

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Roz Foster: Good morning.

Charlie: Good morning.

Roz Foster: Would you please tell me your name and a little bit about yourself and your family?

Charlie: My name is Charlie Ree Mitchell. The Mitchell family, I met them in 1940. I took care of the [00:00:26] quarters off of 46 on the turpentine place [00:00:31]. And um, I got...You want me to tell you about myself too? [00:00:37] And they father was named John Mitchell and the mother was named Mary Mitchell. So they moved out to the turpentine quarters to Mims in 1942. He was the first man that build a block house in Mims.

[00:01:00]

Roz Foster: And where was that block house built?

Charlie: Back then, the street wasn't named, but it's named Harry T. Moore now.

Roz Foster: Is the house still there?

Charlie: Yes. It's on the right hand side coming from ... Off of number 1, you get to a four way stop and you turn left, then you're going on down. And there's a big church sitting on the left and his house on the right.

Roz Foster: You mentioned that you lived out at the turpentine camp on 46.

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: What was the Turpentine compound comprised of? Was it several houses? What did it look like? Tell me what it looked like.

[00:02:00]

Charlie: Well they was just about twenty-two houses out there. They just all old wood structures.

Roz Foster: Did they have a bedroom or living quarters like kitchens and [crosstalk 00:02:09]

Charlie: Yeah, they had bedrooms and kitchens, and front porch. Then that's all.

Roz Foster: Where was this compound located off of 46? Was it on the south side of 46? If you're going from Mims to [crosstalk 00:02:30] St. John's is on your right hand side or the left hand side?

Charlie: It was on the left hand, you turn left going there.

Roz Foster: Was this near Turpentine Road?

Charlie: Yes, that's what it was on, the Turpentine Road down where they got all those trailers and things built out there now.

Roz Foster: Okay. Who were some of the other family names that lived there also?

[00:03:00]

Charlie: The Owens's, they are James Owens and Mary Owens; and Willy Addison and his family.

Roz Foster: And how many were in the Addison family? Do you remember?

Charlie: No ... And son Moe [00:03:19] and his family. That's him and his wife and his daughter. Let me see who else. Effie Brown and Amasa [00:03:28] Brown, they lived there, them and their son.

Roz Foster: Did the men and women work in the turpentine?

Charlie: No. Women didn't work in Turpentine. Nothing but the men.

Roz Foster: Where did the men go? Do you know what a typical day, where they would leave in the mornings? Do you know where they went to turpentine?

Charlie: No, all I know they went to work out there in the woods somewhere. I don't really know.

[00:04:00]

Roz Foster: Okay, do you know who they worked for?

Charlie: They worked for Coleman Kelly.

Roz Foster: Coleman Kelly, okay. Did a truck come and pick them up or a bus? What kind of transportation did they have?

Charlie: They had a truck, but some of the mens had their own transportation.

Roz Foster: In the camp itself, what did they do for entertainment at the camp?

Charlie: Oh we had a church out there.

Roz Foster: You did?

Charlie: Uh huh.

Roz Foster: What was the name of the church?

Charlie: St. Mary's Baptist Church.

Roz Foster: St. Mary's? Oh. And who was the pastor there?

Charlie: What's that man's name? His name is Oliver, last name.

Roz Foster: Where was the church located in relationship to where you lived? Was it on like 46?

[00:05:00]

Charlie: No, it was off of 46 coming into the camp. It was near the road, the church was.

Roz Foster: Okay, now do you remember when that church ... What time period are we talking about here? Are we talking about in the 20s, late 20s?

Charlie: No, they just built that, in the 40s.

Roz Foster: In the 40's okay. Let me ask you this: Do you ever remember, being that we now know there was a church out there, do you ever remember that there was a small cemetery in the area?

Charlie: No. There wasn't.

Roz Foster: Because we had reports that there was a possible cemetery located out at the camps somewhere. We haven't been able to locate it.

Charlie: It might of was, but it wasn't there when we moved there.

[00:06:00]

Roz Foster: Do you remember anything else about the camp? Did you have a company store there?

Charlie: Yes. Mr. Kelly did.

Roz Foster: Mr. Kelly. Can you describe that and what types of things were sold at the company store [00:06:16]?

Charlie: He didn't sell nothing in there but groceries.

Roz Foster: Groceries, and... How was a transaction taken place? Did you exchange money or was it put on an account?

Charlie: It was put on an account.

Roz Foster: And then that was taken out of your pay at the end of the week?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Or the end of the month?

Charlie: Uh huh.

Roz Foster: Did you go shopping for groceries anywhere else?

Charlie: Yes. Sometimes we'd come out here to Mims, to [Duff's?] store.

