An Interview with
Bessie Dickson Jordan
May 26, 1977

Interviewed by
Mrs. 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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Title: An interview with Bessie D. Jordon, May 26, 1977 / interviewed by Mrs. 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: Your full name?
JORDAN: Bessie Dickson Jordan.
BOWLIN: Dickson?
JORDAN: D-I-C-K-S-O-N.
BOWLIN: Your present address?
JORDAN: McCall Creek, Miss. Route 2.
BOWLIN: What is your phone number, Mrs. Jordan?
JORDAN: I can't remember.
BOWLIN: We will get that later. Now your birthplace, where were you born?
JORDAN: Woolmarket, Mississippi, in Harrison County.
BOWLIN: What was the county seat of Harrison County?
JORDAN: Gulfport.
BOWLIN: Gulfport. And the date of your birth?
JORDAN: It is now. It was Mississippi City then.
BOWLIN: Mississippi City, at that time. Alright now, the date of your birth?
JORDAN: November 3, 1891.
BOWLIN: Your educational background. Now, you said you went through what grade?
JORDAN: I barely finished the eighth grade in public school.
BOWLIN: Well, was that in Harrison County?
BOWLIN: Your husband's full name?
JORDAN: Robert Burton Jordan.

BOWLIN: And his birth place?
JORDAN: McCall Creek, Mississippi.

BOWLIN: Franklin County, right?
JORDAN: Yes, Franklin County.

BOWLIN: Now, the date of his birth?
JORDAN: January 18, 1888.

BOWLIN: The date of his death?

BOWLIN: Alright. Now, what was his occupation, Mrs. Jordan?
JORDAN: Farmer and country merchant and a teacher. He was a teacher at one time.

BOWLIN: He was a teacher at one time?
JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Now, who were his parents?
JORDAN: John, J. H. Jordan.

BOWLIN: J. H. Jordan?
JORDAN: Yes, and Adisha Cloy Jordan.

BOWLIN: Adisha Cloy Jordan?
JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: And how many children do you have, Mrs. Jordan?
JORDAN: I have five (5) children.
BOWLIN: What are their names?

JORDAN: Lena Bert, Joe Benford, John Dickerson, Milton Norris, and Ann Stewart.

BOWLIN: Ann Stewart, that is your baby girl?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Now, I know you have some special talent in your family. I can remember personally, well, I know Milton is a good singer. I know that and I know your son Dick was a football player at the University of Tennessee. Now, what of some of your other children? I believe you have one daughter that finished music?

JORDAN: Yes, at M.S.C.W. 1

BOWLIN: M.S.C.W. They are all, well, Milton lives here close to you now and the rest of them are in different...

JORDAN: Dick lives in North Carolina; Ann lives in Brookhaven; Milton, of course, here, and Bert lives in Hattiesburg.

BOWLIN: All right now. What was your father's full name?

JORDAN: John Jacob Dickson.

BOWLIN: And where was he born?

JORDAN: In Florida, but I don't know where.

BOWLIN: You don't know? Do you know approximately his age? When he was born, approximately?

JORDAN: No, I don't know.

BOWLIN: Where did he die?

JORDAN: At McHenry, Mississippi.
BOWLIN: At McHenry, Mississippi? Is he buried there?

JORDAN: He is buried at Woolmarket. That is where I was born.

BOWLIN: Woolmarket, Mississippi. And what was his occupation?

JORDAN: He was a merchant.

BOWLIN: And your mother's full name?

JORDAN: Annie E. Stewart.

BOWLIN: Annie E. Stewart. And her birth place? Do you know where she was born?

JORDAN: It was at Woolmarket.

BOWLIN: At Woolmarket?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: That was in Mississippi, same place.

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Do you about approximately what her date of birth? About when was she born?

JORDAN: No, I don't.

BOWLIN: And she was, her occupation, I suppose she was a housewife?

JORDAN: Yes, just a housewife.

BOWLIN: Just a housewife. Where did you meet Mr. Jordan?

JORDAN: At a sawmill town at Lyman, Mississippi. I was working in the post office and he was laboring at the mill.

