

T H E R E V . J A M E S H . B L A C K

Interviewed by Dr. Louis Silveri

June 13, 1977

S O U T H E R N H I G H L A N D S R E S E A R C H C E N T E R

University of North Carolina at Asheville

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The Reverend James H. Black, interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri,  
June 13, 1977. Tapes I and II.

Dr. Louis D. Silveri: Have you always lived in the Asheville area?

The Rev. James H. Black: I came here from Yancey County.

Silveri: Where were you born?

Black: Windom, North Carolina; three miles east of Burnsville.

Silveri: What were your parents' names?

Black: William A. Black and Louise Boone Black.

Silveri: Who were your grandparents?

Black: I only knew my grandmother on my father's side. My grandfather was killed in the war before my father was born. Her name was Maggie. On my mother's side, my grandfather's name was Marion Boone and my grandmother was Louise Thomas Boone.

Silveri: How many children in each family?

Black: There were only two in my daddy's family, and ten in my mother's family. My mother's father was married two times. There were five children in each family.

Silveri: Oh, so about ten, which was a fairly typical mountain family, with that many children. How many children in your family?

Black: Seven.

Silveri: Seven; and which were you, the first or the last?

Black: Second.

Silveri: When were you born?

Black: I was born on May 16, 1893, at Windom.

Silveri: What kind of work was your father engaged in when you were born?

Black: He was a painter.

Silveri: Painter. Was that a full-time occupation, or did he also have a farm?

Black: Well, it was a full-time occupation.

Silveri: Yancey County is pretty rural, a rural county, I imagine a lot of people still raised a lot of . . .

Black: Of course, we lived on the farm, and farmed ourselves, but he always worked at his trade.

Silveri: Well, who did the farming?

Black: Us children.

Silveri: Oh, I see. How big was the farm?

Black: I wouldn't even know, but there were hundreds of acres, I guess.

Silveri: Is that still intact today?

Black: Well, it's been sold and re-sold and all divided up.

Silveri: What do you remember about those early years, friends at school? What school did you attend?

Black: My first was a little old log school building, I guess about twenty-five or thirty feet square.

Silveri: One teacher?

Black: One teacher school; yes.

Silveri: How many years did you go there?

Black: Well, several years, I guess. I went until I completed the seventh grade; that's as high as they taught at that time.

Silveri: How far was the school from your home?

Black: A couple of miles, I guess.

Silveri: Did you walk that?

Black: Walked it.

Silveri: That was considered normal to walk to school and walk back. How long was the school term?

Black: Three months.

Silveri: Three months; starting in August or July, when the crop was laid by?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: Just three months. Did you like school when you were a kid?

Black: Always liked it right good.

Silveri: After a while that school was filled with Black children, right?

Black: No, it wasn't. There wasn't many blacks lived in the community.

Silveri: Well, I meant children of your family.

Black: Oh; oh.

Silveri: Several. Were they fairly close together so they made several in that school at one time?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: Can you remember the name of the first teacher you had?

Black: Well, there were three right along together. I don't know if I know which was first. There was a Silvers and two Hyatt brothers taught along in the same school right together, but I can't remember which was first, right off.

Silveri: This was a public school, right?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: Did your father or your mother have a chance to get much education; formal education?

Black: No, they didn't.

Silveri: When was the first time you, as a child, got a chance to come to Asheville, in the city? Was that an unusual trip?

Black: Well, I didn't get to come when I was a child. I was grown the first time I ever came to Asheville. I can't remember the date, but. . .

Silveri: About how old were you?

Black: Well, I was even grown and married before I came to Asheville.

Silveri: We were talking about the largest city, Burnsville, which is only about. . . what. . . twenty-five miles away?

Black: Thirty-seven miles from Asheville.

Silveri: Thirty-seven miles away.

Black: Of course, the way we had to come then was a roundabout way. We came in on the train by way of the little Black Mountain railroad that was run down to Coney. That's a station on the main Clinchfield Railroad. Then from there to Marion, and changed to

Black: (Cont'd.) the Southern and came into Biltmore; then had to come on into Asheville on a surrey drawn by horses.

Silveri: So there was no direct line from Asheville to Burnsville, then?

Black: Yes; there was.

Silveri: There was a direct line?

Black: We went back on the way of automobile, but it was rough doings.

Silveri: No railroad lines between . . .

Black: No; not railroad.

Silveri: So you conducted most of your business in Burnsville. Burnsville is the county seat in Yancey County; although it was a small town, you could probably get everything you needed, right?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: And on the farm you raised most of your food. Did you have any farm animals on the farm; raise any hogs?

Black: We didn't raise any hogs for sale. Of course, we always had some for our own use; and cattle.

Silveri: A good part of the farm must have been hilly, a lot of mountains, right?

Black: It was, yes; it was rough.

Silveri: As a kid, you used to go all over those mountains, I bet you, through those woods?

Black: Sure did.

Silveri: Had good times. Did you ever encounter any rattlesnakes or copperheads?

Black: Sure did.

