

CHARLOTTE YOUNG

Interviewed by:

Louis D. Silveri

June 26, 1975

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER
The University of North Carolina at Asheville

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Interview with Charlotte Young

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[TAPE I, SIDE I]

Dr. Silveri: I want to start with when you were born and where?

Charlotte Young: I was born in a very aristocratic community, Hominy Valley, that is older than Asheville. In the 1791's when George Washington, our first president, and the Congress decided to have what they called a Federal City, they bought the manors there. Part of the events I'm telling you came from my great-great aunt, Stacy Webb, a very intelligent lady, who lived to be up in ninety years of age. These stories were handed down in our family.

"Aunt" Lizzie Gudger, the wife of Colonel Samuel Gudger,

who was a well-known figure in Asheville and Buncombe and through this region, remembered these family history and legends. I said, "I don't depend on legends; I've got to know whether they are true or not." So

I didn't quote my Great-great Aunt Stacy until I went to Washington and checked the city library and I found some of the things she said verified there. At that point I accepted all that Aunt Stacy Webb handed down. I came down the youngest of the youngest, and you know just a few generations reach back.

Silveri : Yes, I know.

Young:: I was born at what is now Candler (once Hominy Valley).

My great-great grandfather sold out his part in the biggest manor that was sold to the government, Duddington Manor.

Young: (Cont'd) John Young was born in 1711. His first child, John Stuart Young, was born in 1734. The youngest of thirteen children was my great grandfather, William Young: I, 1763. William Young: II was my grandfather. Pinkney Raybun Young, my father, and I were born in Hominy Valley. Later it was named Candler. It is six miles from West Asheville. I lived there until I was one year old. Then we moved to Haywood County, then to Tennessee, in 1892, where we lived until 1902; since then Asheville has been our home.

Silveri: When were you born?

Young: In 1878, the 11th of June.

Silveri: You can document that, right? You have evidence of that?

Young: Oh, yes. In the Bible. But I remember Grover Cleveland's election in 1884.

Silveri: Eighteen seventy eight!

Young: I was ninety-seven the 11th of June, this year, 1975.

I had a nice, quiet birthday, happy as a lark.

Silveri: Your father was born in Hominy Valley? And his father?

Young: Yes, and his father, William Young II, my grandfather. The ten children of John Young and Lady Martha Stuart Young, all moved South, came pioneering down, hunting for a new place to live, with That pioneering spirit, William I, the youngest of John Young's children, found a place in Hominy Valley. He brought his family and (they never called them slaves)—he brought his servants, possibly his load of furniture brought from England.

Young: (Cont'd) Wagons brought them down through, the Appalachian Mountains. He found this place rich in fertile "bottom" fields. The Rices, the Gudgers, the Jarvises, the Samses, the Whitsons, the Gashes, the Alexanders and others married the daughters and granddaughters of John Young, many of whose descendents still live in Western North Carolina.

Silveri: I know one of the Davidsons, Hardy Davidson, out in Swannanoa. The Davidsons were one of the first families to settle in the Swannanoa Valley.

Young:: My great grandmother was Rebecca Davidson, who married William Young I.

Silveri: How about the Alexanders? And relationship with the Alexanders?

Young:: I sort of lost track of the Alexanders, but all of the Alexanders around here are some kind of cousins of mine. And this man, Sondley, who was a historian and gatherer of pamphlets, and what have you - he had a marvelous library and he gave it to Asheville with the stipulation that it be kept separate. So in their little cramped quarters now, the Sondley library is in boxes, mostly. He was about a sixth cousin to my father.

Silveri: When you were born, you were born into a family that did farming in Hominy Valley. Is that right?

Young:: Yes- but my father was a soldier of the Confederate States of America, a nation that lived a little while. He was a teacher and Baptist minister.

Silveri: Did your father enlist or was he conscripted?

