

An Interview with

John Lloyd Calcote

May 18, 1977

Interviewed by
Austin D. Bowlin

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
Oral History Project
Meadville and Vicinity

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Interviewee: John Lloyd Calcote
Interviewer: Austin D. Bowlin

Title: An interview with John Lloyd Calcote, May 18, 1977 /
interviewed by Austin D. Bowlin

Scope Note: The Lincoln-Lawrence-Franklin Regional Library
System conducted oral history interviews with local
citizens. The interviewees included long-term residents
of the Lincoln, Lawrence and Franklin County areas.

BOWLIN: This interview is with Mr. John Lloyd Calcote. Interviewed by Austin D. Bowlin, May 18, 1977. What is your full name, John?

CALCOTE: John Lloyd Calcote.

BOWLIN: And where were you born?

CALCOTE: I was born in McCall Creek, Mississippi.

BOWLIN: In what year?

CALCOTE: October 26, 1907.

BOWLIN: What education did you get?

CALCOTE: I had a high school education and I had a business course in Chillicothe Business College, Chillicothe, Missouri.

BOWLIN: What was your first occupation John?

CALCOTE: My first occupation. I left that school and got a job with the Chicago Northwestern Railway about two hundred (200) miles west of Omaha, Nebraska, in Bassit, Nebraska.

BOWLIN: And what was the wages being paid then, John?

CALCOTE: Well, it started out then, it was just sixty-two and a half (\$62.50) a month. It was right in the edge of the Crash in the Depression.

BOWLIN: And then what did you do?

CALCOTE: Well, the crash came on and times was difficult and of course, the seniority on that road, the one above you could take your job and I got bumped out of my job and I came back home in the summer of 1932.

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After then, the Civilian Conservation Corps opened up and I got in the three C's, it was called. That was my next job. I was a forestry clerk. I worked in the office - did the bookkeeping and kept records of the roads and telephones and different construction that the boys were doing in the fields.

BOWLIN: Then what did you do?

CALCOTE: After then, of course, I got married when I was in the camp and I came home and established a general mercantile business in 1936.

BOWLIN: Where was that at?

CALCOTE: That was here at Quentin, Mississippi, R.F.D. McCall Creek, Mississippi.

BOWLIN: What merchandise did you handle, John?

CALCOTE: I handled general merchandise - nearly anything you would want to buy. We had groceries, dry good, shoes, all kinds of notions, farm equipment, supplies for the farm, feed - jusy anything you might want to buy, we had it in the store.

BOWLIN: What was the price of bacon in those days? Do you remember?

CALCOTE: Around thirty-five (35) cents or thirty-nine (39) cents.

BOWLIN: What did you do then, John? You was running the store?

CALCOTE: Well, we established this store. Of course, we were in the heart of the Depression and I came upon the idea of putting on a rolling store and taking the merchandise to the people throughout the country. At that time there wasn't a car in twenty-five (25) families and times were very difficult, but the people were very pleased with it and there wasn't very much money. And I taken and traded my groceries for eggs, poultry, syrup,

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and shelled corn. It was a great help to the people and they were very pleased with it. At that time it was very difficult to move, especially those perishable items like chickens and poultry. Sometimes on a week's run, I would have five (500) - or six hundred (600) dozen eggs and no where to sell them. A Mr. Causey from Amite County came up and heard about the rolling store and he established a route into Baton Rouge and gave me a market to sell my produce. In that way, it put it on a more sound fitting. Moving my stuff and I'd know what to pay for the stuff next week.

BOWLIN: In other words, you didn't know from one week to the next whether you would get shed of your eggs or chickens?

CALCOTE: At that time it was established, it looked like one time I was going to have to stop it. But when I had this market established with this man, it built the business.

BOWLIN: What were the eggs and chickens selling for at that time?

CALCOTE: Well, eggs, a lot of times, wouldn't be but fifteen (15) or twenty (20) cents a dozen. They got up when he fixed the route. Lot of times he would pay me thirty (30) cents for eggs, twenty-five (25) and thirty (30) cents usually.

