

VFP VIDEOTAPE TRANSCRIPT

SUBJECT: John Jackson

TAPE NO.: 1

DATE: 8/13/91

TIME CODE

AUDIO

01:02:06 JJ playing Railroad Bill
CU TO MS AT 01:02:08
MS TO CU OF HAND 01:03:03
MS AT 01:04:06
CU OF FACE 01:04:37

01:05:05 "Railroad Bill" ends

01:05:15 GB: Now is that one you learned from someone in
the community? 01:05:18
MS 01:05:19

01:05:19 JJ: Learned it from my father. He's the one that
that's from.

01:05:21 GB: From who?

01:05:23 JJ: My father.

01:06:02 JJ plays "Police Dog Blues"

01:09:00 "Police Dog Blues" ends

01:09:03 GB: Is that one you figured out of a 78?
01:09:06

01:09:06 JJ: Oh yea, learned it off a 78 record, that's
right.

01:09:10 GB: One that your mom had and played on the
Victrola? 01:09:12
CU of LEFT HAND 01:09:12

01:09:13 JJ: Yea, it was several of those that come
around.

01:09:19 GB: Have you heard it since then?

01:09:20 JJ: I've heard it since then, you know so many
people play it this day and time, but I learned it
off a 78 record. 01:09:33

01:09:32 GB: Just figured it out by ear? 01:09:34

01:09:34 JJ: Oh yea, I listened to it 2 or 3 times. I knew it, you know it was in open tune and it sounded good, but Jesus, I had to figure out a little bit of the fingerwork. Didn't take long. I guess 2 or 3 weeks, something like that. (CU of HAND shifts to CU of FACE 01:09:50) Which I still can't say I play it like Bon Blake do, but you know that's what it really come from.

01:10:03 GB: Um, can we do a knife tune? You said you couldn't play it on that, in the guild, right?

01:10:32 *"Muddy Blues"* JJ plays "Going Away, I Won't be Back 'til Fall"

01:11:46 song ends

01:12:32 GB: Now did Happy play strumming like that?
01:12:34

01:12:34 JJ: Yea he did.

01:12:35 GB: Did he finger pick them? 01:12:36

01:12:37 JJ: He strummed, he never finger-picked that, he just strummed. But now I can't do none of the ones he did, you know, finger picking, I never learned that much detail from him.

01:12:48 GB: But he did do some finger-picking? 01:12:50

01:12:49 JJ: Oh Lord, most all the things he did was mostly finger-pick. All except that one song. I can remember him sitting here like this, can't remember all the verses to it though. 01:13:04
CU of LEFT HAND 01:13:06

01:13:14 JJ plays "Hate to Hear that steam whistle blow"

01:15:25 song ends

01:16:14 JJ plays "John Henry"

01:18:50 "John Henry" ends

01:19:00 GB: "Thanks so much"

VFP VIDEOTAPE TRANSCRIPT

SUBJECT: John Jackson

TAPE NO.: 2

DATE: 8/13/91

TIME CODE AUDIO

02:00:18 (picture)

02:00:20 GB: I guess we should start with the basic kind of stuff then, if you could just tell us when you were born, where, and tell us about music in your family and your community. 02:00:28

02:00:28 JJ: I was born in a little town, Woodville, February 25, 1924, and I can remember very well when everybody used to get together and play music like on the weekend, dance and you know, fun at your ? and come up in the country and later on with a load of furniture and a record player, and that's how I mostly learned to play, by listening to 78 records, but before that, it was a convict on the chain gang. 02:01:01

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02:01:01 JJ: That really had a lot of influence, now the road was finished in 1932, and this was before '32, I'd say from about '30 and '32 when that road was cut through Loveland, and when he was in the area, he had a lot of influence on me, so when after he left these furniture dealers came and we bought a record player and they'd bring records around, you know, every time they'd collect whatever we was able to pay them like wants the money every six weeks, then my older sister would buy the record and then I'd listen to the record and learn to play that a way, that's how we did it. 02:01:44

02:01:44 GB: So was Happy the first guitar player you saw? 02:01:48

02:01:49 JJ: He's the best guitar player that I'd ever seen when I was growing up. 02:01:53

02:01:53 GB: But he wasn't the first was he? 02:01:54

02:01:54 JJ: He wasn't the first, no, it was all the people in the area but nobody could touch him. Really couldn't, no. 02:02:02

02:02:04 GB: Who in your family played music? 02:02:06

02:02:06 JJ: Everybody, my father, my mother, my oldest brothers, my aunts, and my uncles. Everybody played music. A whole lot of neighbors were in there. There was one fella used to come all the way from Madison up in Rappahanock County to play with us. And his mane was Eddie Washington. Some would come down out the mountains, some would come from, you know, just every which where. It was a lot of musicians around back then, banjo pickers, I had an uncle play fiddle and Uncle ~~Catie~~ played fiddle and uh, 'cause we'd all call him uncle Franz Turner, he was a good five-string banjo player, there was just a lot of musicians around. That's all we had to look forward to on the weekend was to meet at the church and maintain ourselves with playing music and pitching horseshoes, or marbles, or something like that just the whole weekend. 02:03:05

02:03:08 GB: So was there music at your family's home just about every weekend? 02:03:11

