

**Albertha Meyers Cogswell**

I lived here the first I could remember living here was 1927. Left here by the time I had sense enough to know was when my father died and my mother took us to Savannah and my grandfather helped raise us. 1928 or 1929. My mother remarried something like 30 or 31 I think. Her new husband had the name Henry Smalls. She lived on the mainland at Sanders Plantation. Her husband was the caretaker of the place so they just live like sharecrops. Over here my father used to work on a farm. You see, Copps had a farm; he would make tomatoes, lettuce and cucumber and all that stuff and ship it off to different places like that. Father would work like that, and when time to harvest these things my mother and the other ladies would help harvest.

Mother born on Callawassie.

I was a little girl but I used to go and help...somebody told me the cook was here yesterday, Genevieve Bryan from Savannah...I used to help her in the kitchen around 10 or 11. I used to help her wash dishes. If she say wash the vegetable, turn the meat or whatever.

**What was it like working with her?**

Beautiful..beautiful.

**Why?**

I don't know. I just thought that this was Paradise when I live over here. I loved it.

**What was so great about it?**

Well, the only thing I know everybody was supposed to be your cousin or good neighbor and whatnot like that, so that was the only thing we knew, but we were happy with it. And on Christmastime, Copp would go to New York and buy all the fellas, the menfolks, jumper with overall, what they call apron-front, and then he would buy the ladies and the children material, oh stacks and stacks, and then near Christmastime he would kill a cow or hog or whatnot and would have his people to have the Christmas feast for everybody on the island.

**How many people were there on the island?**

I couldn't begin to count.

**It must have been a large number of people**

Oh yes, and he furnished everybody with a home.

**Who built the homes?**

I guess the men who knew how to do it would get together and build the homes.

**When did you get together with other people on the island?**

When you go to church on Sunday. Sometime in the summertime they have ball games. The Callawassie boys would come over to Spring Island and they would have ball games on Saturday afternoons and then when times Spring Island returned the same thing. That was our festival. We never have anything else. And they had the boys who would play the guitar and some of them would take a washboard with a spoon and make music and that was good.

**Did you ever do anything else for fun like play ring plays?**

Yeah, the little children would, yeah. "Ring Around the Roses" then you'd drop something behind the other and they'd have to pick it up.

**What was that called?**

I don't remember...but it was fun.

**So did you have a lot of friends?**

All family, but we were friends.

**How many family members did you have here or were there just too many to count?**

Yeah too many to count and everybody was cousin's cousin.

**Between Callawassie and Spring Island, right?**

Right, right.

**Did you leave Spring Island ever?**

I used to go to Savannah to my grandfather and my grandmother during the time we lived over here.

**What did you do when you went to Savannah?**

They'd take me shopping, they'd carry me to the movies.

**What sort of movies did you see?**

I saw the movies you'd just see them acting but no voice.

**Were the theaters separated?**

UmHmm.

**Where would you sit when you went?**

With the theaters separate, we would have to go upstairs to the balcony.

**What theater would you go to?**

Lord, could I remember? Was it the Peking? Long gone. I was just telling them out there the funniest thing. My grandmother had this beautiful lamp and then she would have something on that to hold that shade and then on Saturday evenings she would be sure that you clean up this lamp, the shade, fill it up with oil, everything and that would sit over there in case company come on Sundays. And then for our light, through the coast of the week to study for school and everything they would go out in the woods and they call it the lightwood stump and they would cut these big hunks of lightwood and throw a piece in the fire and that would be our light.

**How long would that light last?**

Oh, a long time and then if it go down low then they would throw another piece in the chimney and that would have been our electric light.

**What would you do by the light?**

We studied our schoolwork by the light. We'd sit down and talk by the light. When near time to go to bed they never leave fire in the chimney; they try to keep this much heat until time to go to bed and let it die down. They never sleep with the house hot.

**Did people tell stories around the fire?**

Oh yeah. My great-grandfather..I was just telling them outside. If I get a chance and we go I'm going to try and find the spot where he used to live. He called my great-grandmama one morning...he used to knit nets, sit to the door and knit net...and he called my grandmama, he said, "Fanny!" and she said, "What?" He said, "Come here...listen." And my grandmama come said, "What you want?" He look up in the sky and he say, "Fanny, I may be dead and gone," he said, "but something sucker like a bug gonna be flying in that air." And you know what that is today? Airplanes...airplanes. He had a vision that that would be someday and it was airplane. I'll never forget, "Something sucker like a bug," he say, "Flying in the air...I may be dead and gone." That's my great-grandfather, Sharper Miller.

**He's the one who came from Africa, right?**

Right, right, right.

