

INTERVIEW BETWEEN VERNON ROYD AND ROBERT WOODS

March 8, 1969

Boyd: I want to ~~state~~ try to get a record of black church history. Someone said Roosevelt Wells had written some on it.

Woods: ~~Woods~~, Roosevelt probably has ~~information~~ <sup>There is some history</sup> that you just can't get by picking up here and there. He, I am sure, has talked to a lot of people, and he has good sources. He might be doing a thesis or something. Whatever he is doing, I don't know. But I suspect Bro. Kennedy has ~~the~~ information that ~~the~~ other brethren <sup>do not know</sup> are ~~talking~~ about.

Boyd: Is anything on paper - writing? The Christian Echo, or, what was it, The Counselor that Brother Keeble had down in Nashville for awhile? Someone said he used to edit a paper called The Counselor.

Woods: That may be. That goes back before my day.

Boyd: One of the ladies who visited over at Stony Island ~~you know we~~ have a program of ~~going to visit our visitors~~ - really <sup>she prompted</sup> ~~me~~ me into wanting to ~~work on some~~ <sup>get some of this information on paper</sup> a little bit ~~more~~. She was a most fascinating woman, Sister English whose husband was - -

Woods: D. M. English.

Boyd: Yes. Well, she is up in her 80's and her mind is as clear ~~as~~ ~~she~~. She began talking about where all her husband had been and all he had done, and I began to see that she had a rich history that, as far as I knew, was not written down anywhere.

Woods: I doubt that ~~seriously~~ <sup>seriously</sup>. <sup>she is</sup> Now she is another one, although/not a minister. Her husband was not what you would call a popular preacher, he was a very intelligent man. And his - I've forgotten now what relation Paul English was to him - but the English name in the Church of Christ was a cherished name. These people <sup>and their relatives</sup> were learned people ~~and~~ ~~their attitude~~ - as a matter of fact, Brother Kennedy is in this family, too, you know. D. M. English was his uncle. They all came down from

*around Centerville*

~~They are all from down in that part of Tennessee that is rich in church history, Rich in Tennessee history, as far as that goes, down in that area of the state.~~ Now, Brother English, insofar as the Church of Christ ~~is~~ <sup>is concerned,</sup> was involved in one way or another.

Ⓡ There is one thing about the black history that kind of bothers me a little bit - I think it has been patched up; is still being patched up - I guess time will take care of it. But there was a breach in the <sup>Negro</sup> church, brought about by what you might call a "liberal" and "conservative" feeling, or element, within the Negro community. Brother Keeble, naturally, was an uneducated man, and Brother Bowser was an educated man. Brother Bowser was supported primarily by those Negroes who wanted it, as <sup>we say today</sup> ~~is~~, "just like it is," ~~is~~ Brother Keeble was styled as the "Uncle Tom", <sup>Hot-in-hand-</sup> ~~Happy Hand~~ type of preacher, that went along with the status quo to get the job done, as he saw it. So this brought about a breach. Brother Bowser started the educational movement <sup>in the black c o c :</sup> ~~insofar as schools went in the Negro community.~~ And in this is where the Bowser Christian Institute, and two or three other attempts even before that -

Boyd: Excuse me, <sup>did</sup> Bowser Christian Institute ~~merged into what, or what~~ ~~is~~ become Southwestern Christian College?

Woods: Well, that is the way we like to look at it, ~~that this is S.W.C.C.~~ But actually, I guess that Bowser Christian Institute was just a school - you'd have to call it that - without any type of accreditation or recognition as far as the school system went; just a school run by Brother Bowser himself. No doubt about it, Brother Bowser was <sup>academically</sup> ~~academically~~ qualified to teach, or <sup>to do</sup> anything else. ~~He was academically qualified.~~ He came up in the Methodist Church which trained and conditioned him, even for a bishop. He had all of the credentials. So, he learned the truth, obeyed it - learned it himself by just reading - and after obeying, he started the same movement the Methodists had at that time. You know the Methodists, I believe it was this AME branch he was in, and they were

Black oriented anyway, you understand, ~~and~~ They had already pulled out from the <sup>white</sup> Episcopal Church, ~~and~~ and set up ~~the movement, and that was~~ ~~in this thing that broken~~ ~~in the movement~~ <sup>thus</sup> he started the little school and ~~he~~ was teaching the Bible <sup>with</sup> ~~was~~ was the keynote of the ~~curriculum~~ curriculum.

