

Interview

James Hurst

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(Some of this interview is on tape.)

Mr. James Hurst was born here. His family home was located on Route 172 near the present road to Onslow Beach. There are pecan trees on both sides of the road a little way past the triangle area where Route 172 meets the Main Gate Road. His home was right in the middle of them. He left the area and went away to college. After college, he worked in the International Banking Office of a large New York bank. He wrote a famous short story called the Scarlet Ibis . The setting for this story is Old Woman Swamp, now shown on maps as Gillette Creek, and the flower garden described in the story was the garden beside his home. Mr. Hurst now lives in New Bern.

Early History of the Area

The first settlers in this area entered either through the port of Wilmington or Beaufort. There were no roads at the time so travel was by water. Land in the area was free until after the Revolutionary War . People got land grants from the Provincial Governor. As families grew, they divided their land grants between their children. The first families to settle the area made their homes along the coast, on New River, or up one of the creeks. Each family had its own landing. Their homes were built well back from the water so that passing boats could not see them. People feared the pirates that may be in the area. The area that is now Onslow County was then part of either the county of Carteret or New Hanover. New River was the dividing line between the two counties.

In 1734, the Royal Governor gave the residents of the area permission to form the county of Onslow. His permission was given because of the great distance the people had to travel to the County Seat. In those days they tried to locate the County Seat no further than one days travel by horse back from all parts of the county. It normally was about 25 miles.

The first County Court House was located at Jarrott's Point on Court House Bay. The land belonged to John Williams. He let the county use a log house on his property until they were able to build a courthouse. The plans called for the court house to be made of logs, with stocks, and a jail. The jail was to be larger than the court house. There are records of court cases that were held there. They had cases dealing with land and people who drank too much. People were put in the stocks for being drunk. The court met once a month and everyone went whether they had business there or not. It was a holiday when people could do business and have fun at the same time. Many got drunk. This courthouse was never built. Court was held in the William's building from 1735-1735. It was decided they would build it in a more central location. The next site that records show court being held was at the home of Christian

Heidelberg and later in 1735 it was held at the home of Joseph Howard. In 1737, court was held at the new courthouse on Paradise Point. In 1744, when the justices arrived to hold court they found the courthouse had been burned down and court was held in the home of John Taylor. Between 1744 and 1752 court was held in the homes of Thomas Black and James Foyle in Johnston while a new courthouse was being built. (Johnston was directly across from Hadnot Point. About 1750, a town was laid out with streets and lots. People bought lots and built homes.) The entire town was wiped out by a hurricane and tornado in 1752. and the site of the courthouse was moved to its present site in Jacksonville which at that time was known as Wantland's Ferry. There was nothing there at the time but the river was narrow and easy to cross at that point and it was further from the ocean and therefore should not be as effected by storms. It was called Onslow Court House until 1846 when it was renamed after Andrew Jackson. In 1840, it became the town of Jacksonville.

Most people were subsistent farmers who also fished for food. The Ward family however settled around Brown's Creek. They came from Massachusetts with slaves. . Brown's and Duck's Creeks were settled and there was a post office on Duck Creek in the 1700's.

Duck's Creek which was deeper was the center of large plantations owned by the Wards and Fonvilles at the time of the Civil War. In addition, the Montfort family had a plantation and the Simmons family had one at what is now Paradise Point, known then as Simmons Point. These plantations were several hundred acres. Most families had less than 100 acres and few owned slaves. In 1860, there were 3,000 people in Onslow County most being farmers who farmed their own land.

Revolution

During the Revolutionary War, there was little friction in Onslow County between the Patriots and Tories. Two Tories were sentenced to be hanged in Richlands but no one wanted to hang them. The judge announced that if two Patriot girls would marry them they would not be hanged. Immediately two girls stepped forward, married the boys and neither boy was hanged. In 1771, Col. Cray from Duck Creek marched 25 men to New Bern where he joined Governor Tryon and they marched to Alamance. When they arrived there, no one wanted to kill anyone. This was however the first clash with Loyalists in the state.

Civil War

Onslow saw little action during the Civil War. The North captured Beaufort and Carteret County while the South was in control of Onslow County. The White Oak River being the dividing line between the two. Union troops came up the New River on the gunboat, "The Ellis". They fired a cannonball through a house. As they were leaving, they were shot by Confederate artillery posted on the bluff. Captain Crushing and his men escaped on a schooner.

Note: Mr. Hurst stated that his family never socialized with many families. He said that he never really knew why but that he now feels that it was because his family apparently had Unionist sympathy. His great grandmother was a Quaker and this may

have had something to do with their beliefs.

Note: K.B.Hurst said that it was not spoken of much but that there were counterfeit army groups that managed to stay in hiding when the central command wanted information. They would be told that the unit was on a long march some place or anyplace out of site.

Schools

The earliest schools in the area were called Old Field Schools. Mr. Hurst's great grandfather, John Isaac Hurst had two sons William H. Hurst and Andrew Jackson Hurst. When they were married, they lived about two miles apart. About 1870, they built the Hurst School between the two homes and hired a teacher. Other children, who were their neighbors, attended the school also and contributed money as they could to support it. The school teacher came during the school term only which at first was only three months and then went to six months. The teacher lived with one of the families. It was considered a prize if a young man could marry a school teacher. To be a teacher at that time you needed only a high school education. This Hurst school burned in a woods fire about 1900.