BOWLIN: Oh, yes, that's the circumstance. That is what I was going to ask you. What year were you married, Mrs. Jordan?

JORDAN: In 1914.
BOWLIN: 1914? And you had, I believe you said, a home wedding. Just a quiet home wedding?

JORDAN: Yes, just a wedding at home.

BOWLIN: Well, when did you come to Franklin County?

JORDAN: I came to Franklin County in August, 1914.

BOWLIN: 1914. Did you live in the vicinity when you first came here?

JORDAN: No, not right here, but it was within five (5) miles of here.

BOWLIN: Within five (5) miles. Well, what was the name of the post office closest?

JORDAN: Well now, this was Esias at one time, but that was not the post office when I came here. It had been, but it had been changed to McCall Creek.

BOWLIN: It had been changed. It was Esias before it was McCall Creek?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Esias.

JORDAN: E-S-I-A-S.

BOWLIN: E-S-I-A-S, and they changed it to McCall Creek?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Well, leaving Harrison County and coming this far up in the state, what was your first impression of McCall Creek, this area or this community?

JORDAN: I would never get out of these woods.

BOWLIN: I think you have kind of changed your mind about that, haven't you?

JORDAN: Well, we lived in cutover land in Harrison County where the tim-
ber had all been cut and there wasn't any undergrowth.

BOWLIN: There was plenty of it around here at that time, wasn't it?
JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Well, who were some of your neighbors, Mrs. Jordan, when you first moved to this part of the country?
JORDAN: Well, the J. S. Bennett family, the J. M. Foster family, the Richard Jones family, the Cloy families were relatives of my husband. Let's see the Picketts and the Magees.

BOWLIN: Most of them still live all around here, don't they?
JORDAN: The Burrises were some more.

BOWLIN: The Burrises, they are still around here too, aren't they?
JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Well, I wonder about then, what was your social life? What was it like? What did it center around in this part of the country at that time?
JORDAN: Well, the little country school mostly and our churches.

BOWLIN: What was the name of that school before the other school?
JORDAN: Grange Hall.

BOWLIN: Range Hall?
JORDAN: Grange Hall. G-R-A-N-G-E.

BOWLIN: Grange Hall. Most of the entertainment was just home entertainment or that sort of thing? That was good though, wasn't it?
JORDAN: Yes, community entertainment.

BOWLIN: Community, I see.
JORDAN: Oh, yes.

BOWLIN: Well, how did you all travel during those times?
JORDAN: Horse and buggy.

BOWLIN: Horse and buggy days. Did you ever ride horseback?

JORDAN: No.

BOWLIN: At that time now, where was the nearest railroads?

JORDAN: Well, let me see, Summit. No, Mississippi Central at McCall.

BOWLIN: Mississippi Central at McCall had already come in here then?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Well, did you travel much by train or was there any occasion for you to travel much?

JORDAN: I went home about once a year back to Harrison County.

BOWLIN: Back to Harrison County and you could go by train?

JORDAN: On the train from McCall to Hattiesburg and then on G. and S. I. on down to Gulfport, then on down to McHenry, my home town.

BOWLIN: Yes, well, you know that was the main mode of travel back in that time.

JORDAN: Yes, that was all we had.

BOWLIN: A bus line did come through Highway 98 I believe in later years, didn't it?

JORDAN: Yes, in later years.

BOWLIN: Do you remember by any chance about the first, who had the first telephone around in this part of the country?

JORDAN: It was right here.

BOWLIN: Right here?

JORDAN: Right here. It must have been a private line. The man that we bought this place from had a telephone. I don't know if it came from Summit, I imagine. I think Summit was the nearest railroad town, you know be-
BOWLIN: Well, usually whenever there was a telephone, that was the center of communications, wasn't it?

JORDAN: Well it was. He had the store here, you see, and it was kind of the center.

BOWLIN: And what was his name?

JORDAN: Mr. Quit Jones.

BOWLIN: Mr. Quit Jones.

JORDAN: J. Q. Jones.

BOWLIN: Well, do you remember who in this section of the country had the first automobile or were they already here when you came?

JORDAN: No, they weren't. I guess our mail carrier was the first automobile.