BOWLIN: Now, how long did you operate that rolling store?

CALCOTE: We established the rolling store in 1938 in the spring and of course, the war came on and we had to pull the store off. The gas was rationed and they only allowed me enough gas to operate one (1) week a month and that is why we had to pull it off.

BOWLIN: Well, did you ever get it back on?

CALCOTE: We put it back on in 1948 and run it a few years there,

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but at that time money was picking up. People had conveyance. There was practically a car in every home at that time and it was difficult then to sell your merchandise, make it more sound to run, you know, profitable to run.

BOWLIN: How long did you run this rolling store? How many years?

CALCOTE: About six (6) in all.

BOWLIN: Now, did that pick your profits up some from your store?

CALCOTE: Oh, yes. That was a big difference. That was rolling store was doing more business than the store was because I had four (4) routes each week in different directions that averaged about fifteen (15) to twenty (20) miles long and when you put the store right in front of a person's door and he had eggs and chickens - which is a great help to him - he is going to trade them. It was a great help to them.

BOWLIN: What was your wife's name, John?

CALCOTE: My wife was Ineita Artistine Johnson.

BOWLIN: Where was she born?

CALCOTE: She was born in Harrison County in a little town of Saucier, Mississippi.

BOWLIN: What date was she born?

CALCOTE: She was born January 2, 1916.

BOWLIN: What did she do?

CALCOTE: Well, she didn't do anything. She was just at home, you know. Of course, they had at that time a switchboard at their home. Her father ran a forestry tower there and they had a switchboard in there and it came into our office. They put one in our office, a phone in the camp, you know, from there to establish fire details and things like that. She ran

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the little switchboard there.

BOWLIN: When you moved here and put this store up, she was just a housewife?

CALCOTE: Just a housewife, yes. Of course, she helped me in the store. She run the store when I was out on the rolling store, you see.

BOWLIN: When was she born?

CALCOTE: I believe I stated that. She was born in January 2, 1916.

BOWLIN: How many children did you all have?

CALCOTE: We had four (4) children. Two (2) boys and two (2) girls.

BOWLIN: And what was their names?

CALCOTE: Artie Loy, the first child, and John L., Jr. Then we had Mark, another boy. Then there is Clemois the girl, another girl.

BOWLIN: What was their birth dates?

CALCOTE: Artie Loy was born in March 12, 1940. John L., Jr., was born February 1, 1943. Clemois was born August 20, 1947. Mark the baby was born April 30, 1956.

BOWLIN: Now let's get back to your store. Now, you took your rolling store off the road and you kept your store here at Quentin?

CALCOTE: Yes, the store was here. This was the basis of operating out of, you see.

BOWLIN: How was business after you took the store off and kept the regular store?

CALCOTE: We had good business here at the store because we had a sawmill close by with a payroll every two (2) weeks. Naturally, we had a good business here.

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BOWLIN: What was the most helpful thing here, John, in this community as far as the economic growth of your place and other businesses around here?

CALCOTE: Then you would have to come back to the sawmill, because it was the only source of cash or money for the people. They didn't make too much, but everything was cheap, just like the wages and of course, they made a living and the sawmill was the thing that picked this county up when they first came in. Of course, they didn't come in until this railroad¹ came through that I know of any being in here.

BOWLIN: Where was the sawmill situated?

CALCOTE: Well, the one I know about was the Selco up here. They had a mill, but didn't have a planer. They cut rough lumber. They had a carriage; they had a water pond they put the logs in. They had a train engine on the track that brought the logs in to it and it was a pretty good mill. It disbanded from there and came into Quentin as Central Lumber Company and put up a much larger mill. Had two (2) carriages down there and of course, they built homes for the people to live in. It was a one man town down there.

BOWLIN: All the houses belonged to the company?

CALCOTE: All the houses belonged to the company and most of them are still there and people are living in them. Of course, the mill has been cut over for years. I think in 1952.

BOWLIN: Was there any other kind of industry at all?