Boyd: Where was this school?

Woods: In Arkansas, Fort Smith. It went from there up into Texas (it had two or three locations) It went into Detroit. Just wherever Brother Bowser went, that is where he set up the school, and conditions caused him to move about. Finally they got him into Detroit. They were trying to get him into a location where the school could receive the necessary support, you see. I think he died in Detroit, as an old man.

<sup>In fact,</sup> He was old when he got rolling, so to speak. He left ~~his~~ his mantle in the hands of ~~this is where~~ "the Big Four" ~~thing you heard about~~ ~~of~~ ~~intending~~: G. E. Stewart, J. S. <sup>Winston</sup> ~~Weston~~, Brother <sup>Levi</sup> Kennedy and <sup>R.N.</sup> Hogan out in Los Angeles. These four men <sup>have</sup> kind of brought ~~to~~ <sup>the brotherhood</sup> together <sup>guided it.</sup> Now you take men like G. P. Holt, all the younger men, they came because ~~G. P.~~ ~~Holt~~ ~~was~~ Brother Bowser was G. P.'s granddad. That made it sort of automatic in his case that he was a part of the old man's heritage. But now that <sup>breach</sup> ~~bridge~~ came about through resentment between Bowser and Keeble, because Keeble had his school. Before Brother Keeble met Brother Burton in Nashville, Brother Keeble just piddled around; made soap, had a <sup>market wagon</sup> ~~mortuary~~, sold coal, that sort of thing.

Boyd: ~~Brother~~ ~~Keeble~~ ~~came~~ out of the Christian Church, I believe, Brother Kennedy said

Woods: Yes. But in the Church of Christ he just hadn't done too much <sup>after</sup> until he met Bro. Burton who took an interest in him. ~~Then he went on and started from there.~~ Brother Burton, years ago, put Brother Keeble on a salary, and there just wasn't much of a salary in the Church of Christ, for the Negro brethren. In those days <sup>at</sup> among ~~anybody~~ <sup>anybody</sup> I guess. You would preach for a ham, or a shoulder or a bag of potatoes, anything you could get. <sup>as a matter</sup> ~~of~~ ~~fact~~ of fact, when Bro. Kennedy came here (he can tell

you this himself) - <sup>he began his</sup> ~~all of his~~ preaching ~~right here in~~ right here in Chicago <sup>at</sup> - Maypole Avenue. <sup>(now ~~main~~ street)</sup> This <sup>for the area</sup> was the "mother" church. He knew Brother Bowser.

Boyd: Where? How?

Woods: I don't really know. Brother Kennedy would have to tell you that.

Boyd: Well, lets get back to you. I want to concentrate on you today; what you know.

Woods: In my history of church ~~affairs~~ I have a lot of hear-say, too.

In fact, you are going to have to go back before my time to really get <sup>a piece of history</sup> ~~it~~, for this information I am giving you isn't written down.

Boyd: Is it down anywhere in writing? Would it be in <sup>back copies of the</sup> ~~the~~ Christian ~~Here was~~ Echo?

Woods: It's down, but it really ought to be put in a book. It ought to be authentic ~~and~~ and have signatures of some of the people who make the statements. It ought to be right. I don't know why some Negro brother hasn't taken it upon himself to get all this together <sup>and put it into a book.</sup> I venture to say there are people around who could do it. There is a lady down in Memphis, Sister Annie Tuggle, who taught all these fellows we are talking about, everyone of them, and she is still living.

Boyd: Still has a good mind?