**Did he ever tell you stories about...**

Yeah he told us how they caged them up and bring them over here and carried them to different islands and helped them build up the island and bring them back. There's a church on Hilton Head right now he helped build, a black church, the Quinn Chapel I think they call it, well, he helped build that church. And he used to take his clothes off and he'd show us where they punish them when they do bad. Take the candle and heat and let the hot candle drop on their back.

**How old was he when he came here?**

I guess he had to have been in his 20s or his early 30s.

**When did he die?**

I can't remember, but it was way back when. But he could knit a net, and that's all he would do when he get his breakfast and eat and he'd pull to the door. And people just keep the house shut up in the summer with air-conditioning and in winter with fires. We had to throw them windows, blinds, back and let the fresh air come in. And he would sit there and knit and tell us about all the places they used to take them, because he found my great-grandmama to Young's Island because they were building over there and he met my great-grandmother and he brought her to the island.

**Since he had this kind of vision about the future, did you have any visions as a child?**

Yeah, I used to hear them talk about the freight train and all like that and I used to wonder what a freight train would look like.

**What did you think it looked like?**

Well, I don't know. Sometime I say maybe it's like...the Cops had these tractor and then they would have the trailer and they would load the trailer and the tractor pulled them to the vegetable house where they packed the vegetable and that's the way I used to picture it. As I got older and we visit Savannah, we had to go to Savannah by boat, and then my grandfather would take us to the train station and I learned the trains from that.

**How old were you when you first saw a train?**

I'd say from '27 to '28 so I was born in 1917...10 or 11.

**So you'd never seen a train before?**

No, not even in the picture because, see, they didn't get newspaper and stuff like now.

**Did you ever get news from anywhere?**

No, if somebody across the mainland, if something happen and if it be a nice calm day, somebody'd whoop over there and they say, "Hey...Cousin So-and-so died!" or "Mr. So-and-so died" or got married and stuff like that.

**You could actually hear that?**

Yeah..when it was calm the voice come right over.

**So I guess that was the only way to communicate without going over there...**

Yeah...

**There were never any telephones here?**

No, no, no, no.

**Did you go to church here?**

Yeah but I can't remember the church. Now somebody out there was telling me that the church had name Camel. Now our church is an AME church and its name is Camel AME

and I don't know whether this was the branch from Camel AME or Camel got the name from this one. I really don't know.

**Did you join the church while you were over here?**

No, I didn't join the church. I didn't join 'til I was...let me see...in 1942 when I joined the church.

**Where did you join?**

Camel.

**Do you still go to church there?**

Still there.

**You live in Bluffton...a lot of people moved to Savannah.**

Yeah a lot move to Savannah.

**Why did you move to Bluffton?**

The reason for my moving to Bluffton because I got married, the guy who I married, Bluffton was his home.

**How did you meet him?**

How did I meet him? I think as the generation of mine, they start going to ballgame on Saturdays and then we would go to the ballgame and I met him on the ball diamond.

**Did you ever play baseball?**

Yeah.

**When they had the ballgames, were the girls able to play?**

Yeah, and we used to beat the boys up too.

**You were raised by your mother and your father?**

Halfly by mother and my father and after he died. By the time they got married, I was in my teens and I went to my grandmother, mother and father like in the summertime and then in the wintertime I went back to her 'til I grown enough to get on my own. But he was a great step-father. He was a wonderful person. And I'm going to see if I can get all of my sisters and brothers picture and I'm going to send it to you.

**The next two children were raised here?**

Yeah, Rosa and Bunchie.

**Do you remember when they were born?**

I think I'm a year and three months older than Rosa, but I can't remember Anna back there. I can't remember rightly, but I know that she's drawing Social Security so she got a good age.

**What did other members of your family do during the day?**

Well, back in those days, like I say, my grandmother or my great-grandmama in them days they would take care of the children that wasn't old enough to go and help work on the farm, and we would rake the yard and do washing and cleaning the house through the coast of the day.

**You did that everyday?**

Yeah, we were living in a little cottage, three rooms, the most had four rooms and there would be about 20 or 25 people most living in the house so you had to keep clean and wash everyday.

**Where was your house over here?**

Where we used to live over here, they had a spring well and the water would be pouring all the time, never stop...artesian well.

**Do you know how many springs there were on the island?**

I think there was one more as far as I can remember, but I think they had a spring well down to the place they call Old House where the tabby was and they had one at the Goose Pond. They had spring well at Ridge. I don't whether they call where were living Loy Point or what they call that little neck up in there. I can't remember, but we had a spring down there. And it wasn't far. It was about from here over to the other building over there. And we didn't have no tin tub. We had tubs that were made out of barrels, and then we would take a piece of cloth and we tote awhile and then we stop and rest and then we change hand like that and we do that everyday in order to keep water to the house.

