

OLIVER FAMILY HISTORY
JOHNNY OLIVER GIBSON AND JACKIE OLIVER MOREHEAD
Interview 089a
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Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: This transcript is from two self-interviews from sisters Johnny Oliver Gibson and Jackie Oliver Morehead. They each separately talk about their memories of growing up in Diboll and living in the Southern Pine Lumber Company town when their father was not an employee of the company. They mention their relationships with company leaders, African-American citizens, and other townspeople.

This is a transcription of a tape made by Johnny Gibson the oldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Oliver and Jackie Oliver Morehead, the youngest daughter.

Johnny Gibson (hereafter JG): I can remember when I was about 4-1/2 years old. We lived on the old home place in Houston County, and Papa had a grocery store at Drusoe, Texas. It was a little village where the post office and the depot were. That was the center of attraction, of course, there in our vicinity in Houston County. And I can remember that late in the evening I would take brother's hand, he was just a toddler, and I would lead him down a dusty road. We would sit by a big tree by the side of the road and wait for Papa to come by. He came by just before dark, and we would walk back to the house with him. I would have had to have been around 4-1/2 years old because brother was 2-1/2 years younger than I, and he was just a toddler. He could walk with my assistance. But any way, Papa had a general merchandise store and Uncle Jim Oliver, his brother, had the same kind of store there in Drusoe. We lived about three miles from that grocery store. Mama and us kids would farm. Now I wasn't big enough to do very much work, but I guess I was a pretty good baby sitter. I guess I have been a baby sitter most of my life.

I can remember the first day I went to school. I can remember that so well. Chloe was the baby then. There was Minnie and Mae, and me and brother. Chloe was born just before we moved to Diboll the first time.

The Diboll camp, I guess it was the Diboll camp – it was a sawmill camp that moved in that area. It was closer to home than it was to Drusoe. So Papa moved his general merchandise store over to the camp, right at the edge of the camp. That was in walking distance. Of course, we could walk to Drusoe, but it was a lot closer to the store after he moved it.

He kept the store there for a time and we continued to farm. He maintained that store there until the camp moved. I don't know where it moved. I just remember that it moved. And he just didn't have a location for a grocery store. So he sold that store. He went to look for a new location, and he went to Diboll. He came back—I don't think he was gone very long, and when he came back, he told Mama that he had bought a place at Diboll. We didn't move right away, but Papa would come home every weekend, and that went on for awhile. He then got a house and moved us to Diboll. We lived there one year. He rented the house and he went in the grocery store with the liquor store in it and a large two-story barn of a place that had a nightclub in the bottom floor. And that nightclub was

a black people's club. He rented that for one year. We all went to school there except brother and Chloe. Brother had not started to school at that time, and I could not have been much more than 8 years old. I don't remember much about going to school in Diboll. I don't remember much about going that year, but I know we went. We liked Diboll very much, us children did. Now that is the only year that I ever remember that we did not farm. We just went to school and we had a real good life and we had an easy life.

But at the end of the year, for some reason he wasn't satisfied there, so we moved over into Trinity County, not too far from Diboll, North Cedar Creek. He rented a big house there and Papa had a good many relatives in Cedar Creek. We farmed that year and went to school. Minnie and Mae met Jimmy Hubbard the year we moved there. The following year we moved again. We moved back to Houston County, not too far from where we originally lived. We went to school at Pisgah and that is where I went to school the first year I ever went to school at Pisgah School. We lived there one year. During the summer, Minnie and Mae both were married. And when that crop was over, Papa decided he wanted to move on. So he left and he was gone a short while. When he came home, he told Mama that he had bought a place in Diboll. And of course, us kids were thrilled to death because we liked Diboll. We had the easiest year of our lives right there in Diboll the first time. We didn't know we were moving back there so he could farm, so we moved. We moved right away.

Papa had bought the house, not the one we had lived in the first time that we lived in Diboll that he rented from Mr. Josey. Mr. Josey was a real nice man. I remember him. He was a big heavy-set man, and just real friendly. I don't know why I remember him. I guess he just left an impression on me. We moved back there. Of course, we had the grocery store, and liquor store. The nightclub, and a couple of rent houses, plus a 40-acre farm. And so we moved back there – we went to work and we started to school. Now I can remember going to school. I must have been around 11 years old. Chloe was just a small baby about three years old when we moved back there the second time. We farmed and Papa took care of the business. We raised corn, cotton, peanuts, sweet potatoes, and a big, big garden. We also had watermelons. We had two horses and a one-horse wagon..a small wagon..a one horse wagon. We cleared – Papa and us kids cleared the biggest part of that 40 acres. It was a wilderness almost and we cleared that and put a 3-strand barbed wire fence all the way around it.