CALCOTE: Well, we were in the farming area here. Cotton was the money crop. People raised cotton and that was your money crop. You had share-

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croppers and the merchants around would furnish those hands on these farms from year to year. Take in the account and collect in the fall when they sold the cotton.

BOWLIN: What about the school, John?

CALCOTE: Well, we had a school. The first school I went to was Almo, back north of us in the country here. It was a school there for a long time. Then they came in and consolidated the school and established a school at McCall Creek. They had buses that bused the children into the schools, which was a great help to the people. Had better school and went into a high school. It was more than we had at these little one-horse schools, you know.

BOWLIN: Do you remember the first school you went to? When was it built?

CALCOTE: No, I don't. It must of been 1913 along when I had been going up there and it lasted on down through around 1918 or 1919, I think, when we were transfered to McCall into this consolidated school. That is apporximately right.

BOWLIN: And they made a high school out of McCall the first year they built it?

CALCOTE: No, McCall had a little school up there, but they consolidated, you see, and pulled all the little schools into that one and they did it by busing the children in there. Of course, that opened up some money, gave jobs to people running buses. Give more teachers at the schools and ball taken hold and they had mostly basketball at that time.

BOWLIN: John, what was your father's full name?

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CALCOTE: My father's full name was Willis Seguer Calcote and he was born in 1876 on May 26.

BOWLIN: What was your mother's full name?

CALCOTE: My mother's full name was Mabel Anderson Calcote and she was born at Roxie, Miss. My father was born up in Lincoln County, north of Lucien.

BOWLIN: What date was your mother born?

CALCOTE: She was born February 19, 1888.

BOWLIN: What occupation did your father have?

CALCOTE: Well, he farmed. That was about all they did back in those days. He was a farmer; he had a place here and he had share-croppers on the farm that worked with him. He had five (5) or six (6) share-croppers at one time.

BOWLIN: How many acres did he farm?

CALCOTE: Well, I can't hardly answer that. There was at one time, five (500) - or six hundred (600) acres in the farm, but it wasn't all farmed then. The share-croppers probably wouldn't plant over five (5) or six (6) acres of cotton. It must have been fifty (50) acres of cultivatable land.

BOWLIN: When did you join the C. C. Camp?

CALCOTE: That was in June, 1933. There was some very, very hard times then. Franklin Delano Roosevelt came and answered and picked the whole nation up, those camps did, because most of the checks went back to the homes. The person in the camp just kept five (5) dollars. However, I was a leader in the camp and I got forty-five (45) dollars. I worked in the office and I had

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a leading position in the camp and never went to the woods a day in the whole life. I served two (2) hitches in the camp. It was set up at the first for six (6) months and then you was out. When I got married, I married a girl in that area. The camp moved to a new location. The superintendent of the camp, Mr. Joe Cain, called me one day and wanted to know if I wanted my old job back. I just jumped straight up. I said certainly I want it back. There wasn't nothing to do, you know. I went back and served another hitch and that is when I came out of it, when it ended and I established this general merchandise store here.

BOWLIN: How long did you stay in there?

CALCOTE: In the camp? Well, I served two (2) hitches, you see. That just made, just made a year. You see, I served one hitch and when my time was up I had to come out. Of course, when I went back I had married a girl in that area and you could go in then as what you called a "local enrollee." I could go and come like that. We lived out of the camp. Had a home in Biloxi and the camp was north of Biloxi.

BOWLIN: How much pay did you get? That was before you were promoted.

CALCOTE: It was thirty (30) dollars a month just for an enrollee. When you got the leader's position it paid forty-five (45) dollars. That was the top pay.

BOWLIN: How much did you keep and how much did they send home?

CALCOTE: Well, when you were a local enrollee it all came to you. Then they supplied your groceries separate. I got forty-five (45) dollars in money and each month I'd get a supply of groceries. Go to the supplier there

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and they would issue out your groceries that you were entitled to if you were in camp.

BOWLIN: Well, they didn't keep that up long did they, giving people groceries?