**How many times a day did you have to bring water?**

Well we did it daily. Sometime I think about it now and say "Lord, have mercy!" I go to the bathroom now and take a bath and if the tub wet I'm cleaning, I'm scrubbing, I'm wiping and I can remember when we were little children and my mother used to make a mark in the bottom of the tub and she let the baby wash first like a year-old and then the two and three are going like that and then about four people washing in that water and then dump it out and get more. Today the difference!

**Did you take cold baths?**

No, my great-grandmother used to have a thing built in the chimney you know like the Indians with a long iron and then they had these great big pots with handle on it and they would hang it up in there and heat the water. And they used to have spider, they used to call it spider I don't know the right name...and they used to bake cake in them. They put so much coals under the pot and then they put the cake in and then they put the top on there and then they put the coals on it and that's the way they make the Christmas cake or either cake for holiday or whatever. I don't know how complicated it was but them cakes were good.

**When you were helping in the Copp House, was that a wood stove?**

Oh yeah they had everything. He had something like a commercial stove with hood and bakery and everything.

**It wasn't electric?**

Yes! What they used to call them motor generator. A lot easier. You know what Copp used to like for breakfast? He used to like fish egg and scrambled egg. You scramble that together and then he eat that on toast.

**That's all he ate for breakfast?**

Yes.

**Everyday?**

Yes.

**What did he eat for the rest of the day?**

Oh fine foods, vegetables, good meat. We in the kitchen could have anything that were there, it didn't make any different.

**Were you there when Mrs. Copp was there?**

Um hum. She was a pretty girl. Y'all don't have a picture of her? Genevieve should have a picture of her because Genevieve was the head cook. In fact, she took care of the house and we were there working under her. She give the orders.

**How many people were on the kitchen staff?**

Well, during the time I were there it was...uh...did you hear them talk about Willie Austin used to work over there too? They never talk about him? Well, his wife, Willie Austin's wife, and her daughter and another girl named Rosella. They used to been the laundry people, they would keep the linen and Copp's clothes and wife and all them clean.

Genevieve, Justine, Aurine, and myself, there was another girl but I can't remember, it was like five of us working under her and Aurine and Justine and them was more like the maid, they wait on the table and make Copp's wife and they room kept clean and in the night time they know what they want to the bed-head to drink and then you turn back the bed and all like that. Then he had that much just right round work in the yard. The fellas that work round the yard are yard boys and they had so many men out on the farm.

**Did he ever do anything special for you?**

Well, like I say on Christmastime, he had this big thing from Callawassie Island to the mainland, called the Swain place, all the neighbors and the friends could come over during the holiday Christmas. He would have them to cook and serve everybody and give everybody presents. He was very good.

**What did you eat at home?**

We used to plant our own rice. We used to have a pestle and we used to beat it until all that roughness come off it and then we'd throw it up in the air and all the chaff would go away sand then we would make our own grits. Copp had a mill where we would grind the grits and we could hunt, kill anything you want on the island and then we live out the river: fish, crabs, shrimp, oysters, whatever. I was never a river person. I just was afraid of that big water.

**Did you have any special process to get into the church at Camel?**

Oh yes, we had to say your prayers constantly and you had to have some chosen person where you would talk to and get the advice and everything until you get your belief that this is it. And then they believe you and they baptize you. I dreamt about this person, and then I went and told somebody the dream I had. In the meantime, I say I'm trying to pray and to confess and go to the church and they say go to her and she will teach you.

**Did you have to tell her your dreams?**

Yes.

**Were there any dreams that you remember specifically?**

I remember being among the dead sometime, great gathering and a dream where some of my relative die and all like that and then again I dream we were in church or whatever and when you come up to these good dreams like that then they determine which would be the best for you to believe.

**Did she tell what the best would be?**

Yes.

**What was her name?**

Estella Johnson. She's dead now.

**Did they call it seeking?**

Umhum. That was funny, but I just say back in that time was back in that time. They didn't want you to comb your hair or wash your face or sit around people. You have to always be at your own. And they would tell you when you kneel down to say your prayers, if ants bite you or mosquitoes see you're allowed to take life. I didn't do this over four or five weeks. To begin with, I was afraid of the dark. After awhile, I said this is it.

I say that the older folks just had a lack of understanding because if somebody would chose me today to advice them of how to go about going into the church I would say do you believe there is a God? If they say yes, then I say that's the only you need. I came to be a born-again Christian because I believe there is a God and the only way I could be born-again was to seek him in the church. I would tell somebody that nowadays. They're moving away from that, they're not doing that anymore especially in Camel, my church. They just say I believe and want to become a member. But they put you under six months to a year watchcare and see how you-re improving.

Over here on the island, we only had church once a month. So the pastor had to come from the mainland over here from Camel. I can't remember his name. Rev. Glynn I think it was.