02:03:11 JJ: Every weekend it was music. Father, there was some big trees, you know, sort of like in a little grove, and he built something like a stage, and uh, people that wanted to play music would get ~~done~~ playing music the whole weekend, sometimes some would want to dance, you know, do the old-time ~~bug~~ dancing and square dances because they had a lot of dances going on too, like especially on a Saturday night, like one neighbor would get it, give ~~it~~ ^{a dance} then, and the next week another neighbor would give it, probably person gave it last week, it wouldn't get back to him in a year. It would just keep on going you know and around and then like on the weekends when we played music somebody'd cook a ham, somebody'd bake a pot of beans, and back then we'd cut ice off the pond to fill the ice house with, and you climb down in there and pull the straw back and get a big chunk of ice and get a big ten gallon can, a milk can, and wash the straw off the ice, break it up and put it in the can, and someone'd cut up a big bunch of lemons and make lemonade, or ice for ice water, and then the Watkins man'd come around like once the month and you could buy any kind of household stuff to cook with, like baking powder, soda, and they even sold some kind of drink that came into a big chunk they call cold cow, and they used to make a drink like Coca Cola out of it, you just break off a chunk and put it in the bucket of

water and it would dissolve up, you didn't have to add sugar or nothing to it and it'd be almost the same as buying a can of Coke out of a store and you'd have plenty left to drink and everybody'd have a big time on the weekend. 02:05:09

02:05:11 GB: At what age did you start playing guitar?
02:05:13

02:05:16 JJ: Let's see, I was born in '24, I'd say about 1929 or '30, 'cause I started just when I was seeing this man on the chain gang showed me a few things on it and then I wouldn't leave my father's guitar alone. I just kept getting it when he'd be working, messing with it, and he used to fuss about somebody bothering his guitar and it'd be me. 02:05:44

02:05:44 GB: But you wouldn't let him know. 02:05:45

02:05:45 JJ: I didn't let him know, I ain't never done seen it when he didn't ask who had been messing with it. I ain't never said it and it was me all along. 02:05:57

02:05:58 GB: What kind of music did they play in Woodville when you were growing up? 02:06:02

02:06:03 JJ: When I was growing up, it was named Blues and Mountain Hoe-Down, that's what they called it, you never heard nothing about no folk music, Blue-Grass, or nothing of the sort, it was Blues and Mountain Hoe-Down, that's what it was, that's what they called it. 02:06:20

02:06:20 GB: And did your father play Blues on guitar?
02:06:23

02:06:23 JJ: Yes, that's what he did, he played guitar, banjo, mandolin, eukalelie?, and he made these little penny whistles that you used to blow on. And he called it Blues and he heard a friend was named Bird Thurmond?. I never will forget it. He used to come every weekend, he didn't play nothing, but he could whistle like somebody you ain't never heard in your life and he would whistle a song while my father'd be playing it and it was really fun to watch him. He'd pat both feets and his hands and he'd be whistling and he was almost the same as a whistling machine, that's the truth. I remember one song he used to work so, *Collins?* Floyd Carlton, I don't remember where and when, but he used to do that all the time. 02:07:15

- 02:07:15 GB: Well, uh, did your father also play um, the Hoe-Down type music? 02:07:19
- 02:07:19 JJ: He did, yea he used to play the banjo Hoe-Down type music. That's why I used to hear him and France Turner play, "A Cool Drink of Water before I Die" and they used to play one song that always was our favorite was "Coming Around the Mountain Charmaine Betts", they would laugh, "Get Along Home Sydney", "Boil them Cabbage Down", and then it was one song about a white man and a coon, and a coon, and a coon - that was one Charlotte Herr used to do all the time. I don't know where he got all those songs from, but, and then he used to do one about the Preacher and the big grizzly bear, and stuff like that. And they were calling it Blues and Mountain Hoe-Down. 02:08:07
- 02:08:09 GB: Do you play some of the same songs today that you heard in the community? 02:08:12
- 02:08:12 JJ: Oh yea, I still play some of the same ones, "Railroad Bill" was one of them I learned, you know, my father used to do. 02:08:22
- 02:08:27 GB: Now what about your mother, she was a musician too. 02:08:29
- 02:08:29 JJ: She did, but I can't remember but one song that she sang and it wasn't a spiritual and that was "Put my Little Shoes Away". But she didn't play anything much but spiritual, and she played the chords and things that stretched that long and blow a harmonica. I know she used to sing "Put my Little Shoes Away", but I never did here her sing no Blues or Mountain Hoe-Down songs, or nothing like that. 02:09:05
- 02:09:05 GB: Did she not like that kind of music? 02:09:06
- 02:09:06 JJ: Oh yes, she loved it, but if she sang it, I never heard her. 02:09:13
- 02:09:18 JJ: The reason why I didn't learn nothing from my father, you know, his style of picking. He played the guitar upside down and didn't change the strings a bit, I declare he didn't, and it was impossible to learn anything, the bass string'd be down where the bottom strings were, you know, just turn it right up left-handed and played it just in

*Charmaine Betts
Cindy*

part so I didn't learn anything from him.