BOWLIN: Who was that?

JORDAN: Mr. Dan, no, Mr. Burt Raulins from McCall.

BOWLIN: Burt Raulins from McCall?

JORDAN: Yes, he brought mail out from McCall.

BOWLIN: About what time was that? Do you remember?

JORDAN: It must have been, let me think.

BOWLIN: About what year? In nineteen what?

JORDAN: Well, we moved in 1915. We moved into the house down there. We couldn't get it; we bought it, but we couldn't get it until the year was up. It was rented out by the year and that was in 1915, January, 1915.

BOWLIN: January, 1915.

JORDAN: Yes.
BOWLIN: And Mr. Burt Raulins was the mail carrier from McCall Creek?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Well, when did you get your first car? Do you remember that or about that time?

JORDAN: It was a little later. It must have been maybe two (2) or three (3) years later than that that we bought an old trap. You know, just a trap of a car. One we had to push.

BOWLIN: One you had to push to crank. Well, I want you to tell us about that. You said something about Mr. Burt leaving your tea kettle around.

JORDAN: Well, he would have to have hot water to crank it and he would push it up and down the road and wherever he got it cranked, I found my kettle and he was gone.

BOWLIN: And he was gone and you had to go retrieve your kettle?

JORDAN: Get my kettle, yes.

BOWLIN: What was the general reaction of the people in this part of the country about automobiles at that time? Did they fancy them or what?

JORDAN: Oh, they were, yes. They were delighted really. Of course, couldn't many of us have one you know and they were just a trap when we got one. We couldn't afford a new one, just a trap that we had, but we could go in it some.

BOWLIN: Well, I imagine you were limited in your travels by the road conditions, too, weren't you? There weren't too many good roads.

JORDAN: So many hills, you know, and bad roads. We didn't have any good roads.

BOWLIN: Were there any gravel roads at that time or were they all
dirt?

JORDAN: No, not any gravel.

BOWLIN: Do you recall about the year they started graveling the roads? About what time they started?

JORDAN: No, but it was several years later than that.

BOWLIN: After that time?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Where did you go to church, Mrs. Jordan?

JORDAN: I went to Ebenezer. That was the old established Methodist Church and Concord was a Baptist Church, but it was a younger church than Ebenezer.

BOWLIN: Yes, and you were Methodist and you went to Ebenezer?

JORDAN: Yes, I put in my membership the year that we moved there in 1914 and it is still there.

BOWLIN: 1914. And it's still there? I was going to ask if it was still there.

JORDAN: Yes, I moved from McHenry to Ebenezer.

BOWLIN: To Ebenezer Church in 1914. Well, that's a long time. Are any of the members that were there when you joined still there or are you the only one?

JORDAN: I am the oldest living member.

BOWLIN: Oldest living member of that church. Well, I just wondered. Well now, was that church in a group or charge of churches? I believe that is the way they did.

JORDAN: It was the Auburn Charge.

BOWLIN: The Auburn Charge?

JORDAN: Yes.
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BOWLIN: And one pastor pastored all of the churches?

JORDAN: Several churches. There were five (5), I believe, at one time. He pastored five (5) churches and we had services once a month, just once a month.

BOWLIN: Did you have Sunday School or just church?

JORDAN: We had Sunday School.

BOWLIN: Well, now, you didn't use the emersion type of baptism. You just sprinkled, didn't you?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: I know they were talking about using a branch down here, I think, to baptize from Concord.

JORDAN: They did, yes, this creek down here, yes, they did.

BOWLIN: You are still a member there, you say?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Well, when did you move to this present location, in this particular place that you are now?

JORDAN: In 1922.

BOWLIN: In 1922?

JORDAN: Yes, in the fall of 1922.

BOWLIN: What was it called then?

JORDAN: It was McCall Creek. The named was changed.

BOWLIN: Now, I want you to tell us about your store and how it was constructed - just in your own words - about how the blocks got made and all that sort of thing.

JORDAN: Well, it was just a big old square box, the store that we
bought, you know, with shutters, not windows in it, shutters, you know.

BOWLIN: You bought a store already built?

