white groups, Sonny/Gary Moore asked me about Troy Jones. Troy Jones was a filer, I' m not sure but he was sweet on Gary Moore's red-headed daughter.

Mr. Colburn: So he worked at the mill did he?

Mr. Johnson: Everybody in Sumner worked in the mill except the Markims. They rant the hotel and Dr. Cannon was there. He worked for the mill. If you worked for the mill and got sick or something you went to see Dr. Cannon.

Mr. Colburn: Was there any attempt by the white mobs to attack the blacks in Sumner?

Mr. Johnson: That is when my father came in. They threatened to kill my father because he went armed and he was going to shoot at them if they bothered any of his blacks because he had the mill to run and the blacks were very instrumental in the proper operation of the mill. If they came in there to bother the blacks it would have interfered with the operation of the mill.

Mr. Colburn: Was it his decision to keep them there at the mill to keep them safe as opposed to letting them go home?

Mr. Johnson: Well I don't know. I wouldn't say that my dad was only one out there. Probably most of the guys, Mr. Pillsbury, and everybody else was out there. Probably

a whole bunch of white guys in the mill armed themselves and got there and told these clowns to stay the hell out. If they wanted to shoot the men at the mill would shoot back.

Mr. Colburn: What did the Philadelphia paper say about your father?

Mr. Johnson: They did an article about the fact that he had to go around armed and had been threaten by these clowns. I don't know if you'd call them a mob or not they were sort of free lance. All this talk about soldiers coming in was a lie.

Mr. Colburn: Nobody came down from the State of Florida, the governor?

Mr. Johnson: No, no, no. It didn't last but about three or four days. It wasn't going on for weeks like they talk about. There were no houses buried by bulldozers and there were not 1,500 people bodies out there.

Mr. Colburn: How many would you guess lived in Rosewood?

Mr. Johnson: I doubt it was more than 100. Rosewood was not a town, just a bunch of houses. I don't know what they would have done if Old Man Wright closed his store down. Well it wasn't to far into Cedar Keys from Rosewood-about 7 miles. Cedar Keys at that time was thriving. They had a movie house and a railroad. When they pulled the railroad out Cedar Keys died. When I was a child it was a lot more lively place than Gainesville.

Mr. Colburn: I just want to thank you for your participation. I wanted to make sure that I have your permission to transcribe the tape and use it.

Mr. Johnson: Oh sure. I don't say that I know all about it but to best of my knowledge as a five almost six year old, I know all this garbage about this woman being involved with a railroad engineer and all that kind of stuff is garbage. That part I know, because I was there and saw the dogs when they came out of her back yard and picked up the trail and ended up at my house initially because my brother, who was four years older than me, had apparently gotten nosy and crossed the path of the trail.

Mr. Colburn: You lived about a quarter of a mile from Fannie Taylor's house. You were about a mile from Rosewood?

Mr. Johnson: Well it was about mile and half.