**Were there places on the island that were considered haunted?**

I don't know.

**Did you ever see anything?**

No.

My father died in Savannah in the hospital.

**Did they bring him back here?**

Yes, and I was too small to remember what part of the cemetery, but my mom told me about five or six years ago that big oak was right there and they had marked a big oak tree. Now whether I could find it or they cut it down, but she would always tell me that it was a big oak tree right near his grave and they mark it, cut the big oak tree.

**When people died, did they sit up with the dead?**

Yes, they bathe them and dress them and they use salt to cure the body for the two days or the one day or whatever. I help wash the dead one time, and they salt them behind their ears and under here and over here and under the arms.

**I wonder why behind the ears...**

I don't know but somebody was telling me that an undertaker says that one of the delicate place to be sure the body would be safe for the number of days they wanted. I don't know whether they salt or clean behind there and under the arms with soap and water. In those days people used to save things special to be buried in a special dress or nightgown or whatever.

**How old were you when dressed the body?**

9 or 10.

**Were you scared?**

No no, never did afraid of dead people. I go in my church right now...well, one time back we used to just, any day you feel like walking to the church you could open the door, kneel down and say your prayers or anything you want to do in the church, but people so bad they steal the stuff out of the church you have to lock the church. But I fear not, I go in, I don't care. People didn't have locks on their doors, and actually God has been so good to us in them days we didn't have screen door, when it was hot the front door open all the windows because they had one big blind like a picture when you pull it it covered the whole window and when it's hot all that's wide open and a snake never did crawl in nobody didn't wake up and say a snake was in the house or nothing. God have just been good to us then.

I know when we used to have the fever, my grandmama would go out into the woods and get something they called the red bark off the tree. It must be a red oak tree or something like that. Then she would go and get pine top and another thing she would get was called a myrtle bush and the big root and then she would make a pot of medicine out of that, just boil it I don't know how many days or hours and then she would cool that down, strain it and then put it bottles and she would keep that whenever anyone else got sick she give that to us and we be better. But just think today if you do that you get poison and the next day no ice. And I didn't know nothing about ice until I went down to Copp's and work with that girl and they had their own machine where they make ice or either they would send to Beaufort and get it by the big blocks and get it stowed away. I didn't know what ice was. And my mama would have milk it turned into what they call clabber but nobody got sick. I wonder and I say he is a mighty God. It's too bad we can't turn back the clock because if we could maybe it would be a better world.

**Were you ever unhappy here?**

No, I guess I wasn't old enough to really know what happiness was. Just that I have been around and see I was happy with it until we started spreading out more into the world. But so far as have to have a dress every Sunday and whatnot, what my mama and them used to do, they have always lived good together, this sister's child, when the clothes get too small they come down to us. We never about go to the city and buy a new Easter dress and whatnot. We use the person Easter dress from year and then it go down like that in the family.

**Did you ever make clothing?**

No. We used to order clothes from a company called the Waterfields. they were company that made clothes and plow and everything I guess people needed but sometime my mother and them would order dresses from them or slips or shoes or whatever.

**What did your clothes look like?**

Some were gingham and some were what they call this thing pongee. They had different colors of pongee.

**Did Copp ever carry cloth in his store?**

I doubt it, but like I say during the holiday, he must be had a factory that he'd go to, and he didn't bought it special for the island people but for all the neighbors and friends who would come over and be with us that day he would have somebody there to issue out clothes and material. He bought the material, and most of the people made the clothes.

**Did ever learn how to sew?**

No.

**Did you ever make toys as a child?**

In Senior Citizens, we make dolls and we take toilet paper and make funny things and we take socks and stocking and make little things like that. I haven't been there in quite awhile 'cause since I was feeling so good, I work.

**Did you ever have problems with roaches over here?**

No not in them days.

**Do you remember midwives on the island?**

Yeah, my great-grandmother was a midwife and they had another one what her name was? Oh Lord I can't remember...Nancy Bryan. Catherine and Frankie Bryan were Nancy's grandchildren.



**The midwives were the ones who delivered all the babies?**

Yes, black and white. No doctor but those midwives had God on their side and the knowledge. Cause like my mother said when she gave birth to me she says the only thing the midwife did for her when she was in her seven or eight month they would give her a dose of castor oil. And says sometimes she work up until the night or the day she take sick and no trouble. Now you have to the doctor every week. My grandmother was Mary Powell's midwife...Phoebe Mitchell (grandmother). Phoebe was one of the midwife. She delivered a lot of babies. She traveled around to all the different islands. I know like mama say every you got to hear go to the clinic go to the doctor and whatnot and when we were having children the only thing the midwife would was give us some castor oil. Maybe to loosen up their body or something.