Roz Foster: To [Duff's?] store, ok. And they carried everything, didn't they?

Charlie: Yes. The post office was there in the store.

[00:07:00]

Roz Foster: Okay, what did you do for doctoring out there?

Charlie: We would go to Titusville to the doctor.

Roz Foster: And who was the doctor at the time? Do you remember?

Charlie: Doctor Christian and Doctor [Pardof? 00:07:14].

Roz Foster: How about having babies. Did you have a midwife out there?

Charlie: I didn't have any children.

Roz Foster: Did anybody in the camp have a midwife?

Charlie: Yes. Effie Brown.

Roz Foster: Do you remember who the midwife was?

Charlie: Ms. Effie Brown, the midwife was named Effie Brown.

Roz Foster: Oh, she was the midwife.

Charlie: Uh huh.

Roz Foster: And where did she live? She lived there?

Charlie: Yes, she lived there. But later on she moved out to Mims.

Roz Foster: Okay, do you ever remember any of the babies that Effie delivered?

[00:08:00]

Charlie: Yes. She delivered Ana Mary Owens and Ellen Curvey, Lina Curvey ... That's all I remember.

Roz Foster: Getting back to church services out there. Where did you baptize, where did the church baptize?

Charlie: Well, I was baptized right here in Mims, they used to call it ... What that hole was?

Roz Foster: The Rock Pit?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Oh, where was the Rock Pit located? Do you remember?

Charlie: I can't remember now where it was.

Roz Foster: You used to come from the camp into here to be baptized at the Rock Pit?

Charlie: Yeah. They would bring us out here and baptize us. Then we'd go back out to our church.

[00:09:00]

Roz Foster: I see. Wonderful. Did you celebrate the holidays? What was Christmas like back there at the camp?

Charlie: Well, it was pretty good.

Roz Foster: What was your favorite thing you made at Christmas time?

Charlie: I didn't make anything.

Roz Foster: What did the children used to get? That was simpler times back then for everyone in the 40s and early 50s. What did the children typically get for Christmas? Do you remember?

Charlie: No, I left Mims ... My husband went to the service in '43. I left Mims in '43 and followed him, and we came back in '46. We left in '48 and moved over on the west coast.

Roz Foster: Is there anything else you can remember about turpentine that would be of interest to the young people? Because they don't even know turpentine was done in this area. What did your husband do in the turpentine industry?

[00:10:00]

Charlie: He worked in the turpentine until he went into the service.

Roz Foster: Okay, what branch of the service was he in?

Charlie: He went to the army.

Roz Foster: In the army. He was in World War II?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Okay. He lived through it? The good Lord praised him to come home safely?

Charlie: Right.

Roz Foster: That's wonderful. You said that he is deceased?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Is he buried at La Grange cemetery?

Charlie: No.

Roz Foster: Where is he buried?

Charlie: He's out there on ... What's the name of that street out there on ...

Roz Foster: In Titusville?

Charlie: Yeah, he's out there.

Roz Foster: Deleon?

Charlie: No. He's on Garden Street.

Roz Foster: [crosstalk 00:10:49] In Titusville Center.

Charlie: Uh huh.

[00:11:00]

Roz Foster: Okay, Oaklawn it's now known [00:11:00]. Was the Titusville Cemetery.

What did you do for schooling? Do you know where the children went to school from the turpentine industry out there?

Charlie: They first started out here in Mims to their school. They had a school ... What was the name of that school? Was Mims Colored School, the first [00:11:21]

Roz Foster: Do you remember where Mims Colored School was located?

Charlie: Yes. Right across over there ... What's the name of that place? On Harry T. Moore.

Roz Foster: Where the Normandy Learning Center is?

Charlie: Yeah.

Roz Foster: What happened to the Mims Colored School? Did it burn down, or did they tear it down?

Charlie: I wouldn't know.

Roz Foster: You don't know, okay. What was Mims like in the early days?

[00:12:00]

Charlie: It was a few houses built out there.

Roz Foster: Do you remember any of the Cuylers? Do you remember Bentley?

Charlie: Yeah.

Roz Foster: What did they do in town?

Charlie: All I know is that they had orange groves.

Roz Foster: Lots of orange groves?

Charlie: Uh huh.

Roz Foster: Yeah. Do you remember having any home remedies at all when you lived out at the camp? How did you take care of just every day common colds or fevers? Did you have some home remedies that you did?

Charlie: Yeah, but I barely seldom have no cold. When I was younger.

[00:13:00]

Roz Foster: Where did your family come from?

Charlie: We came from Alabama.

Roz Foster: What was your maiden name?

Charlie: Brown.