JORDAN: Yes, and furnished with all the stock. Yes, this Mr. Jones had the store there and he had gotten too old and his family was all gone and he and Mrs. Jones couldn't carry on. He put it up for sale and we bought it. We couldn't stay in it many years. We had to build another church (Meaning store) and we decided we would make concrete blocks, you know. We hired a Negro from Summit that had a little machine to make little individual blocks. He would come out on Monday morning. We would go and get him and he would work all the week. He would go back to Summit that Saturday evening and get drunk and he didn't come back Monday morning. Jordan and I got to making blocks before he came back, so I helped make the blocks in that store building.

BOWLIN: And they are still there now?

JORDAN: Yes, they are still there.

BOWLIN: Well, I just wanted everybody to know about that because I think it is quite unusual.

JORDAN: Well, yes, it is.

BOWLIN: Now, what type of store was it? Was it just a general store?

JORDAN: Just general merchandise for a country store.

BOWLIN: Just general merchandise.

JORDAN: Yes, groceries and some dry goods and feed and gas.

BOWLIN: Farm tools, probably?

JORDAN: Yes, farming tools, seed, feed, and that sort of thing.

BOWLIN: Seed and feed and that sort of thing?

JORDAN: Yes, yes.
BOWLIN: You didn't carry as some of the store did in Brookhaven, the farmers over a yearly period?

JORDAN: No, we didn't afford it. We couldn't finance that kind of business.

BOWLIN: I see. Now, what kind of records did you have to keep back then? Did you have to keep government records as they do now?

JORDAN: We reported income tax then.

BOWLIN: Did you have to do that from the very beginning?

JORDAN: I believe we did, but I don't know that we did. It was 1922 when we took over that store in the fall. I don't remember that we started right then. I don't know that Mr. Jones had to make that report, but soon after that, I know, we had to, if we didn't start then. I don't believe we started at the time we bought that store, but soon we had to make that report every month. That was a record of our daily sales and we had to send a certain per cent.

BOWLIN: That was to the State?

JORDAN: Yes, that was to the state.

BOWLIN: Then you had to pay a state income tax?

JORDAN: Yes, yes.

BOWLIN: That was before the federal income tax?

JORDAN: Yes, before federal income tax.

BOWLIN: In other words, you didn't have all these many forms and all to fill out that people have to do today.

JORDAN: No, no. Since then, we have so often wished it was back where it was then.
BOWLIN: Well, I can't imagine. Just simple ledgers probably at that time were sufficient to keep up with your business, wasn't it?

JORDAN: Yes, that's true.

BOWLIN: Did you have to have a license to sell certain items?

JORDAN: Yes, we did, retail merchandise. We had to pay a license fee.

BOWLIN: You had to pay a license fee?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: I just wondered if any type of merchandise or anything that you carried had to be licensed?

JORDAN: No, we just sold medicines, just ordinary medicines.

BOWLIN: Just over-the-counter type, patent medicine, I believe they were referred to as that then?

JORDAN: Yes.

BOWLIN: Was it customary about that time for the wife to work with her husband in business?

JORDAN: It was at my house. I don't know if it was with all the other wives or not.

BOWLIN: Well, I just wondered if you had to keep store?

JORDAN: Yes, I sure did. I had a cow bell out on the front of the store. I would lock the store and I would run down here to do some of my work, you know. If a customer came he would ring my bell and I would run up there and wait on him and run back down here to do some more work.

BOWLIN: That was one way to get it done.

JORDAN: Yes.
BOWLIN: Back that time, though I guess it kind of paid to keep it in the family. I mean you didn't have to hire extra help, did you?

JORDAN: No, no, we never did hire a clerk. No, we did it all by ourselves.

BOWLIN: Did it all by yourself.

JORDAN: We did it all by ourselves until our children got big enough to help us carry on, but we never did hire anyone.

BOWLIN: I guess your children grew up keeping store.

JORDAN: Yes, but they didn't like it. Our oldest daughter, we would have her to watch. She would sit on the porch and watch, you know, and she could hear a car coming. She hated to tend to the store. She would say, "If you stop at that store you are just a horse." If it went on, she would say, "No, he is a gentleman; he went on."

