

Voice Record (Mrs. Isabel Barnwell) [Textual Transcription]

Florida Notes on Records 2–6 missing B A B.

RECORD (1) 3521

(Made August 14, 1939, Jacksonville, Florida. Robert Cook interviewing, Stetson Kennedy, operator, Miss Rose Shepherd, Intermediary.)

A1 (Cook) — “This record was made under direction of the Works Progress Administration, sponsored by the Federal Music Project, of Florida, in co-operation with the Federal Writers' Project, at the home of Mrs. Isabel Barnwell, 2116 Pearl Place, Jacksonville, Florida. Mrs. Barnwell was interviewed four years ago by Miss Rose Shepherd, a writer on the Federal Writers' Project. Miss Shepherd is here and will say a few words as to the circumstances of the interview”.

(Miss Shepherd) — “Mrs. Barnwell was born eighty-five years ago on Esperanza Plantation (New Hope Plantation), in Nassau County, Florida. Her memory is very keen and she remembers vividly many incidents that happened on the old plantation in the latter 1850's. Her father, Judge Henry O'Neill, was one of the earliest settlers of Nassau County, his family coming there in the early 1770's from South Carolina.”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “Newberry, South Carolina.”

(Cook) — “I want you, Mrs. Barnwell, to tell us just a few of your personal experiences. Mrs. Barnwell, how old are you?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “I am 85 years and 4 months old.”

(Cook) — “Where were you born?”

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(Mrs. Barnwell) — “I was born at Esperanza (New Hope) Plantation, which is near Fernandina, six miles this side, on the Fernandina highway, and one mile driving through our property.”

(Cook) — “Would you kindly tell me the exact date when you were born?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “I was born April 17, 1854. That was before the War between the States.”

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(Cook) — “That was before the Civil War?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “Yes.”

(Cook) — “How old were you then?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “I was about six.”

(Cook) — “Now, Mrs. Barnwell, will you kindly tell us about your experiences on the old plantation? Before the War between the States.”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “Well, I was six years old and a very precocious child. One Sunday in April, 1861, my brother, John B. O'Neill, was down to visit some cousins a few miles distant. He came back hurriedly stating there were fifteen gunboats in Fernandina Harbor. My father at once commenced to leave the plantation. We had two big flats, a wagon, and a buggy. The flats were filled with corn, peas, beans, and other food and a few possessions, and a few pieces of furniture. All the heavy furniture was left in the house.

“We left the plantation in four hours, at ten o'clock at night, my father and mother driving in the buggy to O'Neill Station that was established on our land in 1852.

(Cook) — “Was that the Fernandina and Cedar Keys Railroad?”

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(Mrs. Barnwell) — “Yes. — When we got to O'Neill Station there was a log car there. There were about fifteen ladies — visitors and relatives — in our home at the time.

“My sister, Florence, and my brother, John, had been in Schenectady, New York, at school, when war was declared, and they were helped to return home by a cousin of Abraham Lincoln, who had been my brothers' tutor a few years before.

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“When we got to the car, my mother said: “Well, ladies, sit around in a circle and put Belle (I) in the middle so that she won't roll off during the night.”

“We got to Lake City the next morning and we stayed in Lake City for four or five days with Dr. Bacon and his family. Then my father went out twenty miles from Lake City to visit his sister, and she took us in for five months, after which my father bought a thousand acres of land with a two story house in Hamilton County, near White Springs, and there we lived for four years in comparative peace.”

(Cook) — “That is very nice, Mrs. Barnwell, I appreciate that. For the benefit of our listeners, I believe I will read this manuscript in which Mrs. Barnwell describes a negro song that originated on the plantation.”

(Cook) — “We interrupted the record for a moment, and we are going to proceed by having Mrs. Barnwell, eighty-five years and four months old to sing this song, which is entitled “ Jump, Isabel, Slide Water. ” Will you kindly sing this song for us, Mrs. Barnwell?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “I'll try — the best I can.”

(Mrs. Barnwell sings):

JUMP, ISABEL, SLIDE WATER

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Jump, Isabel, slide water, Ho, my aunty, ho, Jump, Isabel, slide water, Ho, my aunty, ho.

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“Where's you gwine?” I says to her Ho, my aunty, ho, She answers back, “I's gwine to church”, Ho, my aunty, ho.

Well, I wash my shirts, I neber rench 'um, Ho, my aunty, ho, I wash my shirts, I neber rench 'um, Ho, my aunty, ho.

We jump in de boat, an' away we go, Ho, my aunty, ho, Jump, Isabel, slide water, Ho, my aunty, ho. Jump, Isabel, slide water, Ho, my aunty, ho, Jump high and get dere quick, Ho, my aunty, Ho.

A-2 JUMP, ISABEL, SLIDE WATER.

(Rowboat Song)

The six-car rowboat — Isabel — named for Mrs. Isabel (O'Neill) Barnwell, youngest of the four daughters of Judge Henry O'Neill, of Esperanza (Sp. New Hope) Plantation, a Spanish Grant dating back to 1792, known as the Margaret O'Neill Grant, to a large section of Amelia Island, Nassau County, Florida, was ordered from Lord & Taylor, of New York City, and delivered to Judge O'Neill at Fernandina early in 1860. The boat was a handsome structure of hard wood, with black mahogany nameplate on the bow 5 bearing the name Isabel in blue and gold lettering. The boat was quite commodious with long seats, fancy awnings and comfortable cushions. It was operated by three trusted negro slaves, and carried Judge O'Neill and his family back and forth to Fernandina, and on trips through Nassau Sound, and on visits and picnics and other jaunts up and down the Amelia River, Nassau Sound, and adjacent waters. The song is original, was composed by the slaves themselves, and should be sung in slow rhythm, as if with the dipping and raising of the oars.