Woods: You'd better believe she has! She catches the plane and goes everywhere. She was up here for the anniversary they gave me last year. I'm a Jonnie-come-lately, but she was my teacher, too, at the Nashville Christian Institute (NCI). She taught <sup>Winaton</sup> ~~Weston~~ and all those fellows down at Bowser Institute years ago, and she taught me at NCI, back in 1946, I guess it was. This old lady really has a mind. She is academically trained and although she is from that old school, she is very intelligent. She is the authoress of several books. She knows how to write a book <sup>and she knows what she is saying,</sup> but nobody has approached her about this. You see, she isn't very popular in the Church of Christ because she knows a lot of the history of the Church - <sup>"black"</sup> black history. She knows both sides (laughter) She knows a lot of sordid details that it wouldn't be advisable to put in a

like you have ~~concern~~

church history. She knows the weaknesses, on both sides of the fence (black and white)

You know the church was on shaky ground, ~~and we were on~~ thin ice for years in these areas, in a lot of areas. (Geographic? Doctrinal?)

As a matter of fact, I hope somebody in ~~this particular movement here~~ <sup>their writing of our church history</sup> will tell the complete story.

The church is in a process of revolution, too, and I hope a book will be written on this. I would like to see a book written that would include

confessions where there has been a lot of wrongdoing, hoodwinking and ~~for King in the past. It should be~~ (admitted) brought to light and all agreed upon. ~~This would be just~~ <sup>why</sup> another Restoration. This is what the church needs, ~~another restoration.~~ <sup>a confrontation with the truth</sup>

You know we have the truth, ~~(Bible)~~ but we just misuse it, misapply it and mess it all up. There ought to be a book on this, too. But there definitely should be a book about the black church. Of course, it shouldn't have to be like that - one history should have spoken out and covered ~~it~~ <sup>both black and white</sup>

~~After we got the black church~~ <sup>history</sup> written up - we have the white church ~~as we have it~~ <sup>history somewhat recorded -</sup> then there should be another one with both included, and ~~then we can~~ say "What a mess this was, but now here is THE CHURCH" all covered in one book.

Boyd: Who were some of the others you mentioned that could give some <sup>have</sup> history or/in-depth knowledge - you say there are very few in the church.

Woods: Yes, well Brother Hogan could. These names I've mentioned in the Bowser group - they could give you the Bowser <sup>picture</sup> ~~history~~ 100%. But to tell you the truth, ~~younger men~~, I am in as good a position to give information on the Keeble side as any of the younger men.

Naturally, there are some older men that I would prefer to ~~give their names~~ <sup>give their names</sup> As I said, Keeble was a very unpopular man with the Negroes, but he was the most powerful man among them ~~when it came to moving out~~ <sup>for he could move out and</sup> to do things, because he had the ~~force~~ <sup>force</sup> behind him, ~~do~~ <sup>could do things.</sup> Regardless of his source, he

Boyd: You mean money? Brother Burton?

Woods: Yes. Not only Brother Burton, but a lot of people, white people. There was no money in the black community, just like we don't have it now.

Boyd: Getting back to you again. I can see you know some of this in terms of the Keeble history, but I am interested in you as a person. Your own family history and its relationships to the church. Talk about your parents and their contact with the church. Things like that.

Woods: Well, that goes back to about 19<sup>39</sup>~~40~~. There was a Negro doctor, the doctor who sponsored me in school - Dr. I. C. Ramsey who had come from McMinnville, Tennessee and settled in Gallatin, after going to school at Meharry Medical College, to establish a practice. He was a member of the Church of Christ when he came to Gallatin ~~in 1940~~, back even before I was born. I don't know exactly when Dr. Ramsey moved to Gallatin, but he died in 1948 and he was 79 then, and he had been a practicing doctor a great many years and all of it there in Gallatin, Tenn. There was no congregation in Gallatin before 19<sup>39</sup>~~40~~, or 1940 it was when it really got to rolling. ~~I do not know if~~ ~~made~~ Dr. Ramsey ~~making~~ any ~~attempts~~ to establish a congregation ~~well, I can't explain why~~ or whether ~~he~~ ~~made~~ ~~inquiry~~ ~~regarding other members.~~ When I first came to know him as a church man, I was only 9 years old and in those days, children just didn't question adults. There were certain questions you didn't even get the answers from your parents and you knew not to even ask. ~~for~~ <sup>had</sup> for some reason, he/joined the Methodist Church and he/<sup>had</sup> lived a very aggressive, faithful Methodist until 19<sup>39</sup>~~40~~.