Roz Foster: Where did you come from in Alabama? Do you remember?

Charlie: Yes. We came from Samson, Alabama.

Roz Foster: In about what time?

Charlie: We came here in January in 1940.

Roz Foster: 1940. Boy, that was a long time ago, wasn't it Charlie?

Charlie: Yeah.

Roz Foster: How did you acquire the name of Charlie?

Charlie: I wouldn't know.

Roz Foster: Your mama just liked the name?

Charlie: I guess she did.

Roz Foster: Okay, I thought maybe there might be a family story behind that.

Charlie: No.

Roz Foster: Let me ask you this: Do you remember the railroad? Did you ever ride the train to Titusville?

[00:14:00]

Charlie: No. I rode the train from Titusville to Jacksonville and North Carolina.

Roz Foster: Oh you did? What was that like?

Charlie: It was nice.

Roz Foster: And you got the train in Titusville Station?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: And where did you make your connection?

Charlie: I'd go from Titusville [00:14:17] to Jacksonville, and then I'd change in Jacksonville and go on to North Carolina.

Roz Foster: Do you remember how much that cost in those days?

Charlie: No, I really don't.

Roz Foster: Do you remember anything about the saw mill up here at all?

Charlie: No. I didn't live out there.

Roz Foster: Do you remember how much your husband used to make a week working at the turpentine?

Charlie: No.

Roz Foster: Or how much he was paid a day?

Charlie: No, I can't remember all that. That's been so long ago.

[00:15:00]

Roz Foster: What were some of the traditions that were held at St. Mary's Church out at the turpentine still? What were some of the traditions? For instance, did you have bible studies? Did you observe the washing of feet ceremonies or anything like that?

Charlie: No. We would have prayer meeting, like bible study, and Sunday school, 11 o'clock service and night service.

Roz Foster: How about weddings? Did you hold weddings there?

Charlie: No.

Roz Foster: They were held in Mims, or were most of the people married?

Charlie: I guess they was because I wasn't there when nobody married.

Roz Foster: Okay, do you remember anything else about the turpentine industry that you think we should know? Was there a place out there, if you can recall, between our turpentine place and Sanford? There was a community called Garfield. Do you remember Garfield at all?
[00:16:00]

Charlie: No I don't.

Roz Foster: Okay, did you ever go fishing on the St. John's River?

Charlie: No.

Roz Foster: No, okay. Do you remember Kelly's up here on US 1, where that was located?

Charlie: Yeah, the still was out here.

Roz Foster: Yes, the still was on US 1. In relationship to where everything is today, about where was that located?

Charlie: It was located along there by where the post office is. But it wasn't turned like the post office, it was facing the number 1.

Roz Foster: It was facing US 1?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Okay, and it was south of the post office on this side of the post office?

[00:17:00]

Charlie: No, it was north on this side of the post office.

Roz Foster: And it was facing US 1?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: What was actually there? That was the still. What was actually there? A big building?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Do you remember what happened to that building?

Charlie: No, because I wasn't here.

Roz Foster: Well thank you very much for coming today. I appreciate it.

Charlie: You're welcome.

Roz Foster: And thank you for your information.

Charlie: Uh huh.

Roz Foster: Charlie, could you tell me, what was your birth date?

Charlie: December the 16th, 1922.

Roz Foster: When was your husband born? Do you remember?

Charlie: Yes. He was born April the 17th, 1917.

Roz Foster: Okay, when did he pass?

[00:18:00]

Charlie: 1995.

Roz Foster: In 1995. You have a wonderful photograph that you're holding. Could you tell us something about this photograph? That's absolutely beautiful.

Charlie: All that I can tell you is this is my husband's mother. Her name is Mary Mitchell.

Roz Foster: Mary Mitchell. Could you tell us something about Mary? Where they came from?

Charlie: They came from Chipley, Florida in 1940, down to Mims.

Roz Foster: Did they work in the turpentine?

Charlie: No. She didn't.

Roz Foster: Did her husband?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Tell us something about her husband. What was his name?

Charlie: John Mitchell.

Roz Foster: And he was a reverend?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Okay, what church did he have?

Charlie: He didn't pastor a church.

[00:19:00]
Roz Foster: Okay, what did he do in the area?

Charlie: He worked in the turpentine. He joined St. James when he first came to Mims. St. James Baptist Church.

Roz Foster: What did Mary do?

Charlie: She loved to fish. She worked for some of the white peoples in Mims.

Roz Foster: Do you remember their name?

Charlie: No, I really don't.

Roz Foster: Well it's a beautiful old photograph and you're very fortunate to have a picture of the family.