Now Mr. Conner – Gibb Conner – when he went back to buy the property, he bought it from Gibb Conner. I suppose that Gibb Conner must have bought it from Mr. Josey, the few years we were living elsewhere. Anyway, he bought it from Gibb Conner. He and Mr. Conner had a disagreement over the property line. Papa's deed showed that Mr. Conner's fence was on his property seven feet. Papa wanted Mr. Conner to move the fence back on the property line, and Mr. Conner didn't want to. Finally, he realized that Papa was right and he moved the fence. Later on he became good neighbors with them. Mr. and Mrs. Conner had their children. They had a daughter, Pauline, and two sons, Carl and Clifford. They were about the age of brother, but they were a lot bigger than brother. Brother being 2-1/2 years younger than me, I always felt protective of him. He and the Conner boys didn't get along very well, and they did a lot of fighting. They would jump on brother every time they would catch him out by himself, especially coming home from school. If I wasn't with brother, then they would jump on him and just beat him up. I mean they would beat him up because he didn't have a chance with both of them. If I was

along with him, they never did jump on him because I was pretty good size. I was a very tom-boyish child, and I could hold my own with just about the best of them. The four of us, we had some pretty good fights. Anyway that kept Mama and Papa pretty upset – he fact that both of them would jump on brother. Anyway that’s so much for that.

Then we continued to go to school there and farm and that was our home. We could just live there the rest of our lives--you know, until we married and left.

About the first thing he did, he did away with the liquor store, as he just enlarged the grocery store. Then he closed the nightclub. So we didn’t have the nightclub and we didn’t have the liquor store. We just had the grocery store and the rent houses. Then Clemmie was born and a couple of years later Maurice was born and then a couple of years later Jackie was born. I was sixteen years older than you, Jackie. I was sixteen when you were born and you were three years old when Burl and I married in 1925. That is when I left Diboll.

I never did know much about Papa’s personal business. I don’t think any of us did. There was no reason for him to discuss his personal business with us. But I can assure you that Mama knew all about it because Mama and Papa were very, very close. They were extremely close. I never did know that Papa had any money. I never did think that Papa had any money. I never did think anything about it. I just thought we were poor people. I didn’t know that anybody thought we were rich or that Papa had money. I always just thought we were just poor. I know we never did suffer for anything. I never can remember having gone hungry. And I know we had clothes to wear and we always had a place to lay our heads. We worked hard and Papa was very, very conservative. I do know that he saved all the money he could save. I think back now the difference in the money then and the money today - it’s unbelievable.

Anyway, Papa was an uneducated man, but he was an intelligent man. He had a good business mind and he had plenty of horse sense. And he was as honest a man as ever lived. And he was as hard working as any man that ever lived. Now he taught us children to be honest and to work. And that training--that teaching has stayed with us until this day. Everyone of us – we are honest and we are hard working; and most of us, if not everyone of us, are conservative, but not as conservative as Papa was. But Papa – his word was his law to him. If he gave you his word and a handshake, that was as good as anything a lawyer could draw up this day in time. So his word was his honesty and that was sufficient. Whatever money he had, he never earned it one lump sum; he earned it by living a very conservative life, working hard, and taking care of what he made. And it was through hard work and the sweat of his brow.

We continued to go to school there, and of course, you were still a baby, Jackie. That was before you could remember anything that went on. But then you married and moved out to Pine Valley and then (unintelligible), I guess she married three or four years before I did and then Aurie died. Burl and I married in 1925, and I left Diboll and we moved to Dallas.

I never did know much of anything that went on after I left there. Burl and I would go back on vacation, when he would get his vacation in the summer. We would go back to Diboll and carry my family and occasionally we would go on Christmas.

It seems that I haven’t said very much. I thought I could give you more information. I am just hitting the highlights. I am sure that if I had time to just sit down and concentrate on the happenings back in that day and time, that I could remember a lot

more. But I am kinda catching the thoughts as they come to me, things that I remember so vividly. I hope that this can be of some help to you in furnishing the lady whatever you want to give her.

I can imagine how interesting the book will be, and I am really looking forward to reading that book.

(She continues the tape with some personal happenings to her sister, Jackie. I did not include that in the transcription, but picked up with Jackie Oliver Morehead's transcription which follows) M.D.

This is a transcription of a tape made by Jackie Oliver Morehead, the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Oliver.