02:09:43

02:09:44 GB: Were there other guitar players around?
02:09:46

02:09:46 JJ: Yea, there was a lot of guitar players around, but he was the only one I can remember played left-handed. Course everybody was amazed how he'd turn it, you know, upside down and would play it. I know Eddie Washington was a right-handed guitar player, but he wasn't much of a picker, he was just a singer and a strummer, you know, a competent lad, and was a boy named Richard Kilber who was a good guitar picker around us, Snuckoms Turner, oh there was just a lot of guitar pickers around the area when I grew up.
02:10:23

02:10:24 GB: And were all these black guitar players?
02:10:26

02:10:26 JJ: Yea all of them were, all except a few, now there was one came in from Tennessee who played slide and did a little bit of finger-picking, but it was mostly on the slide - he was named Joe Cason and there was another fiddler that came in that was a great fiddler, was named R. Compton that came in the county, but I think he was out of Tennessee or Texas somewhere in there, he was a powerful fiddler. And then there was some like from down 'round Fredericksburg. I never knew at the time, but you said William Moore used to come by to see my father back in the thirties, 'cause I remember hearing him call him, "Here comes the barber". He always needed a haircut and he used to tell people "Here comes the barber" and I never did know what it meant and she told me the last year that's who it was. And then I used to hear her talk about Lemon Jeffers came somewhere from the lower part of Virginia, was 1930 and played for a soul session, now I don't know if that be true, I used to hear her talk about that.
02:11:40

02:11:40 GB: So you might have seen William Moore play when you were... 02:11:43

02:11:43 JJ: I'm pretty sure I did, 'cause he come with Willie Walker too, yea, at least that Willie Walker came several times and played some with my father, now what's that, I wouldn't know what those people, no more than what she said.
02:12:00

- 02:12:01 GB: Now I know who William Moore was, but I don't know Willie Walker. Did he record a tune?
02:12:06
- 02:12:06 JJ: Willie Walker made one record, and with the "South Carolina rag" on one side and "Betty and the Perdee" on the other. But she said Willie Walker came up several times, William Moore, she said he used to come regularly, 'cause they used to tell people but if you need a haircut, yea, come to Bob. 02:12:29
- 02:12:29 GB: That's a pretty far piece of travelling for him to come down from. 02:12:33
- 02:12:33 JJ: Well it was a man named Henry Mitchell, had a truck back then, and he used to haul people to the social, church, and just everywhere. He'd put a great big thing of straw in the back and he would pack people on that truck for ten cents a piece, 'cause I can remember when he used to haul them you know back from field days and things at the end of the school, yea because I know I rode in the back of his truck, one time we were going to a school gathering, what they'd do at the end of the year all the schools would get together and have one big field day and I can remember him hauling people to it and his name was Henry Mitchell and he was from, oh, all around Madison or Crigneysville, down around in that area, then very likely he could have rode up there with him. And then some of them people had automobiles back then, I know old Henry Bear, we used to call him uncle Henry Bear, was driving a 1918 Star once, I can remember having, and anyway the 1923 T model Ford and Tom Clave, who was the blacksmith in there, a black man, that had a T model Ford and he had too much to drink and the car ran away from him and climbed up a light pole and turned over with him and threw him out over in the creek, and he said it'd liked to drown him. I can remember that, and which he could've, you know how the car was on but I know he used to come more.
02:14:12
- 02:14:23 GB: You said something about the association? What is that?
02:14:26
FROM MS TO CU 02:14:25
- 02:14:27 JJ: Association? Well all the churches get together and have one big, you know, meeting down on the ground and then after that they'll have a whole week's meeting, that's what the association

is, association. Sometimes they'll be a thousand people get together for that. They come from everywhere. They still have all day meeting once a year at churches now, but they like have all-day meeting but then after that they'll have revival for a whole week, and then they don't have it no more until the next year. And they have like soul ?chasing? when they all would gwt together maybe like in Rappahanock county, next year it'd be in Madison, or the next year it could be in Fredericksburg, they don't have it in the same place every year, they move it from one place to another. 02:15:24

02:15:24 GB: Was that mainly Baptist churches that did that? 02:15:26

02:15:26 JJ: I don't know what all churches did, but I know it was the Baptists, sure was the Baptist did it. 02:15:31

02:15:32 GB: And musicians would go to that and play sometimes? 02:15:35

02:15:35 JJ: Well she said Lillian Jeffers came one time and played for 3 days that one in the lower part of Virginia, but I don't know what part of Virginia it was. Course when I grow up, they didn't allow no guitar around the church and this could have been out away from the church in a hall somewhere, I don't know. 02:15:55

02:15:55 GB: That's what I wondered about. 02:15:57

02:15:57 JJ: Yea, 'cause I remember old Fannie Wheaton hit the horse with Otis Burles on it, he was the preacher and the prefect was the guitar player, Benzian Burle and the horse riled up and threw the Blues man off and the preacher stayed on, and she ran both of them off and called them the devil. He kept preaching to us that the Lord was coming on a white horse, and she looked up and saw those Burles with the guitar behind the preacher and she called them hypocrites and she hauled off and hit the horse in the rear with a big stick. And the horse rared way up and threwed the Blues man off with the guitar, he fell off behind them and almost took off with the preacher on him and she ran both of them off. 02:16:46

02:16:49 GB: So not all religious people were opposed to the Blues music? 02:16:52