Silveri: How did you handle those?

Black: Well, naturally, we killed all we could.

Silveri: Did you ever get bitten?

Black: No.

Silveri: Did you ever know anyone who got bitten?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: What happened? Did they die?

Black: No.

Silveri: Quite unusual to die from a snake bite?

Black: I believe I read a long time ago that only fifteen percent of all who were bitten died.

Silveri: What kind of house did you live in; large? How many rooms in it?

Black: All kinds. First and last, of course, small ones, then better ones, and then a little better.

Silveri: Was the house added to all the time? They'd add more rooms to the house? Who built that house; was it your grandparents? . . . The house you were born in?

Black: No, to tell you the truth, I don't know now.

Silveri: What about the church? What role did the church play in family life as you were growing up?

Black: Well, at first the old school building was the only public building there was in the community, and all that went on,



Black: (Cont'd.) whether school, or church, or Sunday School, or whatever, was held in that one building. But later there were three churches in the community. The first one was a Methodist, and the community built it. The understanding was that anybody could preach in it that preached the truth, and of course, at that time, they wouldn't have known too much what truth was. Got it nearly completed, and the Freewill Baptists began to come in pretty strong and were gaining ground fast, and they locked the door and wouldn't let anybody but Methodists preach in it any more.

Then Freewill Baptists and Missionary Baptists went in together and built one and continued for a good while. Of course, naturally didn't get along too well and had to divide. Then Missionary bought the Freewills out; they built them one, and so there's been three ever since.

Silveri: Those three are still there?

Black: Still there.

Silveri: Are they right in Burnsville, or near by?

Black: No; they are at Windom.

Silveri: Which church did your family go to?

Black: Well, we went to all of them, really; but my mother was originally a Missionary. When we moved into this community she joined the Freewills and died a member of the Freewill Church. But after. . . well, my father was a Presbyterian; he belonged to the Presbyterian church at Burnsville. There wasn't a Presbyterian church closer than Burnsville, so he belonged up there.

Silveri: How far was Burnsville from your home?

Black: Three miles.

Silveri: So there was a Presbyterian church in Burnsville. How did the other churches look upon the Presbyterians?

Black: Well, they didn't favor them too well. In fact, at that time there was a contest going on for membership between all churches. Of course, naturally everyone claimed he was right and the other was wrong. I was saved when I was six years old, but I wouldn't acknowledge it until years later. I was confronted then with what church to join, and I refused to join anything when I finally got my feet on the ground. If I had joined that day I would have joined the Freewill, because I had been more influenced that way, while my parents never would tell us either way; left it up to us to make our own decisions. But I knew everything was right, and I refused to join anything until I could decide what I did believe and what I could go out and uphold. So I finally decided in favor of the Missionary.

Silveri: That's the church that your mother went to?

Black: No; she went to the Freewill, really. Of course, I had to decide even against hers, as close as we were; and we were very close.

Silveri: At what age did you join the Missionary church? Six years old?

Black: Twenty-one, I think.

Silveri: Twenty-one; up until that time you just . . .

Black: I wasn't quite twenty-one, I guess; but somewhere in that neighborhood.

Silveri: What did you do when you finished school? What was the name of the school you attended, that school you mentioned?

Black: Windom.

Silveri: Windom School? What did you do when you finished there?

Black: Well, I worked on the farm, naturally; I stayed at home until I was married; helped take care of the younger children.

Silveri: At what age were you married?

Black: Twenty-one.

Silveri: Twenty-one, and you married someone from the local community?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: Been married ever since?

Black: Well, this is my second wife; my first wife had been dead, I guess, about. . .close to nine years.

Silveri: You were married at twenty-one. Where did you live? Did you live at home, then, after you were married?

Black: No; we moved up near Burnsville.

Silveri: Get yourself a farm?

Black: We rented to begin with.

Silveri: What kind of cash crop did you have?

Black: We didn't; at that time we didn't raise anything to sell much, about what we used ourselves.

Silveri: Where did you find the money to pay taxes?

Black: Well, just picked it up here and there.

Silveri: Hire yourself out for work, and things like that?

Black: Yes; worked after I was married. I worked for a dollar and a dollar and a dime a day, and, during the Depression paid as high as two dollars and seventy-five cents for a twenty-five pound bag of flour; thirty-five cents for sugar; and about that same price for fat-back, when you had to buy it.

Silveri: What about politics? Were your family Republicans or Democrats?

Black: Democrats.

Silveri: Democrats? In a county that was Republican, wasn't it?

Black: No; as far back as I can remember it's always been more Democratic. And so far as I know, as far back as I know anything about, all of the family was.

Silveri: Any of them run for public office, or hold public office?

Black: No.

Silveri: Did you ever do any moonshining?

Black: No, sir; never got into nothing like that, proud to say.

Silveri: At age twenty-one you joined the Missionary church in Windom? And you kept going to that church until you publicly confessed your calling?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: At what age was that?

Black: I guess, twenty-four.

Silveri: Twenty-four years of age?