Jackie Oliver Morehead (hereafter JM): Marie, this is a tape my sister who will be eighty years old December 21, 1985, I believe. I am going to send it on to you and add mine on to this.

John B. Oliver was married to Udell Redd and they had their last four children in Diboll, Texas. There were sixteen children in all, and there were nine of us that lived to be grown. When I was growing up, it was Chloe, Clemmie, Maurice and myself (Jackie). I remember the old white house there. But before that, let's go back and find out who lived in "Olivertown" at that time. "Olivertown" – they called it that because, I guess we were the first ones that settled over in that part of the town. We lived in what they called "behind the quarters." We had to go through the Negro quarters to get up to the main part of town. Over in that area, we grew up with the Robert Wallers, the Gibb Connors, the Bivens, the Whites, the Wrights, the Browns, Erma and Carey Smith, Ruby Mae and Lucille, Fannie and Oliver – those were some of the black people we lived near over there. And the Whites and the Miles that I can remember back there, and in Emporia which was an extension of this on down the road the Dunns lived, the Fosters, a Mr. Conn. A lot of the people in Diboll remember Mr. Conn. He was my dad's attorney. He had a pecan orchard down there and that was something in that day and time...the house was. So this kind of what we grew up with...the people we grew up with back then.

So going back to my older sister's tape here...I remember the old white house that was the saloon. It was donated by my daddy later on to organize the second Baptist Church at Diboll. And a Reverend R. T. Walker was the pastor. He was a postman. He would come down on weekends and pastor the church. He didn't require anything. He didn't ask for a salary. My daddy thought that was real honorable. That began our friendship with the Walker family. In our Second Baptist Church, some of them would spend nearly every Sunday with us and many of the other people in Diboll. I remember the Womacks used to come home with us a lot, and Grandma...someone...I can't remember her name right now. Maybe it will come to me later on. Wherever the preacher went, she went and we always had a good time with all of them.

And over in Olivertown, as it was called, we lived with all of these different people. We farmed, we had a garden, we had cows, chickens and hogs. In other words, we were pretty well self-sufficient...with God's help. We kids were seldom sick. I

remember when Doctor Dale was vaccinating everybody for small pox, by the time they got to me, they ran out of vaccine, and I never did get vaccinated until I was married and grown and living in Dallas. I made a trip to Mexico City, and I got vaccinated for small pox at that late date in my life.

Some of the things that I remember back then: Mrs. Weise was one of our favorite teachers. She taught all four of us girls, and she was a wonderful person. And Mr. Bush – Mr. Bush taught all of us girls, and he was very fair with everybody, and he was a good teacher. I thought he was a good principal. We all loved Mr. Bush very much.

The Depression didn't make much difference because we lived very conservatively any way. We always fed everyone who came to our front door. They had to eat with us. We used to fuss at daddy because he would invite everybody to come in and have lunch with us. We girls were always feeding everybody, seems like. One time I remember, and I wasn't too old, someone up in Diboll got word to my daddy that they needed a place for a lady to spend the night. She was traveling through Diboll, and she was quite an elderly lady. The best I remember she was a very well dressed lady. So she spent the night with us. I remember she slept in the room with Maurice and me and she snored all night. She was a frail person. I remember we got up and had breakfast and my daddy got her back up to the train or whatever she was riding through Diboll. He said he was scared to death she was going to die during the night. That kind of stuck with us kids. But that was the way Diboll was back then. None of the roads were paved, no telephones and everything we did, we went to Lufkin to do it. We had the commissary and that is where most of the Diboll people got their food from, and their clothes from Mrs. Farrington.

Where we were over there, the black people were friends of ours. We loved them and they loved us. They worked for us. In fact the majority of the time, if it hadn't been for the black people, we would have never gotten the crops gathered or cotton planted. The white people, you couldn't hire them too well, especially during the Depression. They were being paid so much by the government. At that time if we needed help in the fields, we couldn't get them. We couldn't hire them. And us girls had to do it, with the help of Lucille, Ruby Mae and Fannie. The black people were our friends we thought, and still do.

I remember us kids, when we would come home from school in the afternoon, Aunt Rose lived on the corner, and as we turned the corner if there was a cloud coming up, she would say, "You kids come on in and stay here." And she would always have a hot pie or a piece of cake or something. She would give us pie and milk, and we will always remember that, or I will.