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The family of Judge O'Neill refuged to White Springs during the War between the States. The plantation was occupied by Federal troops for several years. The grand piano, and the entire furnishings of the handsome home were confiscated and removed, together with the handsome rowboat, Isabel, and no trace of anything was ever found, when the family returned at the close of the War.

(Cook) — “This record is being made at the home of Mrs. Isabel Barnwell, 2116 Pearl Place, Jacksonville, Florida, Stetson Kennedy is at the controls, and Mr. Cook is doing the interviewing.”

(Cook) — “Thank you, very much, Mrs. Barnwell. We have enjoyed hearing from you in this way. How many songs which are original, or have you a record of as having originated on your place? How many songs, would you say?”

(Mrs. Barnwell — “I have the headings and some of the words of about fifteen other songs.”

(Cook) — “I have one here — ‘Marse Tommy's Son’ — Is that a 6 rowboat song? Can you sing it for us Mrs. Barnwell?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “I can try.”

(Cook) — “Well, that's fine.”

B-2 Marse Tommy's Son. (Mrs. Barnwell sings).

MARSE TOMMY'S SON

(Rowboat Song)

I knock uh man from eastern sho' Ho, ho, Tomma Long. I heard him fall in Baltimo' Tomma Long, Tommy.

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Chorus

Ho, ho, ho, ho, Tomma Long, I wish I was Marse' Tommy's son, Tomma Long, Tommy,
Well, when he fall, he cum down, bam! Ho, ho Tomma Long. I wish I was Marse' Tommy's
son, Tomma Long, Tommy

Mosquito eata bellyful buckwheat dough, Ho, ho Tomma Long, Then turn right 'roun' and
beg for mo' Tomma Long, Tommy.

B-3 (Cook) — “Now, Mrs. Barnwell, I understand you have a song ‘We Hab a Jest Gawd’
— that is a negro spiritual Song?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “Yes sir.”

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(Cook) — “And while you are not sure it originated on the plantation, it did originate at
about what date, before the War between the States?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “I was only about six, you know, and I could not say exactly.”

(Cook) — “You have a pretty good idea how the song goes? Would you mind singing it for
our audience?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “Surely.”

“ **WE HAB A JEST GAWD.** ”

We hab a jest Gawd ter plead our cause — Plead our cause. We hab a jest Gawd ter
plead our cause Fur we are de chillun ob Gawd.

Cum erlong. I tell yuh, doncha be afeared, — Doncha be afeared. Cum erlong, my people,
doncha be ashamed, Fur we are de chillun ob Gawd.

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Oh, we hab a jest Gawd, ter plead our cause, — Plead our cause We hab a jest Gawd to plead our cause, Fur we are de chillun ob Gawd.

(Cook) — “Mrs. Barnwell, you have an old Black Mammy lullaby that your old nurse used to sing to you? How old were you when you heard this song?”

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(Mrs. Barnwell) — “About six.”

(Cook) — “Do you know how the tune goes?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “Yes.”

(Cook) — “Well, let's try singing it.”

“ **Old Black Mammy's Lullaby** ”

(Mrs. Barnwell's old negro nurse sang this song to her as a lullaby when she was a small child).

Sweet Summer is come, Cold Winter is gone, The little birds sing on eb'ry green tree,
Kokay! Kokay! With a free good will, Ah do declar' Ah luve yuh still.

When I hab money, I gibe you mah pa'at, So when I hab none, I gibe you mah heart.
Kokay! Kokay! With a free good will, Ah do declar' Ah lube yuh still.

B-5 (Mrs. Barnwell) — “I think I should be paid something 9 for my contribution by the United States government. I have given four months of my time to Uncle Sam, and all I have received is from this lady here who has given me copies of my interviews after she has written them.”

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“My father was a judge from 1832 to 1861. He was judge first in the Territory of Florida, with headquarters St. Mary's, when Florida was a Spanish possession and included part of Georgia. He did all sorts of good things for the people of Jacksonville and Nassau County. Fernandina was then a plantation owned by Don Domingo Fernandez. His brother married my father's sister. They had four children and moved to Texas. My aunt died and the children were sent to my father, and yearly Mr. Fernandez sent money to my father to care for these children. It was these children my father took with his family when we went to middle Florida in Hamilton County near White Springs, a large plantation. My father named it Rebel Refuge.”

“I have one of his old books, a journal in which he wrote every day”

(Cook) — “Would you call it a diary?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “Yes, I have three of these diaries. We took eighty-five slaves to Hamilton County. Only six of our Negroes ran away and joined the Federals.”

(Cook) — “How many did you have originally?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “We had ninety-one. The Rebels were encamped at Evergreen. My father went with a flag of truce to try to recover the slaves. He went and reported to Colonel Frederick, Commander at Evergreen, who sent out fifteen men with my four brothers to New Hope Plantation. When they got to the gate a Federal soldier was standing in the door. He was shot and killed. They went upstairs 10 and captured fifteen other men who were sitting around on the beds playing euchre.”

(Cook) — “I notice a painting on the wall there behind you. Would you mind telling us who that is?”

(Mrs. Barnwell) — “That is my husband. He was four years in the Confederate War. He had fifteen men under him and reported news. My husband died twenty years ago.”

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(Cook) — “Thank you, Mrs. Barnwell, this has been most interesting, and I do not know if you know it, but we have made a record of this entire story. Thank you, very much.”