Black: No; it would have been the same, 1924, I guess.

Silveri: Or 1929?

Black: That was when I was ordained.

Silveri: You were ordained. . . you announced in '24, then. What did you do? You announced this to the pastor and the deacons of the church?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: What was their response?

Black: Well, really, they didn't accept it too freely, because at that time, when I first joined the church, immediately I was ordained as a deacon and then elected as superintendent of the Sunday School. About everything that came up, especially if it was touchy, they'd push me out in front. They said they just couldn't give me up; that they needed me too bad.

Silveri: What did it mean, that you would have to leave the church?

Black: No; I'd take the lead, especially with any touchy question. Might tell you this: At that time, of course, there wasn't any money. Everything that was to be done to a church, build it, or repair it, or whatever, it had to be an ice cream supper, box supper, or cake walk. From the time I joined the church I knew it was wrong and told all of them, even a man that was old enough for my. . . not my father, but my grandfather. Even one of my old school teachers was a member of the church. But they persuaded me to go along and not raise any disturbance. They thought, to choose between lesser evils was the better thing to do. But it went on,

Black: (Cont'd.) until finally they had a cake walk right in front of the pulpit, and I said, "That's the last straw!"

Silveri: What's a cake walk?

Black: Well, it's just walking around in a circle, with a mark that whoever stops on that mark is the winner. You pay so much, you know. I promised myself and the Lord that night that would be my last, "And if it ever comes up again, I will lift my voice agin it regardless of what it does."

Well, it wasn't too long until it popped up again, and so I did. I told them I was in favor of doing the work that did need to be done, and I had a dollar to match anybody's dollar that would go into doing the work, that if I didn't have it, I'd get it, but so far as participating in that manner again, I never would do it. They took a vote on it and it was voted down, and it's never been mentioned since.

Silveri: You felt that the congregation should freely give over their labor and also their money for things that had to be fixed in the church?

Black: Well, sure; I had just as soon gambled any other way, as far as I'm concerned.

Silveri: What's the difference between the Freewill and the Missionary Baptists back in those days?

Black: Well, at that time, they didn't believe in missions of any kind; education. If a fellow had a little education he was just out of it.

Silveri: Both of them felt that way, right?

Black: No; Baptists didn't, and never have. Freewills, of course, they are Baptists of a kind.

Silveri: The Freewills were like that.

Black: That's part of the difference in Freewills and Missionaries. Of course, at that time they didn't believe in any mission work of any kind. Of course, they wash feet even until today, as a church ordinance.

Silveri: In other words, the Freewill Baptists felt that all you needed to preach was the call; you didn't need any formal education to preach. . .

Black: Just get up and open your mouth, and the Lord will fill it!

Silveri: Right; and the same with the congregation in order to be saved, they didn't need any formal education. You just had to know what the Bible said; understand the Bible was all that was necessary.

Black: They believed in being saved over and over.

Silveri: Would you say, then, the Missionary Baptists were more progressive?

Black: Sure.

Silveri: Was that reflected in the leadership of the churches' pastors?

Black: Sure, they'd preach against all of it. If anybody preached on giving money, they'd accuse them of trying to buy their way to Heaven, and, of course, it was reflected in some of the Missionary Churches, too, back even when I started preaching.

Silveri: Let's go back to that point: you weren't ordained until 1929; five-year period there. You would have liked to have been ordained before then, right?

Black: No; I really wouldn't have, because if I had, I could have, but really, the right procedure back at that time was that when somebody declared that they were called to preach, they'd license them, not ordain them. Which gave them the freedom to preach, but they couldn't baptize unless the church authorized them to; they couldn't marry anybody until they were ordained.

Silveri: Did you have any additional study before you became ordained?

Black: Well, just self-preparation, mostly. I really can't remember the time when I wasn't inclined this way, but, really, back then I didn't understand what the call was. But I bought books all along and studied, even before I let anyone know that I felt the call.

Silveri: Actually, you were thirty-five years old when you were ordained a Baptist minister, but before that time, for about ten years before that time, you were active in the church in Yancey County; you worked for the Yancey County Baptist Association.

Black: Well, what that was, in going back to some of my first public experience: there wasn't a church in the county that had a year 'round Sunday School. When winter time came, they just closed the door and, well, they had preaching once a month, if the preacher could get there. But a lot of times they couldn't, because they had



Black: (Cont'd.) to ford the streams, and sometimes they'd be flooded. They just couldn't ford and get across them, and it would be two months at a time that you wouldn't see a preacher! I traveled the roads all over Yancey County for five years; that's what that. . .

Silveri: The Association?

Black: . . . being connected with the Association means.

Silveri: Oh, so you taught Sunday School; you traveled around teaching Sunday School. . .

Black: Well, that was in the summer time, to try to stimulate or stir up people and get them to have a year 'round Sunday School. In my own church, when I was elected Sunday School Superintendent, I'd go Sunday after Sunday in the winter time and not a single person would ever come. In my first church that I was called to, talking about money, they wouldn't even take an offering for anything; they thought it was actually sinful.