Diboll was a haven for black people. They were treated well. My daddy got along with the black people very well. I can remember many Sunday mornings, black men would come to the front gate and daddy would go out to meet them. They would want to borrow five dollars or two dollars or three dollars, and he would let them have it and they would pay it back. I remember Chester Willis. Chester Willis was the delivery boy for Southern Pine lumber Company for the commissary there. He borrowed money from my daddy all the time. Daddy would just put it down in a book and he would pay him a little interest along on it. He never did get the debt paid. He just kept paying interest on it. I remember when my daddy died, my mother found in some of the books that were put back – there was a note in there to tell Chester Willis that he did not owe any more

money to my daddy or to my mother or to any of us, that his debt had been paid. It had been cancelled. The black people were real good. I remember Aunt Rose and Uncle Henry that lived at the back of us, and Erma, Fannie and Carey helped.

About the check, that was before my time. I don't remember too much about him cashing the checks and giving money for the checks. But I am sure that it happened.

But I do remember the money that my daddy let Southern Pine Lumber Company borrow. I remember very vividly of my mother telling us. But they did not make an issue of it. But we knew that he had loaned Southern Pine Lumber Company some money at that time. The reason I do remember it is that Maurice and I were coming home in the afternoon and we would make a sashay through the commissary. And one afternoon we were doing that, and there was a big bin of red apples there, and Maurice said, "Gee, I sure would like to have one of those." And I said, "Well, why not? Our daddy loaned them some money, so surely we can have an apple." We picked us up one. And Mr. Ed Day saw us, and I went up and told him. He said, "Okay." I don't remember if we ever paid for them or not, but I am sure we did. If our mother found out about it, I am sure we took money back.

And then another instance, it was cold and rainy one afternoon, and I didn't have a coat at all. I came through the commissary and Mrs. Farrington had some cute little raincoats hanging there. There was a blue one hanging there. I tried it on and I told her I wanted it and she said, "Okay." So I went home with it. I can't remember her telling me how much it was or anything at all about it. I just wore the coat home. Mama and Daddy were sitting on the front porch and I was coming down the road. Daddy said, "Is that Jack? What does she have on?" My mother was laughing when I got there, and they asked me about it and I told them. They kind of laughed. They didn't fuss at me or anything. The next morning daddy said, "How much did it cost." I said, "I don't know." He gave me money to go and pay Mrs. Farrington the next day. He told Maurice to come back by the store and get her one. So we both got a coat out of the deal. And it all stemmed from the fact that we knew Southern Pine Lumber Company had borrowed money from our daddy. We thought we had a little privilege there. So that was that. They later repaid the money. I was never told, but I am sure it was all taken care of. But Daddy was happy to help out in that way.

There was another time he helped out. I remember there was a lady in Lufkin, I believe a Mrs. Wright, who had a beautiful tract of timber. At that time my daddy was buying and selling timber. Later on he had a little sawmill at Hoshall. And many a Saturday I drove him, because he couldn't drive. While I was in high school, I drove him everywhere. I would sit out in the woods by a tract of timber all day long on Saturday with him looking at a tract of timber to buy. Anyway, back to this tract of timber of Mrs. Wright's. Southern Pine Lumber Company wanted that tract of timber...they needed it I suppose to keep the timber going into the sawmill. Mrs. Wright wouldn't sell to whoever was buying for Southern Pine Lumber Company at that time. But she told daddy, "I'll sell it to you." So Southern Pine found out and they contacted my daddy to buy the tract of timber and in turn sell it to them. And that, seemingly, was all right with Mrs. Wright. She just didn't want to deal with whoever was buying for Southern Pine Lumber Company. Anyway, he bought the tract of timber and sold it to Southern Pine.

Us kids always wondered after Southern Pine ended up with our land over there and developed it, why they did not name one of the streets after my daddy because he did help them out in several ways.

Back to our school years, I remember back when our grade school burned. We were going down the commissary porch one morning and Chester Willis was running down the store porch hollering, "Fire, Fire." When we got on up there, it was our school building. I can remember standing out there and wondering where my tablet and crayolas were and what had happened to them.

The black people also had a brand new school. I remember it was about 200 yards from the front of our house. And it was a good-looking school. It wasn't as big as our school, but it was a brand new school.

Back then I don't think segregation was any problem. In that town, we did not mistreat the black people and they did not mistreat us. We all got along and worked together. That is the way that I remember it.

Back to my daddy, Daddy had a lot of wisdom about him. You can gather that from what my sister said. Daddy made his money more by just saving it and being conservative than any other thing. I know that he did make money when he had the sawmill at Hoshall during my high school years. I would take him to work in the morning and go get him in the afternoon. And he made money out of that. And I remember that he bought the 1939 car...the first new Chevrolet car in Diboll at that time. I know it cost \$900.00 and I know he paid cash for it. He was just a conservative man.