- 02:16:53 JJ: Oh no, at the church, you couldn't go nowhere around the church with it, but after church at somebody's house everybody got together and played the music and did the dancing, all like that.
02:17:07
MS TO CU AT 02:17:07
- 02:17:08 GB: Were there some people though that wouldn't have anything to do with the Blues?
02:17:11
- 02:17:12 JJ: None as I can ever remember of, I really wouldn't, everybody that was in that era seemed to love the music and take right to it.
02:17:23
- 02:17:27 GB: Are there certain songs that you play that you associate with the people that you learned them from?
02:17:33
- 02:17:33 JJ: Yea there is alot of the songs I play I associate with some of the people I learned them from. 02:17:39
- 02:17:40 GB: Could you give us a few examples?
02:17:43
- 02:17:43 JJ: Well, I learned a song, "Going Down in Georgia on a Horn" I learned from a man named Benzian Burles, who was associated with him, and then I think the "Police Dog Blues", which I never met Brian Blake, certainly associate with him, that's where I learned it from, you know, from a 78 record, and uh, I learned some of Blind Boy Phyllis', like "Trucking Up Baby" and "My Little Woman's so Sweet". I never met him, but you know pretty much on the same basis, which I feel like I have sometime. 02:18:23
- 02:18:26 GB: What about [people you knew, though] songs you learned directly from other people in your family or community?
02:18:33
- 02:18:34 JJ: Yea I did learn some from some of the people around the area, just like I told you I learned "Railroad Bill" from my father, the singing part of it, but I never learned none of his picking, and "~~Barlim Cab is Down~~", you know, is mountain hoe-down, that I learned from some of the people around the area, like France Turner and some of the banjo pickers, "Get Along Home Sydney" and stuff like that, I learned from just the people

Blind Boy
Phyllis

that used to dance at Evelyn? and "Going up North, Pull my Britches off, Dancing in my Long Shirt Tail", my father used to do it, France Turner used to play there, you know on the banjo and that's where I learned the song from, just from some of the neighbors and people used to dance back at that time. 02:19:30

02:19:32

GB: Are there any songs that you do that are particularly meaningful to you? Particularly important? Seem to say anything for you? 02:19:44

02:19:44

JJ: Yea, I do. I love Blues music, well which I love all music, but I think Blues says more for me than the others really do, I don't know for why, just seems maybe I know it better, I would, But I really do enjoy the Blues. It meant a lot for me. I wouldn't have been able to make it if I hadn't have had Blues. Yes I really do believe that. It was no kind of club, it was nothing, and once you heard that guitar music, that was it, it was like just me going to heaven and coming back, it really was. 02:20:30

END

same as

VFP VIDEOTAPE TRANSCRIPT

SUBJECT: John Jackson

TAPE NO.: 3

DATE: 8/13/91

TIME CODE

AUDIO

03:00:20 (picture) CU OF JJ

03:00:32 GB: I don't think we talked too much about Happy. Did you tell us how you met him specifically? I know you tell a story about going down to the spring and he was just there? 03:00:41

03:00:41 JJ: Well, I don't know that I did, what it was, I was just chopping wood at the wood ~~pile~~ trying to get some wood and he kept going back and forth to the spring getting water, making so much noise when he walked, and I wondered how come he make so much noise and I met him at the spring, and he had a chain on his leg with a ball about that big on it, may have been bigger and so when I got talking to him, he wanted to know what we did around there. And I told him father worked on the farm and us little ones we danced while father played the guitar and mandolin, eukalelie? and the banjo. My mother played the accordion and harmonica. And he said if you bring your daddy's guitar down here I'll play you a song and I used to get the guitar out the house and meet him at the spring and he'd play me a song and then he'd go back with a bucket of water, in a little while he'd be back and he'd play me another song and it went on like that for about six months and then they finally took the chains off his leg and made a trustee out of him and then every evening at six o'clock when he'd get off from the camp, he would come up to the house and stay 'til nine o'clock at night and Mother'd fix dinner for him and he would play songs the whole time he was there and he used to sit me on his knee and try to learn me some chords and finger-picking and those open tunes, they stuck right in my head, but I couldn't learn none of his style of finger-picking and he really had a lot of influence on me getting started playing. And so in another six months they set him free and he stayed with us 2 or 3 days and he got up one morning and said he had to go away for a couple days, but I'll be back, so we help him to the next little town of Spareville and he got on the mail

Sperryville

truck. We never did lay eyes on him again.) That was the end of that one. Don't know where he ever went. 03:02:43

03:02:48 FROM CU TO ECU

03:02:46 GB: Did he play slide? 03:02:48

03:02:48 JJ: He played some slide too, yea he had some kind of slide he made on the road there. But I don't remember what it was, don't remember what it was. I know he had some sort of slide. I believe it was part of a brass pipe had been cut out and it was just enough for him to stick his finger in, but the pipe wasn't all together like James's, it had a great big bite out the side of it, seems to me I can remember that great big bite out the side. It was either brass or carpet pipe one.
03:03:26

03:03:26 GB: And how old a man was he? 03:03:28

03:03:28 JJ: I would say he was a man somewhere between 25 or 30 when I seen him, he was very young.
03:03:36