Silveri: The Presbyterians had a mission in Burnsville, didn't they, in those years?

Black: Well, they had a little school in Burnsville.

Silveri: Had school? Then they had a church?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: Did you have any associations or relations with the Presbyterians?

Black: No; never.

Silveri: I imagine that the Baptists looked upon them as even Romanish, right? They were highly structured for the Baptists, and

Silveri: (Cont'd.) they had too much doctrine and dogma; they looked at them as real outsiders. Yet, the Presbyterians did grow, the church did grow back then, didn't it?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: Were there any other churches besides Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians?

Black: Not back then; later, years later, the Church of God got a hold, and they're one church still over there, as far as I know.

Silveri: When was the first time you preached in a church?

Black: I can't remember the date.

Silveri: Was that before, or after, you were ordained? You preached in churches before you were ordained. Were you licensed to preach?

Black: No, no; I never was licensed.

Silveri: Then, how come?

Black: You didn't have to be, but I had been, what they thought, tried out sufficiently without it, because I had proven myself, or at least they thought so.

Silveri: You gave your first preaching in your home church?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: The Windom Baptist Church; that was before you were ordained, some time before you were ordained, which was at the age of thirty-five, and the pastor just told you one Sunday morning to come up and preach? Did he tell you beforehand?

Black: Well, naturally, back. . .it wasn't they'd let you know. Of course, the first time I was ever called on to lead a prayer in public

Black: (Cont'd.) was sudden, right out of the blue sky! But they were considerate enough about preaching or making any kind of public talk to let it be known before. But I have been called on even later, suddenly.

Silveri: How much advance notice did you have for this first time?

Black: I don't remember; it wasn't long, of course.

Silveri: Do you remember spending a lot of hours preparing for it?

Black: Naturally.

Silveri: You preached from the Sixteenth Chapter of Matthew?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: ". . . Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. . ." Why did you pick that?

Black: Well, I just felt like that was the thing I ought to do, about all I could say.

Silveri: How many people in the congregation when you first preached? Do you remember, approximately, fifteen, twenty, fifty?

Black: There were possibly seventy-five.

Silveri: How long did you talk?

Black: Naturally, not too long; I couldn't even guess.

Silveri: Well, did you preach regularly after that? On a regular basis?

Black: Mostly, yes.

Silveri: After you were ordained then, at age thirty-five, which would put it ordained in 1929, you were born in 1893, did you get a church?

Black: Soon after; yes.

Silveri: What was it? Which church was it? Where was it?

Black: It was Pleasant Grove Baptist Church.

Silveri: In where?

Black: That's back; it would be the back side of Yancey County from here.

Silveri: Up near Mitchell County?

Black: Over near. . . no, it wasn't. . . over near the Mitchell line. . . wasn't too far from the Mitchell line, near Green Mountain, if you know where that's at.

Silveri: Yes; Pleasant Grove Baptist Church?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: You were called there by the congregation? You didn't move, did you?

Black: No; we had to furnish our own living quarters, and had to stay stationary regardless of where we preached.

Silveri: And what was the arrangement made for that call from the congregation? Were you given a salary?

Black: No; they didn't at that time; they didn't believe in paying a preacher.

Silveri: That was the Missionary Baptists?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: You had to work yourself, and earn your own living like any one else in the congregation?

Black: And I guess it's in that record there; I don't know. Back at that time it was twelve miles from where I lived to the church. I walked it rain or shine, sleet or snow, or whatever.

Silveri: You walked to church?

Black: I walked that twelve miles one time, and somebody gave me fifty cents!

Silveri: Why didn't you take a horse, or a mule, or a wagon?

Black: Right at that time, I don't believe I owned one. Of course, most of the old preachers did ride horseback where they had to go such distances.

Silveri: How long were you at that church?

Black: Well, first I stayed three years and quit for three years. Then the preacher that followed me stayed three years. At that time the custom was to have just one revival a year, and I did the preaching in two of those. They they called me right back, and I stayed fourteen years, and I built the first Sunday School rooms there that were ever built in the county, except the town churches.

Silveri: So when you went to Pleasant Grove Baptist Church it was just a simple structure?

Black: That's all; just one. . . well, all of the churches. . . there wasn't a single one had Sunday School rooms, just one-room buildings.

Silveri: So you decided it was necessary to add on to it so you built a Sunday School. What did the deacons of the church think about that?

Black: Well, they fought it, most of them, 'cause I had enough support to get it finally done. . . when one of the deacons, who had been a church boss ever since I had known anything about it.

I had to build them in the basement, because I didn't have room on top of the ground, and it was up on a kind of a flat, ridge-like place. They had to bulldoze one side down low enough until you could go under, and then go under and dig all that dirt out and build them underneath it, which was a big job, especially at that time. This particular deacon wished we had to carry that dirt back under there in a spoon. . . the way they felt about it then. . . claimed it was just fixing a place for young people to court! That was their conception.