Young:: He enlisted when he was twenty. His older brother, Watson G. Young, was killed at Malvern Hill, July..2, 1861, and is buried in Hominy Valley Baptist Church graveyard. Two of my great-grandparents, two couples, are buried in a graveyard that was filled up long ago. My great-grandfather, William Young I, and Rebecca Young, are buried there. They were charter members of the Hominy Valley Baptist Church. And another great-grandfather, who was mentioned in Hall's History of Western North Carolina as one of the leading men of Western North Carolina--which used to be Buncombe County, taking in nearly all of Western North Carolina. The eastern counties were cut up into little counties; they had a lot of votes and they fought against any new county coming into Western North Carolina.

My great-grandfather, Hodge Rabun moved in the early days from Virginia. He had a son, James Rabon, who was Governor of Georgia, 1817-1819.

Great-Grandfather Hodge Rabun was an outstanding member of the State Legislature for twenty years, sometimes in the Senate, the House of Representatives.

Silveri: Did your grandfather own slaves?

Young:: Yes, but not many. After his death in 1857, Grandmother made "Uncle Luke," a slave, manager of the farm. He was almost like one of the family. He stayed and helped run the farm after "The Surrender." The military officers during Reconstruction times broke up such plans.

Great-grandfather Hodge Raybun had many servants—they never called them slaves- the Southern owners. I talked to a good old servant , “Uncle Gilbert Bairdy”, who was

Young: (Cont'd) a member of the Confederate Veteran's organization and drew a Confederate pension,

because he took care of his master, was loyal to him. I said to him, "Were your

masters good to you? How were masters in those days?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you how it was, Miss

Young: If a man was good to his chilluns, he's good to his servants. If he was mean to his chilluns, he's mean to his "niggers;". They used the word "nigger" affectionately sometimes.

Silveri: So they did have- -well, you say they didn't call them "slaves," they called them "servants," but they were black, right?

Young: Oh yes, they were black.

Silveri: Were there very many of them that your grandfather owned?

Young: One great- grandfather, Hodge Rabun, owned so many, he didn't know his own servants. But he was good to them. He didn't believe in slavery.

I suppose he wanted to free them, but there'd been an uprising stirred up by over-zealous (they called them "blue mouth") Yankees, against the white people. They stirred up the Negroes in North Carolina and put the whole state into panic. A law was passed that no Negro should be freed in North Carolina.

My great-grandfather, Hodge Raybun, who was a great fellow, (I can tell you more about him later) couldn't free them. I think

he wanted to, for he thought it was wrong, so he sold them.

I'm sure he must have picked out the best master he could find, and sold them. I call him a statesman,

Young: (Cont'd) but, of course, in his day he was a politician. Spent most of his patrimony and his living getting elected to state assemblies and getting defeated for Congress. So he died a poor man, as he called it; he had a good plantation out at Pole Creek. I thought that must be just a little backwoods "hollar" or cove, as they called it, but it was a very prosperous place, and still is.

Silveri: Did he die just before the Civil War?

Young:: Yes. He died about 1849.

Silveri: And he didn't see the war?

Young: No.

Silveri: The books say that the residents of the mountains usually had very few slaves, or none at all.

Young:: Most of them had none at all. It was only well-to-do people who'd inherited them. My grandmother (my grandfather died when Papa was fourteen years of age in 1859). Grandmother was left a widow and they didn't have many slaves. They had been rich, but somehow or other estates had slipped through their fingers, They had only one slave that I have heard about and that was "Uncle Luke" as they called him. Papa called him "Uncle Luke." He managed the farm, made the two boys behave themselves; would spank them if they needed correction. They would joke with him, tease him, and he would join in the fun. Most of the people through Western North Carolina have inherited this love of fun.

Young: (Cont'd) My people were Presbyterian or Baptist, and my father tried to find the Lord in our revival meetings, as he grew up. He must have been an unusual boy. He was eighteen before he could see his way clear to say, "I'm a Christian." When Papa stood and testified, Uncle Luke took him in his arms and wept for joy. Do you know anything about the old revival meetings?