The next school to be built was the Provost School which was built about a mile away by their neighbors. Mr. Hurst said that this school was made of tongue and groove boards and had a bell tower. It had one room and had grades one through seven. There were between twenty and twenty five children usually in attendance. It was used as a school until 1931 and then became a church.

The first school that Mr. Hurst attended was the Enon School. It was located about seven miles up Piney Green on the Base toward Route 24. It had three rooms and about ninety students. The school was open from October to March. It was closed for about ten days at Christmas and when there was a hurricane. They got to school by bus. The bus was green wood and looked like a surrey with a motor in the front. It had roll up canvass curtains to keep the rain out. The school had one globe and all the children brought their own books. In 1927, he read from a Baby Ray Reader. There were no standard books. His teacher had previously kept her infant daughter behind the door while she taught.

In 1931, schools in North Carolina were consolidated and the children from this area were sent to Swansboro. The school session was now seven months long and the day began at 9:15 and ended at 3:15. Grades 1-11 were now offered. Prior to this if a child wanted to go to high school they had to go and live with a relative in Jacksonville.

Roads started to be built in the 1930's but the road to Swansboro was a dirt road with two ruts. The school was about nineteen miles away but it took one hour and a half to get there. There were four buses that took the children. The yellow school bus

came into use. It was boxy and the windows pushed out to open. The inside had two long benches down each side for the bigger children and had a small narrow bench down the middle for smaller children. He took his lunch in a small metal pail. When he was older his mother gave him money to buy a moon pie in Swansboro to add to his lunch. Mr. Hurst graduated in 1939. His graduating class had 27 students. In 1942, school extended to twelve grades. School became mandatory in 1900 and in 1933 all text books in North Carolina became uniform.

Home life

Homes were very different than they are today. There was no **electricity** until 1939 and since the people in this area knew they would be moving out in 1941 not many put electricity in their homes. For light people used a lamp that looked like an Aladdin's lamp with a mantle for studying. There were also kerosene and carbide gas lights. Some people had Delco lights which ran on thirty two batteries. This was usually kept in a building near the house and run for three hours a day. When you ironed, there were gasoline irons or flat irons. Everything had to be ironed in those days, even the sheets. Sewing machines ran by a foot pedal if you were lucky enough to have one. Cooking was done on a wood burning stove. Heat was nonexistent except for the fireplaces. Fires were lit in the kitchen and family rooms because of all the wood that was needed. People living here were too far from the ice plants to get ice. They used kerosene refrigerators. In the late 1930's, the Hursts bought one and payed about \$400. This was the first time their family had ice. Milk was kept cold by lowering it by ropes into the well. This well was also used for the animal's water. Water at first was gotten from the well but later they had a water pump. Immediately preceeding dinner Mr. Hurst had the job of going out to get cold water for dinner. He had to top off the water to get it cold. In the cold weather, he had to throw the pump to drain all the water out of the pump so that it would not freeze. When they wanted to use the bathroom, they went to the outhouse. If it was at night they used the pot that was kept under their bed.

Meals were also different then . The whole family ate breakfast together. The ate rice, sausage, biscuits, and coffee. Coffee beans were roasted every Saturday. Every morning he recalls waking up and hearing his mother building the fire in the stove. She had to do this before she began to cook anything. In the summer the big meal was eaten at noon and the farm hands had to be fed too. It was always a hot meal with dessert. For supper in the summer, they ate cold food while in the winter, it was hot soup or meat, rice and sweet potatoes. School lunches were usually a sandwich. Food was served on pottery plates and they used glasses.

Everyone **worked** six days a week. On Sunday, no one worked. Work was determined by size. Children who were eight to ten years old fed the cows, mules, milked the cows, fed and slopped the hogs. To slop a hog meant to let him eat or to give him whatever edible food there was left over from the house. The boys took pride in being able to work in the fields. At about sixteen, the boys worked in the fields as a

man. Every day the children had to feed the stock, gather the eggs, get the corn from the barn and clean it for the cattle and mule, and shell the corn for the chickens, which the women raised for extra money. The girls had to sew, cook, clean, and make the beds. To wash dishes they had to get water, heat the water on the stove wash the dishes and then begin all over again to rinse the dishes. In the summer, the girls had to help prepare the food for the mid day meal for the family and the work hands. They also had to loop the tobacco during tobacco harvest time.

In the winter, they still had many things to do. When they couldn't work in the fields, they cut oaks and pines in the sand hills for fire wood. This wood would be for the entire year.

Mr. Hurst told us that no one had heavy coats or raincoat. He told us that until he was eleven his mother made all their clothes even their underwear.

He told us that farm children had to be "real". He related the following story to demonstrate his point:

His sister was two years older than him. One day their pig had babies. Their father brought home the runt of the litter. His sister adopted it as a pet. She fed him and named him Pug. The pig followed them everywhere. One day when they were at school their father killed the pig. When his sister got home and found out what had happened she threw a tantrum and announced that she would never eat pork again however she got over it in a short period of time.