Silveri: They were the first Sunday School rooms in Yancey County outside of Burnsville?

Black: That's the first ones; sure.

Silveri: Well, when you had those completed, then you held Sunday School regularly every Sunday?

Black: Sure did; and ever since I got it started to having them the year around, it's been continuous ever since in all of the churches. And I taught the first Bible School that was ever taught in any church in the county.

Silveri: Bible School is different from Sunday School?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: In what way?

Black: Daily Vacation Bible Schools, as we know it today. To be made fun of, criticized, and to be accused of making a playhouse out of the church. I had to cut down to two churches at that time. At first, we'd always had four churches.

Silveri: Well, you continued to stay at those various churches in Yancey County. When did you leave Yancey County?

Black: Forty-nine.

Silveri: Nineteen-forty-nine; you left and moved out. You came to Buncombe County?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: Why did you do that?

Black: Well, I guess there were possibly different reasons. I had spent my life there. Of course, I made the greatest sacrifice in coming to Buncombe I ever made in my life at any time.

Silveri: Did you want to come?

Black: No; there wasn't a thing in the world inviting about it. I didn't like anything connected with the situation, but I was so impressed that I felt like that was the only thing I could do.

Silveri: Was this when you went down to Swannanoa?

Black: To Buckeye; yes.

Silveri: Did you remain there until you retired?

Black: No; I stayed there eight years, and they'd had. . .they'd had four preachers in two years. I stayed with it eight years and got a building built. Then I went out in Cane Creek section and started from scratch out there.

Silveri: Cane Creek in Yancey County?

Black: No; that's in Buncombe.

Silveri: How long did you stay there?

Black: Five years.

Silveri: Was that your last church?

Black: That's the last one; yes.

Silveri: Well, most of your preaching, of course, was in rural churches?

Black: All of it.

Silveri: All of it?

Black: Seems like it fell my lot, and I only pastored two churches that never had any experience with training union and WMU, missionary work, Women's Missionary work. A lot of them would never give a dollar to any kind of missions, hospital, orphanage, or anything. I was able to get all of them organized before I left.

Silveri: What you're saying is that there was not a very strong spirit of community cooperation among the congregation?

Black: Well, community wise, that's about all they did, but outside work, of course, naturally training union and WMU work was loathed, but. . . well, I will just give you an example of how the old preachers felt. About all they did was just preach, and never supported anything other than just their preaching effort. While I was traveling the county and trying to get the Sunday School work revived, I went to one church after it got warm. Well, they'd had time to reorganize if they were going to, but they hadn't. Naturally, that was preaching day, and



Black: (Cont'd.) dear old brother preacher knew why I was there. I went at regular Sunday School time, but there wasn't a single person on the place. Some time, maybe ten-thirty, or fifteen 'til eleven, or whatever, they came swarming out of the hollows like a bee swarm. They sang a couple of songs, naturally; it was seven minutes 'til eleven o'clock when the preacher took the pulpit and told them why I was there and said he'd give me until eleven o'clock. But when eleven o'clock came, he believed in preaching, and to tell the truth, he didn't believe in these new-fangled ideas anyway. . . how he felt even about Sunday School. Of course, he took up part of that seven minutes and, of course, I made a rousing speech in five minutes. But even at that, when he dismissed several people gathered around me and asked if I'd come back that evening and help them organize themselves into a Sunday School. Of course, I agreed I would, and I went with him and had dinner, and he wouldn't even go back with me to assist in organizing the Sunday School. That's the way that even some of the old preachers felt.

You can imagine what a task you had when you had to face a situation like that. And it wasn't in just one church; it was in most of them. All they'd ever done was just have once-a-month preaching, if that much, and that was it. . . and one revival a year!

Silveri: They didn't even meet every Sunday?

Black: No; it wasn't expected!

Silveri: Well, let me ask you: What. . . how important was religion in the lives of the people, say, in Yancey County? Among the people you were born and grew up with?

Black: It was very important, the kind it was. Well, they'd fight over it, really. But as far as I was concerned, it was more religion than Christianity. When you tried to develop them and lead them out of that, you just had a fight on your hands, that's all.

Silveri: Tell me the difference between what you mentioned: religion and Christianity.

Black: Well, everybody's religious in some way, but Christianity is something altogether different, because it has to do with salvation that can only be had by accepting Christ and following Him.

Silveri: So, what about church attendance? When you talk about how religious the people were, are we talking about those who attended church?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: You felt that anyone who didn't attend church was not a very religious person?

Black: Well, they were religious in some ways, but lacked. . .

[End of Tape I]

[Tape II, Side I]

Black: . . . Biblical sense of what Christianity is all about.

Silveri: Would you say most everybody had a Bible in their houses?

Black: Yes, yes; everybody, and they'd tell you with all the conviction that they were able to muster that they believed every

Black: (Cont'd.) word of it from cover to cover. But there are people living over there as old or older than I am that would tell you. . . they've told me personally. . . "I never knew that was in the Bible until you preached it!" That's how much they knew about it.