CALCOTE: Well, a local enrollee could get groceries, because he wasn't in the camp to share the meals with the boys. So they issued his groceries separate, you see.

BOWLIN: If you didn't eat at camp, you got your groceries to take home?

CALCOTE: A local enrollee was entitled to groceries per month.

BOWLIN: What kind of work did they do in the camp at Biloxi?

CALCOTE: Well, they established roads, cut some roads through the forest and they established telephon lines. They had fire towers at that time stationed all over the whole area, miles apart, maybe fifteen (15) or twenty (20) miles apart. People manned those fire towers and those lines, telephone lines was connected to the camp. Well, if they got a fire reported they could call in there and get a fire detail to be sent out to these fires. Of course, they set out seedlings too, pine tree seedlings and stuff like that. It was all connected to the forest, to the end of it.

BOWLIN: How many men where in the camp where you were?

CALCOTE: I believe a company of men about two hundred (200), I believe they called it in the camp. They had various crews you see. Joe Cain was the superintendant. Old man Ramsey was the telephone man. Albert Leggestt was a graduate forester. He had the forestry detail of it. Old man Pete Prather² was the survey man that ran the survey lines. That is

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something else they would do, straighten out line. Sid Bufkin was a younger survey man and Cliff Dees was a road man and there was a Johnson fellow, I forget his name, he was a road man. Then we had Mac Holly, who was the Maintenance man that kept up the shop and the trucks and sharpened their equipment that they had to use - axes and things they fought fire with, some kind of a sling blade.

BOWLIN: When they had a fire, how many men did they call out? All of the men or just a part?

CALCOTE: Oh, no. A detail you see was just so many men. Maybe you could have a detail of fifteen (15) men, as many as you could get on a truck or something. On weekends I made out that fire detail. I had a list of all the men in the camp and on the weekend certain detail had to stay in. He couldn't leave the camp. He was detailed for that fire. It would be put on the bulletin board that he was to stand fire duty that weekend.

BOWLIN: Did any of them ever go over the hill on weekends?

CALCOTE: Well, I don't know that they did. They were pretty loyal boys in that camp. It was a big thing for them at that time. Didn't have anywhere to go if they wanted to go over the hill; they couldn't get out of there. There wasn't much they could do but rest. The first vehicle that I ever owned, I bought it when I was in that camp. I bought a T-Model Ford. I kept that car - it was a sedan. It wasn't new. I met my wife over these telephones. They hooked that phone into the office and after it was connected to their home and I told you she used to man a little switchboard down there. She was pretty close to the tower. Her father operated the tower. I met her over the phone and talked to her for months before I ever saw her.

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I asked her for a date and had never seen her. She said, "I guess so." I said, "I don't like that 'guess so' part of it. I want a date." She said okay, so I went down and met her. It went on and we married right at the end of that hitch in that camp in June, 1934.

BOWLINE: How much did you pay for the car?

CALCOTE: I didn't pay but thirty (30) dollars, but it was a good car. I kept that car. Brought it home with me when we established this business here. I don't know how long I ran that car. I would give anything in the world if I had kept that automobile. It would be worth three- or four thousand (3-4,000) dollars now. That was the best T-Model I ever saw, I believe. I never did have any trouble with it.

BOWLIN: How old was it?

CALCOTE: It must have been a '27 model. I think that was about the latest date they made a T-Model in '27 or '28.

BOWLIN: You bought it when?

CALCOTE: Well, I must have bought it in 1933, that was when we first got in camp.

BOWLIN: In other words it wasn't but six (6) years old when you bought it?

CALCOTE: Yes, we didn't put too many miles on them even then back here in the country. We didn't go anywhere much but from here to McCall.

BOWLIN: John, what was the first church you ever went to?

CALCOTE: That was it. The Methodist Church at McCall Creek.

BOWLIN: And when was it established?

CALCOTE: It was established in 1909.

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BOWLIN: Do you know the charter members of the church?

CALCOTE: Yes, I have a list of them. Do you want me to read them?