I can remember before World War II when Japan, well, our government was buying up all the scrap iron. All the kids in Diboll were picking up all the scrap iron in Diboll and selling it; and daddy wouldn't let us do it because he said it would be made into weapons and our boys would be killed with it. That is what happened when they got into World War II. He never believed that Bruno Hoffman was guilty in the trial of the Lindberg baby. He always said he was not guilty. He said right after Yalta Conference that Roosevelt sold us down the river, which was proven to be true. So he was a man of wisdom.

Back to Mr. Temple and my father, I know they had a good relationship. He was never a part of Southern Pine Lumber Company. He always worked for himself. Diboll was good to us. We didn't have an awful lot, but we all grew up, and I had a ball in Diboll, especially when I got in high school. I had a ball in high school, and I didn't want to graduate, I remember.

There was a lot of sorrow in our family, but mother and daddy made it through and taught us kids to reverence God, to be honest, and work hard, for which I am grateful to this day.

I just thought of the lady's name. It was Granny Taylor. She was the grandmother of the Chandlers over in Diboll. She was the lady that always came home with us on Sundays and everybody in Diboll knew Granny Taylor.

Some of the personal things about the four sisters...and myself might be amusing. The way we got married...I remember that Chloe ran away and got married. The morning that Clemmie woke up and found Chloe gone, it set our household in a tailspin. Of course, all Diboll was talking about it for a week after that. She and Doyle Weeks ran off and got married. They found her staying down in Beulah. They had spent the night with Doyle's family. She stayed down there with them for a while and Doyle ended up in the

service and retired from the Army. They live in Fort Worth. They had three boys. All of those boys are doing real good and we are proud of them. Clemmie and Kirby Dubose got secretly married – right before she was to take a school to start teaching. She had graduated from Nacogdoches State Teachers College. Daddy was real proud of her. He wanted all us kids to go to school and get an education. He had real high hopes for Chloe because she did have a real good mind, a sharp mind and that hurt him real bad when Clemmie got married. He wanted her to teach school more than anything else in this world. She and Kirby wanted to do something because they had been going together about three years. And they wanted to do something that he didn't want them to do. So he put the pressure on them pretty hard, and they decided they had better tell him. So it was on Sunday afternoon when they told him, and I will never forget that afternoon. Daddy cried and he did a little bit of everything. You know teachers could not teach if they were married, so she never did teach. But Kirby ended up being one of daddy's favorite son-in-laws and one of the best of all of them. And they had children and had a fine life with grandchildren. Maurice married Waldo Coker. It was on a Saturday afternoon and Maurice was a brain, too. I had to work for everything that I got. I was not that smart. Daddy always said that I had a lot of common sense. So I guess that made up for the book sense. Maurice was a straight A student. Mrs. Weise thought a lot of Maurice and had a lot of hopes for her. That was on Saturday afternoon and we were washing clothes and Maurice was slinging them across the line. I got so aggravated at her because she was not hanging them up right and I would fuss at her. And about three o'clock in the afternoon, Jewel Brown, Waldo and daddy were building a rent house down on the property there, and Waldo asked him while they were on the roof and Daddy came down off that house like a tiger. I don't know what happened really, but he ended up saying, "Yes" to them. My mother took the car and they went to Lufkin and bought her wedding outfit. They got married that afternoon. I don't even know where they got married, at whose house, justice of the peace or what. But anyway they got married and went to Corsicana. Now that was miles away from Diboll at that time. I thought, "Well, I will never see Maurice again." They came back to Diboll to live near us; they separated, and she married another man. They have a real good life now. When Clemmie got married, I was graduating that year and I had my school picked out and everything where I was going and my daddy told me, "You have to promise me you will go to school four years, graduate, and work two years before you get married or you leave college out and we will just skip it for now. We'll just forget about it." I said, "Daddy, that is just too much for you to ask from me." I had just met Robert Morehead at that time and I knew that was possibly who I would marry. I couldn't promise him that. So I went to Jacksonville and went to taking care of his property up there. I never got to college. I went to SMU in Dallas after I married, took some courses up there, and that is about all the college I have had. So anyway, Robert and I got married. We got secretly married, too. Daddy didn't want any of us to marry. He didn't think anybody was good enough for us. I guess that is a compliment in one way, but it made it hard on us girls.

That is just some of the highlights of our life. I still look back and think that God has been good to us and we have a lot of friends in Diboll. Just put us a good book out so we can have some good things to laugh about and look back on.

END OF TRANSCRIPT