03:03:37 GB: But you don't have any idea where he came from? 03:03:39

03:03:39 JJ: Indeed I don't, he was on the chain gang. We had just hundreds of convicts building that road and they were building it with mules and dynamite and hammers, and of course they had some, you know, tractors, and they set up their own thing to grind up the rock with when they blasted out and they would bust some of it with hammers and then they'd haul it on wheelbarrows and then they had some truck and they cooked their own tar 'cause I can remember how that stuff smelled when they was cooking it. 03:04:15

03:04:15 GB: Now where was the nearest prison around here? I'm trying to figure out where it was. 03:04:18

03:04:18 JJ: There was no prison, they had camp, they'd just build a camp in the field on some of the farmer's fields, and then it was guarded, 'cause we would walk up on the hill off from the house and look down over in the bottom at the convict camp. They built their own. And we would sit there until he came out the camp and we would walk him back to the house, then about nine o'clock us little ones would walk him back to the camp because some of the neighbors was awful upset

about the convicts being in there. But they was well guarded, they had guards with these pump guns, I can remember them very well - pump guns.
03:04:59

03:05:00 GB: So he even could have come from the state pen at Richmond. 03:05:02

03:05:04 JJ: Could have been. Somebody seemed to think he was from out of North Carolina,? for we's Carolina too?, there's no telling where he come from.
03:05:12

03:05:12 GB: Well I know the state used to rent their convicts out for labor. 03:05:16

03:05:16 JJ: Well maybe so, they could've come from Richmond, but I know they had hundreds of them on the road, building that road with them. They had mules and hammers and blasting powders, and I can remember one air hammer that they had, drilling holes in the rock, blow it out and blasting it out that-a -way. But now where he come from I have no idea. 03:05:45

03:05:45 GB: As far as what you learned from him, that was specific tunes or just the way to tune it?
03:05:53

03:05:45 GB: As far as what you learned from him, that was specific tunes or just the way to tune it?
03:05:53
FROM ECU TO CU AT 03:05:51

03:05:53 { JJ: Well I know he showed me how to learn those open tunes, I caught on to them very quick, But I couldn't learn none of his picking.
03:06:02

03:06:03 (JJ tells someone, "You can get him out" talking about some animal) 03:06:24
MS OF JJ 03:06:24

03:06:24 GB: But did you learn specific tunes from him that you still remember? 03:06:28

03:06:28 JJ: The only tune I can remember, the "Midnight Blues", the one you know I played a little bit of for you. 03:06:35

03:06:40 GB: Tell me about, at one point in your life you gave up guitar playing. 03:06:45

03:06:45

JJ: I did. I don't know, I guess I was about 20, 21 years old by then, and before then I used to play for a lot of parties and dances around. Somebody had a dance or party pretty near every weekend. You know like a Saturday night and I used to go play for the dances, and this one particular dance I was playing for just happened to be a real bad fight and I said if I get out of here alive I'll never do this again, and I didn't, I hadn't gotten married then, I reckon I was married for about six months - about six months to a year, I reckon - and so I managed to get out alive and get in my car and get away and I quit playing and I put the guitar down, and that was in 1946 and I didn't play again until 1964, and I met Chuck Perdue and that's how I was discovered in the gas station up in the city of Fairfax, by Chuck Perdue.

03:07:54

03:07:54

GB: And what happened then after you met Chuck?
03:07:57

03:07:57

JJ: Well after Elvis Presley started this dance with this hoop dance, you know Frank Stokes and the Jerk? Band put out a song about "Walk Right out and Let your Sweet Mind Roll On" back in the early Twenties and Frank Sinatra's daughter got a hold of it and made a big hit on it in 1964. Well back in '64 the kids wanted to do this hoop dance and a bunch of them came down to my house, I lived in the little town of Fairfax. They were playing ball and they got tired of playing ball and they wanted to do this hoop dance and they kept asking me to get the guitar out and play "Walk Right in and Let your Sweet Mind Roll On", so when I did and the mailman -

03:08:44

03:08:44

I was sitting on the porch playing it - and he brought some mail to the house and he heard me playing it and he just wouldn't leave me alone, saying I got a part time job just two blocks right up on the hill there, he said at the Amoco station pumping gas at night. He said you get your guitar and please come up here, if you just come up here and learn me how to play it. So he just kept on asking and I told him I would. So when I got the guitar and went on up there that night, and I was sitting in the back of the station learning him how to play it and this man come in for gas and came running in the back of the station wanting to know what I was playing and I said nothing and he just kept on at me and I played him Mississippi John Herr's? "Candyman".