BOWLIN: Yes.

CALCOTE: Charter members of McCall Creek Methodist Church: Dr. Decatur P. Butler, Wilena L. Butler, William Rayford Butler, Jessie Wilena Butler, Stewart Harrison Butler, Joseph Powell Butler, Willis S. Calcote, Mabel Calcote, Nancy and Vera Havens, Maggie Havens, Hugh Lewis Raulins, Alice Newell, and Bert Raulins. That was the total charter members at that time in 1909. Our first pastor was Rev. J. N. Bennett.

BOWLIN: Where did the church come from?

CALCOTE: Well, we were served off of the Adams Charge. Adams was a large church down south of us and we were on the Brookhaven district.

BOWLIN: I believe you said a while ago something about you came from the church from Auburn.

CALCOTE: Auburn, yes, the pastor's home was at Auburn and he served our church from Auburn down there. You see, the pastor would serve several churches often when they were on a charge. Three (3) or four (4) churches sometimes.

BOWLIN: How many members did you have at the church after it was stationed there awhile?

CALCOTE: I really don't know. There must have been several. Here is the old book, but I don't know whether we can tell from this book or not.

BOWLIN: Well, did you ever have any colored people come to the

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church?

CALCOTE: No, at that time it just wouldn't have worked to have the colored people come there. I have heard my dad say as time went on back in slavery time, that the colored people would be up in a balcony in the back of the church. They let them come in there like that, but it wasn't that way in our church.

BOWLIN: You mentioned Dr. Decatur Butler. He was a senator at one time, wasn't he?

CALCOTE: He was a senator at one time. He was our country doctor. He lived here and served a great area around here. I remember, I believe he was the first man I ever seen with a T-Model car. He came out with a T-Model car. He was instrumental in getting this church organized here. He was a leader in it, the Methodist Church here in 1909.

BOWLIN: Before he got his car, how did he get around to his patients?

CALCOTE: He went by buggy and sometimes horseback. I remember one time, old man Fate Evans' place back south of the creek up there between here and McCall. Al Lofton, I've heard my daddy say, Al Lofton was visiting and maybe some more and they ate dinner together and got up and walked outside and Fate Evans shot Al Lofton in the stomach with a pistol. They sent after Dr. Butler and he rushed over there. He must have still been laying out on the ground. He had a hole in his stomach and he (Dr. Butler) ran his finger down in that hole and said, "Hell, he is going to die." He was already dead then, I expect.

BOWLIN: Do you remember how much Dr. Butler charged for his ser-

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vices back then?

CALCOTE: It was very, very reasonable. Sometimes two (2) or three (3) dollars and maybe a dollar sometimes and lot of times then he would have to take stuff that you would have on the place, you know, like produce, eggs and chickens. They would take anything. It was kind of like that rolling store business. There just wasn't no money back then. They didn't charge too much; they couldn't. They deliver every baby in the country at that time and I don't know what it cost to deliver a baby. It was about five (5) dollars on up. In my age it wasn't but ten (10) dollars to come and deliver babies. There is no telling the babies that Dr. Butler delivered over the country, a country doctor, you know, and didn't have nobody else.

BOWLIN: John, when the railroad came through did it help to established business in this community?

CALCOTE: That was a great help. You know the railroad was the backbone of the country, especially Franklin County here. It opened up your little sawmills with a way to ship your lumber out. Along the road they would established little towns. McCall Creek was established, I presume, right along then, because they had a way to get their groceries shipped in. We had four (4) merchants at McCall at that time. Harrison and Cameron was one of the biggest merchants. They did a supply business. Supplied the farmers around. They had the great trading post. Mr. Clem Mullins was another pretty good size merchant. Dr. Cain established a drug store there and sold books. He handled school-books at the opening of the school and that is where all the children would come to get their books. Then we had

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a Mr. W. W. Reece, he established a smaller store. He handled cold drinks. The first cold drink I ever remember drinking was at his store. He handled cookies, candy, and different thing of that nature. It was a handout of the community, kind of a bust corner. Everybody would gather up there and there is where the news would scatter and set up there and talk about everything in the community. The railroads were a great help at that time. Of course that is what established our nation, you know.

