

Mr. Wilbur Cobbs: School and Work in South Carolina

As told by Dorchester County Youth Curators

St. George, South Carolina

Story Narrative:

Meet Mr. Wilbur Cobbs. At 92-years-old, he's one of the oldest citizens in the town of St. George, South Carolina. Ever since Mr. Cobbs was young, he has helped his family of sharecroppers on the farm.

Speaker 1 (00:04): Meet Mr. Wilbur. He's one of the oldest residents in St. George, South Carolina.

Wilbur Cobbs (00:11): My name is, Wilbur Cobbs. I'm 92.

Speaker 1 (00:18): Yes, Mr. Cobbs was born in 1924, which makes him 92 years old. In the beginning of the interview, we sat down and asked Mr. Cobbs what life was like when he was younger?

Wilbur Cobbs (00:30): Oh, pretty rough. Real rough. Well, we had the ...

Speaker 4 (00:40): We had a big family.

Wilbur Cobbs (00:46): There were eight in the family. We used to stay on the Old Westbury Place. We used to stay on his place, we were farmers.

Speaker 4 (00:47): We had to work [crosstalk 00:01:00].

Wilbur Cobbs (00:47): Had to work.

Speaker 4 (00:48): It was a sharecrop, or so. Working on ...

Wilbur Cobbs (00:49): Yeah.

Speaker 4 (01:04): ... the owner's property, and you had to do a lot of farming. Maybe that's what kept him from going to school, because he had to work in the afternoon, and he had all that stuff he had to harvest. Cotton, corn, tobacco, whatever. Whatever was popular back then. A lot of cotton was popular, because I did that too.

Speaker 5 (01:25): Yeah.

Speaker 1 (01:27): Ever since Mr. Cobbs was young, he has helped his family on the farm. Mr. Cobbs' family worked on a sharecropping farm. Sharecropping was a dominant type of farming during this time period in the cotton south. Families would rent plots of land and in return they gave a portion of their crops to the landowner. All members of the family had to work, including young children. Listen to Mr. Cobbs as he explains his childhood memory of farming.

Wilbur Cobbs (01:55): [inaudible 00:01:55] bean. [inaudible 00:01:56] bean might be that long, and then it had something like fur on it.

Speaker 4 (02:04): Oh yeah.

Wilbur Cobbs (02:05): Yeah. And you had to go and pick it. And you pick it, it would burn. It would get on the skin and it could burn you, the fur off that bean. And you would wash, and the more you wash it the more it burn.

Speaker 1 (02:22): As a sharecropper, Mr. Cobbs and his family only got to keep a certain percentage of their crops they harvested. Listen as he explains more on how sharecropping worked.

Wilbur Cobbs (02:41): Well sharecropper, we had our mules, you would get half of what we plant. You get half of the money like when you sell a car. And stuff like that, the corn, we would get half of that. We didn't have no mule ourself, we would get [inaudible 00:02:52]. [inaudible 00:02:57].

Speaker 1 (03:01): Mr. Cobbs went to school until third grade. After third grade, he would have to travel to the Williams School. This school was inside the town of St. George. Because of the great distance and his duties on the farm, he only attended school once every few months.

Wilbur Cobbs (03:17): Did the third grade at a ...

Speaker 4 (03:17): Williams School?

Wilbur Cobbs (03:19): At the Williams School.

Wilbur Cobbs (03:23): We couldn't go to school too much, mostly we had to do was work. Staying on there.

Speaker 1 (03:32): There were days where Mr. Cobbs would ride a mule to school, but he wasn't that lucky every day.

Wilbur Cobbs (03:39): Walk to school. Well, your little school shoes they had sometime they had a hole and you put a little piece of [inaudible 00:03:53], and go and walk to school [inaudible 00:03:57].

Speaker 1 (04:00): There were some days Mr. Cobbs wanted to go to school, he would get ready and put on his school clothes just to be soon let down. He would be told to take off his clothes and work on the farm instead.

Wilbur Cobbs (04:13): I'm trying to get ready to go to school, the Old Westbury stand on his [inaudible 00:04:22], be ready to go to school, then he would come and [inaudible 00:04:26], you can't go to school. I go, "I don't like bean picking." You had to take off your clothes, and go to [inaudible 00:04:37] picking beans. So we had it rough. I had it rough coming up [inaudible 00:04:42].

Speaker 1 (04:44): Even though times were hard, Mr. Cobbs feels he lived a good life.

Wilbur Cobbs (04:53): But, I think back over sometime of that life, that was the good old days, in a way.

Wilbur Cobbs (05:02): Rough coming up, but it make a good man. I'm 92 years old.

Speaker 5 (05:09): That's right.

Wilbur Cobbs (05:09): Ain't nobody 92 [inaudible 00:05:10], especially in St. George.

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