[00:20:00]
When you lived out at the turpentine, what was the facilities like out there? You said there was a company store ... You had indoor bathrooms at this time?

Charlie: No ma'am.

Roz Foster: Did each house have their own outdoor baths?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Okay, where were they usually located?

Charlie: In the back of their houses.

Roz Foster: Okay and also, the other important thing is too ... Back then, that we didn't have a rural trash collection, what did you do with the trash that you had?

Charlie: We would rake it up and burn it.

Roz Foster: And the bottles and cans and stuff?

Charlie: Yeah, bury them.

Roz Foster: They were buried. So actually, out there in that location, if one was to go and excavate, it would probably find some very old bottles and cans, etc.?

Charlie: They probably would.

[00:21:00]

Roz Foster: Also, we had mentioned about the doctors. Did they make house calls back then?

Charlie: Yes. Dr. [Pardof? 00:21:04] did.

Roz Foster: Do you remember how much a house call cost?

Charlie: No, I really didn't, because I didn't never have no house calls.

Roz Foster: Did they come to the house if the people were just very ill? Is that why they came, or did they come just for anything?

Charlie: They would come if you know were very ill.

Roz Foster: There were telephones out there?

Charlie: No.

Roz Foster: No? So how would you get in touch with them? Someone from in the town?

Charlie: Yes. We write letters to everyone in our family, and if something happened they'd send a telegram.

Roz Foster: Okay, oh so telegrams?

Charlie: Yeah.

Roz Foster: Where did you send the telegrams?

Charlie: We had to go to Titusville to do that.

Roz Foster: At the Western Union office?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Do you remember where that was located?

Charlie: No, I really don't.

[00:22:00]

Roz Foster: I believe it was on US 1 or Washington Avenue, I think that's where it was.

Thank you very much for bringing this photograph and some history about the Mitchell family.

Charlie: You're welcome.

Roz Foster: I understand that your father-in-law and his son ran a grocery store? What was the name of the grocery store? Do you remember?

Charlie: Mitchell Brother's Grocery.

Roz Foster: And where was it located?

Charlie: Harry T. Moore Street.

Roz Foster: Was that on the corner of Main Street and Harry T. Moore or was that ...

Charlie: No, that was Harry T. Moore Street.

Roz Foster: Is it still there today?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Still running?

Charlie: But it's not no grocery store now. It's still there.

Roz Foster: What is it today?

[00:23:00]

Charlie: Well I couldn't say right now what it is. They don't really have a lot of groceries in there. They have a few little things in there.

Roz Foster: Like a little convenient store?

Charlie: Yeah.

Roz Foster: What was his connection with St. Mary's Church in Mims?

Charlie: Who?

Roz Foster: Reverend John Mitchell.

Charlie: Oh, he was just a member there.

Roz Foster: And he helped to found the church?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Also, where was the movie theatre?

Charlie: It was on Main and Harry T. Moore.

Roz Foster: And that was at the Masonic lodges I understand [00:23:37] ?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: Also, what are the most significant changes in Mims that you can see from the time that you were here in the 40s to the present?

[00:24:00]

Charlie: Most everything, because it wasn't nothing much here when I came here. A lot of streets wasn't even cut through there when we was here. When I first came. So it's been a great change since I've been here.

Roz Foster: They weren't paved, either?

Charlie: No.

Roz Foster: Or had names?

Charlie: Didn't have names either.

Roz Foster: How did you have an address? How did you receive mail?

Charlie: When we were living out to the turpentine quarters. We'd get it from the post office.

Roz Foster: You had to come into town to the post office?

Charlie: Yes.

Roz Foster: So you had a post office box?

Charlie: No. You didn't have a post office box. You just asked for your mail and the postmaster would give it to you.

Roz Foster: Okay, if I wanted to send you a letter, to you. How would I address it to you?

[00:25:00]

Charlie: Just address it to Mims, Florida, and we would come up to [Duff's?] Store to the post office and get it.

Roz Foster: So I would just put on the envelope, "Charlie Mitchell, Mims Florida," okay, and they would get it.

Charlie: Uh huh, Mims, Florida.

Roz Foster: What are some of the other significant changes that you've seen in the area? For instance, did you ever think that the space industry would have its roots here?

Charlie: No, I really didn't.

Roz Foster: And television? All that kind of thing.

Charlie: No ... And banks, drug stores, I never thought that would be in Mims.

Roz Foster: What did you do for banking?

Charlie: I didn't have anything!

Roz Foster: Well the use of the company store you just sort of, quote, "had a credit" there and that would be the pay?

Charlie: Right.

[00:26:00]

Roz Foster: Okay, well thank you very much.

Charlie: Uh huh.