BOWLIN: I guess she didn't realize exactly what that store meant?

JORDAN: No, I wanted them to stop.

BOWLIN: You wanted the business didn't you?

JORDAN: Yes, that's true.

BOWLIN: I guess it gives you a good feeling today to know you could serve the community in that capacity?

JORDAN: Oh, yes. I enjoyed it and we accomplished something. It helped us on to something else, you know.

BOWLIN: That's right.

JORDAN: And the business grew.

BOWLIN: The people in this part of the country lived a long way from Brookhaven, Summit, or to some place. It was a whole day's drive or
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journey by wagon or something. They saved a lot of time.

JORDAN: Indeed they did. That is true. They would call us all times of night if they had a sick cow or a sick horse or a sick baby or something. You know, they'd come down to the store for something. They would call us all through the night.

BOWLIN: Did Mr. Burt do any veterinarian business?

JORDAN: Tried to.

BOWLIN: Most country stores, you know, the people thought the country store man knew all about veterinary business. I just wondered?

JORDAN: Well, Mr. Becker in Brookhaven started the creamery in Brookhaven - old man Becker. So he came out here to get Jordan to work up a milk route from this community. Well, he worked among all the neighbors in the community, encouraged them. Of course, everybody was trying to make a living. It was hard to make a living. Well, he encouraged enough of the farmers to buy some cows. All they had to get was the cows and a barn. They didn't have all that sanitary business that finally developed, but they just started and they would milk their cows. We had a truck that picked up the milk and carried it in. Well, it was a start in the right direction, you know. The people would have a way to milk their cows and still live at home and get along. It was just wonderful. And the creamery today is the results of it, you see, in Brookhaven. They still have it there.

BOWLIN: Everything has to have a beginning.

JORDAN: It does. Indeed it does.

BOWLIN: It is good to know you have some part in helping to establish these things.
JORDAN: Yes, it was interesting. People had enough confidence in Jordan that he could talk them into, you know, get them interested in some project that he could see something in it. We picked cucumbers one year, you know. Everybody planted cucumbers. We did everything anybody else ever did do, trying to make a dollar. That was the size of it.

BOWLIN: You had to do it to make a living, didn't you?

JORDAN: Yes, all of us did, all our neighbors and us too. We all did it. We were neighbors.

BOWLIN: There wasn't really any industry of any to speak of in this part of the country or way to make a living?

JORDAN: No, no, there wasn't. There was no public work of any kind; nothing here.

BOWLIN: You did have a small sawmill around and about or did you, here some of the time?

JORDAN: Well, sometimes we would have a little portable mill that would cut a little.

BOWLIN: Just a little portable mill. What about the syrup mills? Did they make the syrup?

JORDAN: Yes, they made syrup.

BOWLIN: Well, did you buy the syrup from them and sell it?

JORDAN: Yes, we would buy it. They would pay their burial insurance with their syrup. Hartman would give us – don't remember just how much – but people would pay their burial insurance with their syrup. Then somebody would come along, maybe who furnished us would take the syrup off our hands and we would get produce for that. We did every way in the world to
help the people get something that they could manage and live on, you see, and they paid their burial insurance with that syrup.

    BOWLIN: Was your husband a burial agent for Hartman or something?
    JORDAN: We collected to this day. We have collected for Hartman to this day from the time we opened our business here.

    BOWLIN: Until now?
    JORDAN: Yes, Milton does right now.
    BOWLIN: Is that right?
    JORDAN: Yes, started then and been doing it ever since.
    BOWLIN: Well, I didn't know anything about that. That is something I didn't know anything about. I remember people back in my day having to pay their bills with their produce and that sort of thing.

    JORDAN: Yes, we would take chickens and eggs and Jordan would haul them to town, you know, and would buy up something we needed for the store with our chickens and eggs and bring it back. It was a hard life, but we didn't grumble.

    BOWLIN: Rewarding, I'm sure.
    JORDAN: It was. We raised our children and accumulated enough that we could make a more comfortable home.