Silveri: How do you explain, or how do you account for, the fact that you, who grew up among those people, had those views, developed different views. . . what might be called progressive views? You believed in education more than they did. Why?

Black: Well, it's just always been a part of me; that's about all I know to say.

Silveri: Was that encouraged by your parents, too?

Black: Well, naturally.

Silveri: And sustained by brothers and sisters? Brothers and sisters felt that way, too?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: It would seem to me, with your progressive views, that you might have found yourself (your way) into another church rather than the Baptists. Let's say, the Presbyterians, who put a great deal of emphasis on education; more, I'm sure, than the Baptists. Were you attracted to the Presbyterians at all?

Black: No; never did have a feeling.

Silveri: What was your attitude toward people of various churches? Did you feel that salvation was a personal thing; that it didn't matter which church you belonged to?

Black: I never did, and I don't yet. I feel like Baptist doctrines

Black: (Cont'd.) are more correct with Bible teaching than any other. Like I said many times, if I didn't feel that way, I'd be something else. And I still say, if anyone could convince me otherwise then I still would be willing to change, because I've always wanted to do the right thing, and was taught that from my earliest recollections right on down. I've always wanted to be on the winning side of anything that I undertook, not the losing side. I've always respected other people, and still do. I've never had a cross. . . an argument with any other preacher in my life; I just refused to do it.

Silveri: You mentioned about what you feel the role of the church should be in education. What about the role of the church in the community as a whole? Should the pastor or the preacher. . . and I'm talking about those days in the early part of the century when you were in Yancey County. . . do you feel the preacher and the congregation should carry their Christian values into the community, and be very concerned about how the community is run by its leaders, and concerned about social welfare problems?

Black: Sure; absolutely.

Silveri: Did you preach that way, too?

Black: Absolutely.

Silveri: You were talking about the role of the church in the community.

Black: There's no such thing as divorcing Christianity from people. I've always put it. . . people talk about serving the Lord. Well, He tells plainly that if He was hungry He wouldn't tell us, because

Black: (Cont'd.) He owns it all to begin with. You serve people in the name of the Lord, so far as I'm concerned, and anything short of that is just short of being the right kind of a Christian that the Bible teaches us to be.

Silveri: So many of the people who are what they call "other worldliness." They thought only of the question of salvation; what life was after death, and not about life. . .

Black: Now.

Silveri: Now.

Black: And the preachers back then, they would emphasize in your daily prayer life, or reading of the Bible, and attending church, on their regular preaching time, but that was the extent of it. Not getting out here and administering to human need.

Silveri: Well, they might go and visit the sick?

Black: Yes, they'd do that, and attend every funeral they could get to.

Silveri: You've been to many funerals?

Black: Sure have!

Silveri: You preached? It was common in the mountains for a funeral to be held quite a long time after the death and burial, right?

Black: Well, back before my time they had a custom of waiting one year to have the memorial service. I don't know what they did at the time of the burial, whether they just took them out and buried them or how. I can remember. . . just as long ago as I can

Black: (Cont'd.) remember, going to memorial service a year later!

Silveri: Any special way, special burying places for the people? Were they usually up on the hill? Why is it that they put their little cemeteries there?

Black: Well, that was just the custom they had. They just. . . they were buried all over the whole place on about the highest places they could get. Just where it originated, I don't know.

Silveri: Baptisms; you've done many a baptism?

Black: Sure have.

Silveri: Total immersion baptisms?

Black: And I've baptized in the river with snow on the ground!

Silveri: Did you usually have a whole group of people together to baptize at one time?

Black: Well, most of the time; some time maybe just two or three. Two is the fewest I ever baptized at one time, that I can remember.

Silveri: Were there usually celebrations afterwards; some kind of celebration afterwards?

Black: No; generally we'd go back to church for a service of some kind.

Silveri: All of the baptisms took place in the river? Which rivers? There are many rivers going through Yancey County. Cane River?

Black: Cane River and South Toe; of course: creeks. Have to pond up a creek or a branch or whatever, if you're too far from the river.

Silveri: What about . . . one of my last questions: What about the mountain people? You're one of them, yourself. There's been a lot of talk about the people living in the Appalachian Mountains. Can you characterize them for me? The people, your people, that you've grown up with in Yancey County. What are their good points and what are their bad points, as you see them?

Black: Well, like I said a while ago, the most of them are just naturally religious. Of course, they even claim that their type, or way of thinking, is the best; even better than any kind of a progressive type of religion; their Christianity. They're just naturally a good-hearted kind of people: hard-working and saving. Of course, I'd say, selfish with it. Well, one of the old terms that charity begins at home, and I always tell people just the opposite: that selfishness begins at home.

Silveri: Did you ever preach against moonshining?

Black: Sure did.

Silveri: Did you ever take part in any campaigns to advocate it?

Black: No; no, I didn't go out and stop any fights against it, but I always preached against it. I preached one time on temperance . . . and this same fellow that I mentioned a while ago about being a church boss. . . I told them that temperance had no reference to drinking liquor, that when it came to drinking liquor, it was total abstinence; temperance only has to do with allowable things, not to go to an excess. . . and he told people that I was preaching in favor of liquor.