Discipline was never a problem. Children were brought up to obey at home. If you got into trouble at school, you knew you would be in big trouble when you got home. Parents also never criticized the school or the teacher. If they did, they were looked down on by their neighbors.

Bathing was not done as frequently as it is done now. It was not thought to be healthy for a person to bathe too often. In the summer, however, the men swam often after working in the fields. No one ever thought of washing after a swim. You were already considered clean.

Shopping was also very different in Mr. Hurst's time. His father went to Jacksonville once a month for supplies. Eggs sold for ten cents a dozen, twenty four pounds of flour came first in a barrel and then in a cloth sack for eighty five cents, and sugar was bought in one hundred pound bags. All their clothes and were made at home or purchased from the Sears catalog. Sears was located in Philadelphia and your order was received back in seven days. Montgomery Wards, Spiegel, and National Bellas Hess were other catalog stores.

There were few **doctors**. The women learned to use herbs and home remedies. Every summer most children would get a form of malaria when the mosquitoes got bad in August. They had chills and fever. The mothers all gave their children quinine to cure them. The only time they went to the doctor was for broken bones or a major illnesses. Dental care was almost nonexistent. Teeth were pulled if there was a problem.

Funerals were held at home. If someone died, the casket was placed in the living room for one day and then the person was buried in the family cemetery.

Travel was not easy. Route 17 was built in 1926 and went from New Bern to Wilmington. Roads started to be built in the 1930's and were mostly dirt roads with two ruts in them. To go to Swansboro, you had to go through Hubert on a road that wound

through Bear Creek. There was no bridge over Queen's Creek. People traveled mostly by horse and cart, Model T. Ford, or walked. In fact, he says that he only went to Swansboro once before he went to school.

Holidays and Special Events

Halloween was a holiday that he does not remember celebrating until after he went to school in Swansboro. Then he remembers going back to town with his family at night for a carnival.

Christmas was a special family time. The Christmas baking began before Thanksgiving when the children spent one day in collecting the nuts for the fruit cake. His mother and sister then spent the next day baking the cakes. After they were baked, they then were wrapped in cloth that was soaked in wine to be stored until they were ready to eat at Christmas time. He said that few people drank wine but his mother always used it to soak her cake. The only people who he knew that drank were an elderly brother and sister named Hewitt who lived on the road to Piney Green.

Every year his mother would keep them out of school for their annual trip to shop in New Bern and visit the relatives there. This was a big occasion. They would rise early and all get into the Model T Ford under many blankets. He remembers one particular trip in 1933. He and his sister were given two dollars to buy gifts for his mother, father, brother and sister. They shopped at one of the three five and ten cent stores there. They bought their father a shaving stand and got the rest of the presents they needed and still had change left over. He told us that this was the last present that they gave his father. He got sick on New Years Eve and died January 11, 1934 of pneumonia at the age of sixty one.

For Christmas they usually received an apple an orange, a piece of candy and a toy. He still has some of his presents. One was a toy policeman that he got in 1931. When he got older, instead of a toy he received gloves or socks.

They decorated the house with homemade things. Foil paper from gum wrappers and cigarette paper was used to cover cardboard shapes of stars and angels. They also wrapped acorns. He remembers having their first tree about the time he was in high school. He said some others had trees before that and some people cut holly and greens to decorate their homes.

Christmas was a family time when you went to visit family. You never gave presents to anyone but your immediate family.

Easter

He remembers his sister getting a new outfit. He recalled also that everyone went to church on Easter even the people who never went any other Sunday.

Sharecroppers

Sharecroppers were poor families who worked for other farmers. In exchange for their work, they were given a house to live in and were supposed to be paid. Many people cheated them. When the year was over and they were supposed to be paid,

they found that after they settled their bills they had no money left. Their life was very hard. January 2 was Moving Day for all the sharecroppers and you could see them with all their belongings packed in their wagon moving to the home that they would live in for the next year.

Marine Corps Arrived

The Base was begun in 1940. In August of 1941, the first joint maneuvers were held off Hurst Beach. There were battleships, an air craft carrier, destroyers, and a Red Cross ship. Paratroopers were dropped from planes onto the farm fields around Mr. Hurst's home. One even landed in a big tree in their yard. Tanks cut across their fields and knocked down their fences. It made him feel very strange. The First Marine Division set up a tent camp in the Fall of 1941. Mr. Hurst's Family received a letter notifying them that they had to move on October 27, 1941. People were paid about twelve dollars an acre for their land. Cleared land was valued slightly higher than other land. About 1,500 people had to move. Marines was the only small village at the time. Most of the land was small farms and lumber operations. They received \$1,400 for a mile of beach front. Land had little value at the time.

People who owned land were paid by the government which helped them relocate but sharecroppers, white and black, were paid nothing. A man by the name of Kellum gave the blacks his cow pasture of about one hundred acres. They were told that they could pay him as they had the money. The area was full of water, woods, and rattlesnakes. The people drained the fields, built homes, a church, and a school, and planted crops. Today this place is known as Kellumtown.