

Interview with Aunt Harriet Smith, Hempstead, Texas, 1941

AFS t5500A

Interview with Aunt Harriet Smith, Hempstead, Texas, 1941

John Henry Faulk: Lean up this way a little. And you remember, can you remember churches very well Aunt Harriet? Were you a church goer?

Harriet Smith: No. We was just children then, when slavery time. My mother and father, I can remember when they went to church. Our white folks, they'd ride, go to church in the morning, you know, and they'd go in the evening, my grandma, to the white folks' church. In Mountain City, ride their horses.

John Henry Faulk: Well now what do you, when did you start going to church?

Harriet Smith: Oh yeah. I never started to going to church. We never had any church till, uh, much after I married.

John Henry Faulk: Well, and you started going, didn't you?

Harriet Smith: Yeah.

John Henry Faulk: After you got married.

Harriet Smith: I went to church, and [*mumbles*]

John Henry Faulk: Well, who, who do you, how did you marry? Did you have a preacher to marry you?

Harriet Smith: Course. A white preacher married us.

John Henry Faulk: He did, huh.

Harriet Smith: Uh huh. White preacher married all of us girls. There wasn't any preachers much when I married.

John Henry Faulk: Well, who did you uh, uh, when did you first start going to church then?

Harriet Smith: Well we'd go to church then. We had church before. It wasn't like, you know, preachers didn't know unless, you know, only what they heard [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Was he a traveling preacher? Or was he just, he was a colored preacher wasn't he?
[*John Henry Faulk and Harriet Smith overlap*]

Harriet Smith: Yes, just traveling, you know, and stop there and preach. There was a H. and G. and so on. That was our preacher's name. [*mumbles*]

John Henry Faulk: Well what would they preach about? Can you remember?

Harriet Smith: Well, they just preached that we had a God and a soul to be saved and so on.

John Henry Faulk: Did they preach as good as preachers preach today?

Harriet Smith: Oh no. No, they didn't know nothing, you know, only read the Bible sometimes in places they could read a little. No they wasn't, the preacher wasn't educated at all.

John Henry Faulk: They weren't huh.

Harriet Smith: No. Only [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Some of them couldn't read and write at all.

Harriet Smith: No, they would spell letters and so on. Couldn't read and write at all. [*pause*] There's some of them couldn't read and write at all. Just only preached what they heard others say, you know. Then some of them, after getting older and wiser, you know they [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Well what about the songs that they sang. that's what I'm interested in. [*John Henry Faulk and Harriet Smith overlap*]

Harriet Smith: Oh. I didn't go much when they sung them songs and uh [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Well did they sing these old One Hundreds? Do you know what an old One Hundred is?

Harriet Smith: One of these old time songs?

John Henry Faulk: Uh huh.

Harriet Smith: Yes, yeah.

John Henry Faulk:Where they'd write off one you know. "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone, and All the World Go Free?" You've heard that haven't you? [*John Henry Faulk and Harriet Smith overlap*]

Harriet Smith: Yes, yes, that's it. That's the wind blowing, I think. I don't know what it's fixing to do out there. See them trees a-bowing down. Yeah, yes we'd sing them songs. But I had the old, old timey books, hymn books, I'd be [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk:Well where would you get those books?

Harriet Smith:They had them, sell them. Ma and uh and grandma, and them bought them you know. And my husband bought each of us a hymn book.

John Henry Faulk:Was your husband H. S., uh, much of a [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith:J. S.

John Henry Faulk:Uh, oh, J. S.

Harriet Smith:Hmmm.

John Henry Faulk:Was he a church man?

Harriet Smith:Yes, he was [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk:What happened [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: Church man, church man, and a politic man too.

John Henry Faulk:Oh you were, y'all voted in those days.

Harriet Smith:Yes. My husband was uh, he was known by white folks. He was well, uh, when he got kill them white folks was just crazy about him. He'd gone through [*unintelligible*]. That boy that killed my husband, I nursed him when he was a baby.

John Henry Faulk:How come him to kill your husband?

Harriet Smith:Well he just mean, just mean you know and he, they didn't like people up to date you know. And course there just thirteen months in the difference in my husband's kill and his brother. Stole [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Killed your husband's brother?

Harriet Smith: Uh huh. He'd been to church. I think he went to ??? that night to carry a bale of cotton. And this W. B. sat down on a seat and a whole passel of them was setting down talking. And when the time to come to his cotton, they killed him and, and they killed my brother, my husband on the way from the cedar break. I could go right to the spot now nearly where he was killed at.

John Henry Faulk: Shot him or cut him [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: Shot him, shot him on the way from the cedar, see, we have a cedar break at home, at the old home. [*mumbles*] Shot him on the way from the cedar break.

John Henry Faulk: Well what kind of politicking did he do?

Harriet Smith: Well, he worked for white, white people when they want to be elected, you know, anything that time.

John Henry Faulk: He'd work amongst the colored folks.

Harriet Smith: Amongst the colored people. Men speak, and white folks, you couldn't get in the house when he spoke hardly for white people, all that section there. He had a good learning. Uh, all of them boys did.

John Henry Faulk: And he'd round up the votes, and that's how come them to kill him.

Harriet Smith: Uh huh. He rounded, when he set the night for a speech, people from Austin, from San Marcos, from every which way, white and colored, to hear him speak. He'd go to court house and speak for them.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Harriet Smith: Uh huh.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Harriet Smith: Yeah, he was forever speaking.

John Henry Faulk: Well, he uh, did the colored folks not like him?

Harriet Smith: No. The colored people all went too, but these white people, this boy that killed him, old W. B., I nursed him when he was a baby before I was ever acquainted with my husband.

John Henry Faulk: Well what I was, what I'm trying to, to find out is, how come him to kill your husband. Was it over politics?

Harriet Smith: Uh huh, politics and different things you know. [*mumbles*] Poor white people.

John Henry Faulk: Did the white folks have your husband killed or did uh, did he just, W. B. just go shoot him [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: No, my husband went to cedar break that day, and uh, and on his way back from the cedar break, uh, he lay by the road and killed him. And let's see, there was something about a horse, I don't hardly, how they done, but the white people, W. K. and them, was the first one got to him when he was killed. They had to shoot him, you know. And they brought the news to us. My brother and them.

John Henry Faulk: What did they do to W. B.?

Harriet Smith: Well, you know how that was. He lived up in there, you know. They would tell any kind of tale. Didn't do nothing, didn't hang him up, put him in jail about, seemed like (*unintelligible*). But his brother-in-law killed him.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Harriet Smith: Sure.

John Henry Faulk: They must have been a-shooting a lot of folk up in them days.

Harriet Smith: Oh yeah, Them peoples was poor peoples you know. Rich white people don't bother nobody.

John Henry Faulk: Oh, it was the poor white folks.

Harriet Smith: Uh yes, it was poor. When they come down, and his brother-in-law S. L. killed him. S., his father moved away. Had a good home over there, and then moved away, said they'd steal his life just like they stole B. and J's. So, and his boy's life, so he left and went to Oklahoma. Yes. His brother-in-law kill him. He rode up to [*unintelligible*] to kill his brother-in-law.

John Henry Faulk: And his brother-in-law shot him instead.

Harriet Smith: Yes. His mother tried to keep him from killing him but he just said, I ain't gonna let him kill me like he did Uncle J. Him and my boys all raised together. [*mumbles*]

John Henry Faulk: Y'all must have all been kin folks in those days.

Harriet Smith: Which?

John Henry Faulk: Well all of you seem to have been [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: White folks?

John Henry Faulk: and all.

Harriet Smith: No, they was white people.

END OF SIDE A