Silveri: I think it was while you were there that the Presbyterians carried on quite a campaign to get rid of moonshining in Yancey County. Do you remember that?

Black: Well, when it came to registering your protest, that included all of them; all denominations. . . when it came to a vote.

Silveri: You mean a vote for sheriff, for instance?

Black: Yes; they'd vote against anybody that they felt was in favor of such.

Silveri: Were the mountain people cooperative in the sense that they would help their neighbor?

Black: Yes; to a certain extent. For instance (I don't know if you know much about it or not) they used to have what they called "log rollings" in clearing land, and "corn shuckings" . . . go in and help people shuck their corn in the fall of the year. Help people build a house, and such like. They practiced that, but when it came to going all out and going into your pocketbook to help people, that was something different.

Silveri: Any well-known preachers come through Yancey County in those years, to hold revivals?

Black: Well, there were not any, many, evangelist-type, like we have today. Of course, the most anybody that came along that claimed to be a preacher could get [would be] somewhere to preach. They wouldn't hardly turn them down at all. For instance, this . . . going back to this old log school building which was the only place we had then for any type of public use. . .one preacher came through: a great big tall fellow, over six feet tall, and he wore



Black: (Cont'd.) one of those old type raincoats that they had back then, that reached to the floor nearly, and it had a cape on it. He preached in that. He left there and he finally got over as far as Barnardsville and the law overtook him and arrested him over there for some crime. I forget what it was he was wanted for. So just anybody that came along could preach!

Silveri: How about music in the church?

Black: Well, it was very poor; nobody concerned himself very much about it.

Silveri: Did they have singing schools back then?

Black: Yes; and that was the main idea that they had, to revive the church when it got to dwindling: was to have a singing school, not a regular revival.

Silveri: Can they teach the shaped notes in those singing schools?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: And then at Sunday service, they'd have their line out, the songs first? Somebody would line them out, and someone else. . . What kind of music? Did they have a piano or organ, or. . .?

Black: They didn't have. . .in my early experience they didn't have any, because a lot of churches felt it was sinful, and they would, a lot of times, split over it. I know one over in Mitchell County, one of the leading churches over there. . . well, it's been a good while, too, but not a long time ago. . . split wide open over a piano. Like I say, the type of religion they had, they'd fight to the bitter end over it.

Silveri: And quite often they'd split up?

Black: Yes; many times they did. Well, not only over that, but just a lot of other things. Right over here in Madison County: I don't know whether you'd know it, but that Middle Fork section. . . you remember a little independent church by the side of the road?

Silveri: Yes.

Black: Well, that came out of the church, the original church which is over from the road, a brick building. They split up years ago. I don't know. . . well, it was over the doctrine, of course. This little church beside the road called themselves "independent," which has been in existence for years. Of course, Yancey County has a lot of "independent" belief in both places every Sunday morning, and do whatever they do, and won't have anything to do with each other. I just can't see it, myself.

Silveri: Well, there have been many changes in this part of the country over the years in which you've lived; eighty-four years old. Which changes that you've seen do you regret having taken place in life in this part of the country?

Black: Well, of course, I talked to the preachers that were present out at Buckeye last month. There needs to be more positive preaching and less negative. Of course, it's always been true, and I don't know if it's any more true today than always. Of course, it's always been necessary, but back in my early experience and, of course, right on down, it was more negative than positive. I think that's a great weakness on the part of any of us. I don't say but what I've

Black: (Cont'd.) done my part of it, but I think I have learned different, and preachers are still preaching bad times and getting worse every day.

Silveri: Is that fire-and-brimstone preaching?

Black: Yes; of course, so much of it needs to be done, but that's not all there is to it. Well, put it like this: I knew one man that was above forty years old that put it like this. . . that he didn't need so much to be told how bad he was, what he needed was to be told the way out of the situation that he was in. So that's my feeling about the whole situation and, of course, there's more crime than naturally we've ever known, but there's more people to do it. The same thing's been going on all of my life to a certain extent. There just weren't as many people to do it as there are today.

So what we need again is a way out of the situation that we are in, and put it like this: We need to deal more with the cause than the symptoms. Using a crude illustration: You can beat every limb off of a tree and not kill it, but if you'll dig it up by the roots, that'll get rid of it. It's human nature that needs to be cured, not just tell a fellow to quit this and quit that and quit the other, because he has no power to do it, and he will not do it until his nature's been changed, which can only be changed by the Lord Himself.

Silveri: What you're saying is that it's just as hard today, or, it is no harder today, to be saved than it was in those days during the turn of the century?

Black: Absolutely not!

Silveri: It's about the same. Life has gotten more complicated today than it was then; it was a simple life back then. Do you regret seeing that simple life pass? Do you regret seeing life become much more complicated?

Black: No.

Silveri: By machines and all of that?