BOWLIN: How many depots did they have say from Brookhaven to Natchez?

CALCOTE: Well, they had several. It just seemed like they were just two (2) or three (3) miles apart. There was Lucien, another little town was established. It was just two (2) miles east of us. Then McCall Creek and then Eddiceton had a little town and depot. Then right on down was Bude a little further and then Monroe. They were just two (2) or three (3) miles apart coming down through there. We had four (4) passenger trains a day was another great thing. They ran two (2) east and two (2) west. Four (4) a day and the people could travel. They could go nearly about anywhere they needed to go. They could go to Brookhaven and go to Natchez. The only hospital we had at that time was at Natchez - the Charity Hospital which is still in operation. They could just travel anywhere they wanted to. They could go to see their people if they lived along the route.

BOWLIN: How much did it cost to ride say from here to Natchez?

CALCOTE: Well, I really don't know, but it didn't cost too much. Maybe a dollar and a half or a couple of dollars.

BOWLIN: How much did it cost to ride say from here at Quentin to

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McCall?

CALCOTE: Well, that would be hard to say. It would not be much - twenty five (25) or thirty (30) cents maybe.

BOWLIN: Were there any buses running through here at that times?

CALCOTE: Not at that time, no, sir. That (railroad) was the only conveyance. Of course, we had Quentin a little town established here. Had a big sawmill, shipped lumber out. The railroad built the country. History will prove that. It built the whole country. When they came through that meant a lot. Everything would pick up. The little stores, logging, business, lumbering...

BOWLIN: John, was the first railroad here, were they running trains on it when you first remember?

CALCOTE: It came in 1909 and I was born in 1907, and I was two (2) years old and I remember seeing the first train. It was very amusing to me to see that.

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BOWLIN: John, how did you get your merchandise for your store here when you put it up?

CALCOTE: Well, we had trains every day. Had four (4) passenger trains and of course we had the freight trains. Most of our merchandise was shipped by rail out of Natchez. We had the wholesalers in Natchez and, of course, they had the boat facilities there. The supplies would come up out of New Orleans into Natchez and we were supplied out of those sources. They would come to each depot at the little towns. It was great help to have this

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source to buy your supplies at.

BOWLIN: John, have you continually operated this store since 1936?

CALCOTE: Yes, we are still continuing to operate here. This is 1977. It has been quite awhile since we began this business. I might say when we started this business we only had eighty-five (85) dollars to start this business with. We invested it and we exercise our talent there and it has prospered mightily. We have educated our children out of this store. Income derived from this store educated them. I had four (4) children and Artie Loy Calcote has a degree in public school music from Mississippi Southern University and she taught school down at Meadville some two (2) or three (3) years, but she married Thomas A. Scott and since then she quit teaching and they have three (3) children: Lamar, Dana, and Chad. John Calcote, Jr., has a degree in band directing from Delta State College. He taught band directing for several years and he changed his major. He went back to school and got a Master's Degree in School Administration and now he is principal of Loyd Star School. He has been up there about three (3) years now. Clemois Calcote, the daughter, got a degree in music from Mississippi Southern University and she is now teaching in the high school at Hazelhurst, Miss. She will transfer to Meadville next year in our county. She married Gregory A. Scott and they have no children. Mark Calcote graduated as a machinist from Co-Lin Junior College at Wesson, Miss., and he is now employed at Chuck Smith's Machine Shop in Brookhaven, Miss. He married Paula Travis and they have no children.

BOWLIN: John, who did John L., Jr., marry?

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CALCOTE: John, L., Jr., married Shirley Campbell at Cleveland, Miss., while he was at school up there at Delta State. They have two (2) children, Katie Grace and Lee Ellen.

(End of Interview)

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Transcriber's Notes

¹Mississippi Central Railroad.

²Pete Flurry - Mr. Calcote's correction.