03:09:27

Hurt's

308 - 4 min
3:12

Jug

03:09:27

He asked me where I learned it and I told him off a 78 record and he wanted to know what else I play. And I said nothing, I ain't played no guitar since '46 and I hadn't. He said, you got a guitar you must know more than one song. So I played him a Blind Boy ~~Phillips~~^{Tuller}'s song, "Trucking up Baby". He wanted to know where I learned it and I told him off a 78 record and then he asked me where I live and I said that little house down there, it's just two blocks from here and he asked me how long I'd been living there and I told him probably since '49, December 28, you know stuff like that. And so he got his gas and went on, I didn't think no more about it. 03:10:12

03:10:12

The next evening when I come home from work he was sitting on my porch and he said well, I come to see you again, I want to hear you play a little bit more. So I played him a whole bunch of stuff and told him I hadn't played since '46 and before he left he asked me if I'd like to go in town and meet the man wrote "Candyman". I said that man ain't living now he's pushing up tulips. And he said, oh yes he is, he said Mississippi John Herr's playing up in Terrol Place in Georgetown. Said now you be ready Friday night and I'm going to take you over to meet him. So sure enough he did and I seen this little man, but I still didn't believe it was him. But the minute I heard him play "Candyman", I knew he was the man. So I got to meet Mississippi John Hurt that night, ? Cardin, Skip James, and a whole bunch of other people, two weeks later they brought another Blues man in, was Nance Lestin, so Chuck come by and pick me up, him and Nan, to go over and meet him. So met Nance Lestin, then they asked me would I play just two songs on the stage and I played about half of a song and this man jumped up out the audience, said I want to make a record by that man. 03:11:30

03:11:30

Well the next day about 11:00 he came out with all these little boxes, looked like a radio, and I started playing about 11:00 and played untill 11:00 that night, and played 90 songs, and then in 1965, April or May, the record came out. And that's how I got to be Travelling and playing ever since. That's the way it all happened.

03:11:57

03:11:59

GB: And since then you've done a good bit of traveling, haven't you?
03:12:01

03:12:01 JJ: Yes, I have - I certainly have.
03:12:03

03:12:04 GB: Where all have you been to play your music?
03:12:06

03:12:07 FROM MS TO CU ENDS 03:12:23

03:12:06 JJ: Jesus Christ, I couldn't remember all the different countries I've been in. I've been all through Europe many times, I went one tour around the world for the State Department and I've been in just about every state in the United States and I've been in pretty near every country in South America and the only country I know I've never been in is China, I've never been in China, but I've been in Thailand, and you know, Tokyo, of course that tour, I went around the world took me all over the world, took me through all them part of the countries, and I just don't know all the countries I've been in. 03:12:50

03:12:50 GB: Sounds like you've been in quite a few.
03:12:51

03:12:51 JJ: Yea, we went in what, four different countries this time on the tour this time in Europe I believe. Several different ones, yea.
03:13:03

03:13:04 GB: How does that make you feel about your music to be appreciated by so many people all over the world? 03:13:08

03:13:09 JJ: Well it makes me feel real good, but I enjoy it just as much as they do, it makes me happy when I'm done, I really do 03:13:18

03:13:19 GB: Why do you think so many people like what you do? Can you explain? 03:13:24

03:13:25 JJ: Indeed I can't, I really can't. Sometimes when I walk out on the stage, I feel like, O.K., I'm going to get booted off the stage, but it always works out. I had people singing right along with me, you know, when we was overseas this time, you know, on the "Midnight Special", when I was singing in American, they was singing in, what was it, Hungary. Was Hungary when I was down there, they was singing it, you'd know it was the "Midnight Special" but they was singing in another language, and I just don't understand it, I really don't. They seemed to understand it just very well, but I don't know how it's done. 03:14:11

03:14:16 GB: Has your celebrity affected you? 03:14:20

03:14:20 JJ: Oh no indeed, I ain't changed one bit and never will. I ain't never forgot where I come from, not one bit. I'm the same person I've always been and I'll never change. Well you can't change what the Lord give you, now, people say I've got a forked tongue by the way I talk, sometimes I get it if I'm from Texas, sometime from Tennessee, from Alabama, from every state except Virginia, ain't that right? (said to onlooker). But I'll never change, I really won't. 03:14:58

03:14:02 GB: Do you think your music offers something to the younger kids that are growing up? Is there - what's important about it? What can they get out of it? 03:15:12

03:15:12 JJ: Well they can get a great deal out of it, and here's a great feeling, right there's a good feeling even when other people's done as well as myself - I really do, there's plenty to get out of it, this is what they call the roots of the music. It really is the roots of the music and all the rest of the music originated from it, which, some of the youths may not understand that, but they will when they get a little bit older, I've had you know some people come here into rock music and then I've had them come back a few years later wanting to get back into this, so very well they'll understand that, you know I think they get a great deal out of it, I really do. We heard a lot of good young Blues people that's into this Blues, it really is. Now I can't say that it's an awful lot of Black, but it 'tis a lot of white Blues players and they're really good. I can name quite a few of them, it's you know, in the list of what they call the Piedmont Blues. 03:16:28

03:16:30 GB: Thanks to you and having heard your records? 03:16:31

03:16:31 JJ: Yea, that's right. It's certainly true, and we just get it all the time, sometimes about three or four times a week about people wanting me to teach and which I'm not able to do that, I'm not set up for it, (he says to someone in the background: but you got the names for it, you express it, you tell it.) She replies but inaudible.
FROM VCU TO CU AT 03:17:06