Silveri: Yes

Young: : Where they have a "mourner's bench?" I've even seen them in my childhood, when we lived back in places where my father was teaching. In earlier days the slaves went with their masters to church, and the white people never dumped them out. They left the churches under the influence of overzealous people from the North who meant well and didn't understand the situation, and the Negroes started their own churches. For instance, the first church in Charlotte was full. It had a big majority of black people as members; they left and organized their own church.

Silveri: But I've read where they were supposed to sit in the back of the church, or upstairs, but never with the whites who came to church. They always sat separately. Is that true?

Young: : It probably was, in most churches. Usually they had a balcony, and they had rather be together. They didn't mind. But they knew- -and when Papa got up in church and said, "I'm all right. I confess the Lord Jesus," Luke came forward and took him in his arms.

Young: (Cont'd) Papa returned the caress. Now that was the way they lived and associated, in this region.

Silveri: How old was your father when he volunteered in the Civil War?

Young:: He was twenty years of age. It was on or near 11-17-1868.

Silveri: What had he done before that time, remained on the farm?

Young:: From eighteen to twenty he was employed by the Confederate States of America in their postal system. He drove a buggy. He boarded over in Asheville, about eleven miles from his home

in Candler, (Hominy Valley, I still like to call it)

He drove a buggy from Asheville to Murphy, and spent the night in Murphy; or on the route and back to Asheville, and spent a night in Asheville.

He said all along the way people would stop him: "Have you got a letter for me from my son or my brother, my husband, in the War?" They'd get in line to wait to hear from them. Very interesting to hear him tell it.

Silveri: What's the distance from Murphy to Asheville and back?

Young: : Why, it must be- -from Asheville to Franklin, the shortest way is about sixty miles — it must be about a hundred miles or more.

Silveri: He wouldn't do that in one day in a buggy, would he?

Young: : Probably two days or more each way.

Silveri: That's very interesting. Now you mentioned your father taught. He taught school for a while?

Young: Oh, yes.

Silveri: But this was after the war?

Young:: After the war.

Silveri: Let's go back to the war itself. What experience did your father have in the war?

Young:: Oh, most interesting. He was in the siege of Petersburg, and when the "blow up" came - You heard of the "blow up?"

Silveri: The tunnel underneath.

Young:: It backfired and killed more of the Yankee soldiers that caused it than it did the Confederates.. It was a great big opening, and the people just fell into it. Terrible! Oh, it was a crime against civilization, bad as we're doing now. It was as shocking for the people of that day, particularly to the Southern people, as Hiroshima is to us.

Silveri: Your father then, when did he get into the, war? Not at the very beginning?

Young:: He volunteered in 1863 and stayed until the surrender, April 9, 1865. He was sick in the hospital. He was wounded twice in the siege at Petersburg.

I went back there three or four years ago with some friends

who are interested in history as I am. We visited that place, and I saw

Hairs Hill where he was wounded. He had told me of that skirmish and he gave me the details of that, and he gave me the details of the Battle of Hairs

Hill. Part of that big battle of Fort Steadman that

Young: (Cont'd) This big battle that went all over Petersburg.

When I went to Petersburg I was surprised to see so much of the territory covered with graves. Then I looked for the Battle of Fort Steadman, that battle that went almost all over the city. I didn't realize it was so big. My father made a little map of it and showed me the whole thing.

Silveri: That's very interesting. Did your father ever tell you why he went to fight?

Young: Because he believed in state's rights.

Silveri: And your father was fighting for state's rights?

Young: Yes, and he said, "Sometime history will tell the truth about it. It'll come out sometime." Of course, there isn't such a thing as "impersonal history." It just can't be. But, some of us will write it from our point of view. Well, the South was left "dragging" in the sands", financially and every other way.

Silveri: Did your father ever make any comments about Abe Lincoln?

Young: Yes. Well, Southerners looked on him then just as we looked on the Kaiser in World War I, and as we looked on Hitler in World War II. I've heard jokes about it. One soldier who was