    BOWLIN: You have a beautiful and comfortable home right now.
    JORDAN: Well, we made this house over. It was just about down when we bought it, but it was shelter and it was alright.

    BOWLIN: I imagine the foundation was good. Back then, most of the foundations of homes were constructed good.

    JORDAN: Yes, it was good. Still is good. Of course we leveled it up and made it up to make us a good home.
BOWLIN: It must be nice to stay in one place that long and still call it home and enjoy being there.

JORDAN: Yes, it really is. It has been wonderful.

BOWLIN: Do you remember just exactly when the Independence School was built here?

JORDAN: Well, the fall that we moved here in 1922 that was its first session of school there in the new building.

BOWLIN: That was a high school, I believe, right?

JORDAN: Yes, Independence High. Yes, it was a high school.

BOWLIN: I thought that I remembered that.

JORDAN: It wasn't an accredited school, but it was a high school.

BOWLIN: It was a high school. How did it come to get the name of Independence? I believe you told me a little about that.

JORDAN: Yes, your father-in-law was...

BOWLIN: Grandfather-in-law.

JORDAN: Yes, grandfather.

BOWLIN: Yes, it was grandfather-in-law.

JORDAN: Well, he was, his place was going to be in this territory, you know. He said, "I don't want it named for any of these schools." That, "We are joining together and I want it different from any of the others." He said, "How about naming it Independence?" Well, every other school agreed, so it was Independence School. That is where it got its name. Mr. Bowlin named it.

BOWLIN: Well, that's a good idea. I mean not to name for another.

JORDAN: Yes, and it was a good idea about the school. Couldn't
any one school claim more than the other. It wasn't the name of any of
the other schools, you know. It was our school.

BOWLIN: It wasn't a part of another school. It was your school.
JORDAN: No, sir. It was a new school.
BOWLIN: It gradually became Independence Community, I understand.
JORDAN: Yes, it was a community center. It was great - the ball
games and all those things, you know.

BOWLIN: I imagine your social life sort of centered around the
school at that time, didn't it?
JORDAN: Yes, it did. It improved our social life. The ball games
and things, you know, threw us together and we enjoyed it.

BOWLIN: Do you remember who the first principal was by any chance?
JORDAN: Yes, Mr. Carey Young.
BOWLIN: Carey Young.
JORDAN: Yes.
BOWLIN: Now, he was the first principal. I believe Mr. Ratcliff
was principal at some time, wasn't he?
JORDAN: He was, and Mr. Ernest Jones was our principal after Mr.
Young.

BOWLIN: Mr. Ernest Jones after Mr. Young?
JORDAN: Right, and Mr. Ratcliff was early, but I don't know just
what year Mr. Ratcliff was here, but those two were the two first ones.

BOWLIN: Do you know if any of the teachers, the original teachers,
of this school are still living?
JORDAN: Yes, let me see now. The first was a lady down here. She
Jordan was a Terry, Ruby Terry. But now, let me think. Mr. Young was our principal and a Porter was one of the assistants and I can't remember his name. Your husband ought to remember him.

BOWLIN: He might, because he went to school at Independence.

JORDAN: Yes, he did. I imagine he remembers.

BOWLIN: I just wondered if any of them were still in this part of the country.

JORDAN: Well, this lady that I remember down here that is still living, was a teacher here. I don't know how early in history of that church (school) that she was here. She lived with me and was Miss Ruby Terry. She was a young lady then, but I can't remember about what year it was. It had been here about two (2) or three (3) years. I can't remember.

BOWLIN: Do you know about what the qualifications were, the educational requirements were for teachers then?

JORDAN: A teacher's license, as far as I know, was all that was required then, because it was just starting out, you know.

BOWLIN: Yes, I see. They didn't have to have a college degree?

JORDAN: No, no special degree, no.

BOWLIN: Who were the trustees? Do you remember?

JORDAN: Well, Mr. Lane Ratcliff was one and let me see now, I believe Mr. Roscoe Cain was one. I know Mr. Lane was a good one, a good trustee.

BOWLIN: He was my husband's uncle, you know. He married my father-in-law's sister. He was Uncle Lane to us.