- 03:17:23 JJ: Oh there's a lot of interest in teaching this here, we get it all the time, which I'm just not able to teach right yet, you have to have a time and place to do it. 03:17:37
- 03:17:40 GB: You mentioned that it's mostly young white people who are getting into the Blues, the acoustic lead music now, why is that? Why are not young black people interested? 03:17:49
- 03:17:49 JJ: There's a few young Black people getting into it, but I would say it's 10 to 1 on the basis of that, it's 10 white to 1 black is into, what they call on the East coast, the Piedmont Blues, finger-picking style. 03:18:07
- 03:18:07 GB: Any idea why? 03:18:09
- 03:18:09 JJ: I really don't know, I think a lot of young blacks just don't like this type of music, maybe it's not just up to date enough for them or just what it is - some like it and some don't. 03:18:24
- 03:18:25 GB: Do you think they appreciate the historical value of it? 03:18:28
- 03:18:28 JJ: No I really don't think some of them don't. I really don't now, which I ain't never heard them say they don't appreciate it, but I think by them not coming out, you don't see many of them at concerts and things like that and that tells me, you know, that they don't appreciate it as much as what you would call Rap music or Soul or Disco or Rock music, but now when there's a Rock concert comes up you see more there than ever at it. 03:19:08
- 03:19:12 GB: Do you ever think or wish you could reach young Black people and teach them about this tradition? 03:19:20
- 03:19:20 JJ: Yea, I wish I could reach them, but it really never occurred to me, I get out there and do what I do and it's there if they wants it, if they don't it's a shame what you can do about it, but I did hears some young Blacks that come and say they'd like to get into it. In fact there was one when you was here's last that was very much rapped op in it, Richard Joyce, he's a young Black man that's into it, then his son in Washington learned to play real good, what's his name, uh, Paul Watkins, and the other boy that plays the guitar, Mike Roach, and then there's another fellow named

Green, he is into it, you know there's some young
Blacks into it, but not nearly as many as the
Whites that have gotten into it 03:20:28

03:20:30

TAPE ENDS

VFP VIDEOTAPE TRANSCRIPT

SUBJECT: John Jackson

TAPE NO.: 4

DATE: 8/13/91

TIME CODE

AUDIO

03:20:47

MS OF JJ

03:22:51

JJ: They started moving away when there was so much protest in the '60's after Louisville. (Woman talking in background) Well I guess they associate my music, you know, sort of like, it's based on hard times, that's what, you know, everybody said, based on the hard time, and I guess you know, it may have some racial barriers as well, and so, it started in the '60's, I know it did. 03:21:30

03:21:32

GB: Well do you think then, that's reason enough to reject it? 03:21:39

03:21:38

JJ: Well you know there was so much protests going on and marches and all back in the '60's and I think that's what done it, it's gotten much better obviously in the 70's and 80's and up to now, and I still think it's getting better, I really do. I don't know what it was, they called it Uncle Tom's music, a lot of young Blacks did, I guess, you know, it dated back to when it wasn't segregation, more or less, what I think. 03:22:13

03:22:18

GB: But isn't there a relevance, doesn't this music have relevance for kids today? 03:22:22

03:22:22

JJ: Yes, it has relevance for the kids today, but I think what it is, it ain't the kind of music that they'd like to dance and move around to. You take Rap music or Soul or Disco or Rock, you see all sorts of dancing going on, that different kind of dancing I seen when I grew up and so the kind of music I do don't call for that kind of movement, and I think that has something to do with it as well. 03:22:56

03:22:59

GB: If you could address a group of young Black kids that don't know anything about your music, what would you tell them? 03:23:04

03:23:04 JJ: Well I'd tell them I lived off it, it was all I had when I grew up, and I appreciated most anything and still do, and if we didn't have this music along with the gospel, I just don't know what would've happened. I really wouldn't 'cause we didn't have anything, and it made everybody happy, not only me, everybody in the neighborhood and every place I'd ever been, dances and anything else in the neighborhood and to hear other people come up like I did, that's what it was, they really enjoyed it, and it really hit the spot with me and a lot of other people. 03:23:47

03:23:51 GB: What do you know about the history of this music? 03:23:54

03:23:56 JJ: I can't say where it come from, most people tell me that this music came from Africa, you know to start with, but once it got over here it changed around from the people working in the fields, building the railroads, and farming, and then you know Spirituals, that's where a lot of Spirituals got started, from people farming, working in the fields, and I really believe that's how it got started, 'cause it's no research what did on the music then back no more than I did hear, somebody said, back in 1880, in Scott Joplin's day, that it was a Blues player, but there was no research done on him. Now I can't go back that far. 03:24:49

03:24:50 GB: You mentioned you had an uncle that played the banjo? 03:24:52

03:24:52 JJ: I did. 03:24:53

03:24:54 GB: How does - did he play Blues on the Banjo? 03:24:58

03:24:58 JJ: He picked three- fingers and a thumb style, the same Bluegrass style that the people doing today. And I don't know where he got it from, and he played stuff like "Cool Drink of Water Before I Die" and I heard him play "Groundhog", you know, like "Get Along Home Sydney", "Coming Around the Mountain Charmine Betts", I don't know where he got little songs like that, now who wrote them or anything, they called them Mountain Hoe Down and that's what they played on the banjo, he was the only one I'd ever seen picked with three fingers and a thumb and he never had no picks or like that - I never saw no picks on his hand, and I don't know where he learned that style from, whether it was something he picked up, he was a thoroughbred