Black: No; I don't want my children to have to go through what I've had to go through. Absolutely not, and nobody else! Because it's really a trying experience.

Silveri: In other words, those years that you grew up in, early manhood, and so on, were very difficult years.

Black: They sure were!

Silveri: You don't look with nostalgia and say: "Those were the good old days."

Black: No; this idea of the way some people put it. . . the old-time religion. . . and lots still today claim that's the kind they've got! . . . well, if you're just talking about religion, there's truth in it; but when you're talking about Christianity, it's the same today that it was many years ago. I tell people when they talk about it: "If you'll go back far enough, I'll agree with you." When people had to pay for their faith with their lives, like in Stephen's day. I don't agree not only with my own pastor on this question, and I've never heard but one other preacher except myself put it this way.

[End of Tape II, Side I]

[Side II]

Black: (Cont'd.) That persecution that came in Acts: Eighth Chapter . . . the minor persecution started in the fourth chapter, and the major in the eighth chapter. . . most preachers until today still preach that that came to scatter the people off from Jerusalem, get them out to preaching the gospel in other places. But Peter tells us, and James (both) that it came to try the people. And why didn't the twelve go like the rest did? They stayed and paid with their lives for their faith. It was a test to see. . . and that's the first downward move that I know anything about in Christianity, when they left. . . and you're to keep your testimony at Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and to the outermost parts of the earth. Well, if it don't stand up at home, it don't stand up anywhere! I've said it many times: If we can't be a Christian at home, no use to go off across the ridge or somewhere and bellow so loud! It just don't stand up, that's all.

Silveri: I noticed you have on the table here, the book, Angels, by Billy Graham. What do you think of Billy Graham?

Black: Well, I personally. . . I admire him. . . and a lot of preachers even that criticize Billy. Billy is a human being like the rest of us; doubtless makes many mistakes, but there's no other man who has preached to as many people as he has, that I know anything about. I just don't let myself criticize anybody that, with

Black: (Cont'd.) all their failures, or whatever it might be, that upholds the name of Christ and preaches Him as the only solution for our sins and our problems.

Silveri: Well, I think that I've taken up quite a lot of your time today. I hope you've enjoyed going back and reminiscing.

Black: Well, I have, and I certainly appreciate your concern, I want you to know that.

Silveri: I'm very interested. I am very happy to be able to sit down and talk to you and hear your comments about those early years, particularly in Yancey County. I'm quite interested in Yancey County.

Black: I guess I didn't. . .

Silveri: Yes. What were you going to say?

Black: Well, I was pastor of fifteen churches in my own county, Yancey, and one in Mitchell County, before I came to Buncombe. Ten of those churches in Yancey County I was pastor twice, with all of my faults, and the one in Mitchell twice, besides the many different revivals I was in. There were times that I averaged a revival a month for every month in the year, and there were times I stayed at home a half a night in the whole month!

Silveri: Did you raise a family in those years, too? Do you have children?

Black: Raised five.

Silveri: Five children?

Black: Sure did; and my wife never worked a day, or any part of

Black: (Cont'd.) a day for pay in all of her married life. We got them up some way. I don't know how.

Silveri: Earlier on, you mentioned about the Depression years. Those were very tough years for everybody, even in a rural place like Yancey County, right?

Black: It sure was bad.

Silveri: Money was hard to come by?

Black: Well, you couldn't buy a job of any kind; that's about all there was to it. There wasn't anything to do. If you didn't make what you lived on, you just didn't have it, that's all.

Silveri: Looking at it a different way, though. The people who had land and could raise most of their own food were better off than those who lived in the city.

Black: Well, they were. Yes; that's true.

Silveri: Did you vote for Roosevelt?

Black: Sure did.

Silveri: Every time? Well, you were a Democrat. You always voted Democratic, didn't you?

Black: Yes.

Silveri: Never voted for a Republican?

Black: Never voted the Republican ticket in my life. Of course, I don't tell that, broadcast it; I've always voted Democratic.

Silveri: Do you think Roosevelt did a lot of good for the country?

Black: Yes; and I saw his "Little White House" last week.

Silveri: Down in Warm Springs, Georgia?

Black: Yes, sir; sure did.

Silveri: In all those years you've been preaching in Yancey County, you saw a lot of families who were in different situations; a lot of children without the kind of things they need, see that they go to school? How about disease? Much disease that you could see, that could easily be eradicated if there were enough doctors around?

Black: Sure; sure could, and I guess I've hauled more people to Winston-Salem Baptist Hospital than any other preacher in the country, I reckon.

Silveri: Why there? Why didn't you come into Asheville?

Black: Well, you could just get it done cheaper, ordinarily, down there.

Silveri: Not many doctors in the county when you were growing up?

Black: No; there wasn't.

Silveri: A couple in Burnsville, and that's probably about it?

Black: Well, there were. . . at one time there were about four, I think, but ordinarily there were maybe two and three.

Silveri: Well, I think perhaps I should end now. Thank you very much for giving this time.

Black: Well, I thank you, again.

[End of tape]