Injun and his name was Jim Clark, and he married my aunt Nellie, and I used to stay with them some, and he's the first man I knew picked three - fingers and a thumb style. I don't know where he got it from. 03:26:10

03:26:10 GB: Did he grow up around Rappahanock? 03:26:13

03:26:13 JJ: He grew up in Rappahanock County, was a family of Injuns named Clark and their home place was over in Flynn Hills, Virginia and some man wrote me a letter from California and said it was a family of Injuns in Virginia and the name was Clark, and they wanted to do some research or something, the sheriff'd know something about that. He probably could tell you something about it if you wanted to mention it to him, this man was from U.C. Davis, California and was doing research on the Injun - and his name was Jim Clark and he was a thoroughbred Injun, but I don't know what tribe he was from, and he had a sister named Lila Clark. And he wore one big plait of hair about that long and he would ball it up and put his hat on it and you would never know it until he pulled that hat off and that big old roll of hair, plait of hair would come down, it would come clean down underneath his arm. That's the truth. And he used to stick his finger in his mouth and make some kind of noise when he got mad, he never would curse, but he would get mad and stomp his feet when he got real angry. 03:27:36

03:30:32 GB: But James at least is carrying your music on?
03:30:36

03:30:36 JJ: Yea, James has learned real good, he came in from school one day and asked me to learn him play "Freight Train", said the teachers were trying to tell him he didn't know what he was doing and trying to learn him to play with a pick, said he couldn't and said I learned him to play "Freight Train" and he went back over there and the music teacher got up and said he wasn't doing it right and he showed them, said let me show you how my Daddy learned me how to play, and he played it for them and the teacher never bothered him no more, had him teaching the other kids 03:31:11

03:31:19 FROM CU TO MS

03:31:44 FROM MS TO VCU

03:31:15 (Conversation going on) 'til 03:31:53

- 03:31:53 Lady: What do you think personally is the future of the Blues? 03:31:55
- 03:31:55 JJ: Is the future of the Blues? What I think it is? It's the happiness that you get out of it. Where's it going? This Blues is going to never die, it's here to stay. Absolutely. Because there's too many white people going to carry the tradition on even if the Blacks don't, that's where the future's going to be, it's going to be so widespread after a while it's going to be just the same as rock and roll when Elvis Presley was doing it, when the right peoples get into it. ...We got the 78 records, I guess the first time we really heard it good after the convict left, it was when Benzian Burles came back from the penitentiary and he played "Going Down to Georgia On a Horn" and everybody liked to went crazy, I think the future of the Blues is here to stay. ... Oh yea I love it as much today as I ever did. 03:33:17
- 03:33:17 GB: You said something about getting happiness out of it? 03:33:21
- 03:33:22 Yea, you get a great deal of happiness, at least I do, I can't speak for the other Blues players, but evidently they do too, if they didn't, they wouldn't play it. It makes me real happy, I've been down and out before now, pick up a guitar and in a few minutes everything would be alright. 03:33:45
- 03:39:57 picture of JJ with Jimmy Carter and wife
- 03:40:01 GB: Can you tell us about, I think you've played for every president in the past four administrations or something like that? 03:40:07
- 03:40:07 JJ: Well uh, I really never got to meet Mr. Nixon, Mr. Reagan didn't want, they wasn't anybody ? ? . But I did get to meet Mr. Carter for a Labor Day picnic or some kind of activity and he came right out and sat down in the audience and after I finished playing he sent his daughter Amy over and she said, "John, don't you and Paula go nowhere, Momma and Daddy wants to meet you". So when he got right up and came to us and shook hands he said, that's the kind of music I was raised on," he said. And he said, "That's down - home music" and he said, "I want to get a picture with you all, and he put Paula on side of him and me over on the other side of his wife and had them

- take that picture here, which we didn't get it right then, but somebody mailed it to us about a week later. 03:41:04
- 03:41:07 see letter from Reagan
- 03:41:07 JJ: And these pictures here, from ?? ceremony were from 1986, an award from the Endowment they forming us. That was given and signed by the president and I was real glad to get them. 03:41:27
- 03:41:38 see award for National Heritage Fellowship: awarded 1986
- 03:41:39 GB: What is this called again?
- 03:41:39 JJ: The Award from the Endowment of the Performing Arts. 03:41:45
- 03:41:46 (person in way) 03:41:49
- 03:41:51 (Talking about grabbing that static) 03:41:56
- 03:41:58 JJ: Yea the first one was a fellowship that was signed by the president that they give out, when I got it in '86, I believe it was, there was 13 other people, including myself that got it. 03:42:14
- 03:42:14 see Reagan letter again
- 03:42:14 JJ: Of which ^{Orville} Ohryvelle Reese was one of them, and then it was two fellows from out the Cajun and Louis Denn that got it and I can't remember who all the others were but, and then there was one man from Injun, from Oklahoma got it too that year. 03:42:35
- 03:42:37 award from Fairfax fair 1984
- 03:42:38 JJ: ...which from what I understand I was real glad to get that, real glad to get it. 03:42:45
- 03:42:51 picture from 1966
- 03:42:51 JJ: This was 1965 or '66, I don't remember which. 03:43:00
- 03:43:00 GB: And who was that? 03:43:01
- 03:43:01 JJ: Joe Pikenson, he worked ... tape over.