~~Boyd: you say he was a member of the Church before?~~

~~Woods: Yes, he was a member of the Church of Christ when he came to Gallatin. A group of white brethren in Sumner County, a little place they called Cottontown and the Gallatin, ~~was~~ I don't think <sup>the latter</sup> was Pre-Millennialist <sup>at that time,</sup> anyway, <sup>the</sup> ~~was~~ a preacher by the name of Brother O. L. Olmstead, I believe, ~~was the preacher at that time, and that was the only congregation in the area.~~ I am ~~not~~ trying to remember if Number One <sup>the main street church</sup> was down there at this time. I don't think so. ~~that~~ <sup>was</sup> was the big going church in Sumner County, ~~right there on main street.~~ Now these~~

brethren decided to have a meeting for the Negro brethren. What brought  
so-called  
this on was the Church of God, <sup>which</sup> was very strong in those days, ~~and~~ They had  
a lady preacher ~~by the name of~~ <sup>which</sup> they referred to ~~her~~ as Sister Swanson.  
She had two sons, ~~(one of them was named Abraham)~~ who were both boy  
preachers, ~~this became~~ a very popular, <sup>exciting</sup> thing. ~~You~~ You just didn't see any  
boy preachers in <sup>those days.</sup> ~~that time.~~ ~~It was something exciting.~~ <sup>However,</sup> Brother Keeble  
~~at that time,~~ like Brother Bowser, was teaching boys to know the Bible  
and to quote Scripture, ~~etc.~~ Well, anyway, this lady created such an  
attraction she had ~~what you might say~~ "sewed Gallatin up". <sup>They</sup> Couldn't get  
tents big enough to ~~hold~~ her meetings. ~~xxxxxxx~~ they put her out in  
what they call the fair ground ~~(they had a white fair ground and a black~~  
fair ground <sup>in Gallatin)</sup> ~~they still do)~~ and she ~~had~~ <sup>still have a</sup> had quite a show. Well, the  
white brethren saw the need to bring the Gospel to Gallatin, and ~~that is~~

~~the way it started.~~ They sponsored this thing and <sup>they</sup> got in touch with Bro.  
(A. C. Holt, <sup>of Detroit</sup> G. P.'s uncle ~~his father's brother,~~ ~~and there is another~~  
man who can give you some good wholesome history that he knows by exper-  
ience and by other means). ~~So Brother Holt~~ ~~will actually it was~~ <sup>G.P. Holt</sup>  
father, <sup>Marion F. Holt,</sup> ~~that really started it~~ <sup>M. F. Holt, Marion's brother,</sup> ~~A. C. came the second year.~~  
~~father,~~ <sup>who became</sup> the first preacher that we had ~~the first~~ black  
preacher that ever preached the Gospel in Gallatin, to my knowledge.

<sup>This was</sup> <sup>39</sup> ~~In 1930~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~under a tent.~~ <sup>The next year, his brother, A. C. Holt, came for a while</sup>  
to refer to him as "Uncle Jimmie", because all his nephews and nieces <sup>called him</sup>  
~~called him Uncle Jimmie.~~ He would <sup>and bring a</sup> bring a trailer <sup>load of children up</sup>  
there nearly every night. <sup>just hook a trailer on his car,</sup> <sup>fill it up with</sup>  
~~children and drive it from Nashville,~~ <sup>and would drive</sup> <sup>up to Gallatin,</sup> <sup>a distance of about 30 miles.</sup> ~~So that is the way~~

<sup>He lived in</sup> ~~the church began.~~ <sup>39</sup> ~~My mother was baptized in 1910 and I was baptized in~~  
1940. <sup>the church sort of drifted for about 2 years until</sup> ~~The little church~~ <sup>erected</sup> building was erected in 1941. Mrs. R. C.  
Owens of the Owens Tobacco Works in Gallatin <sup>helped substantially</sup> ~~bought quite a few things~~  
~~that we had,~~ but principally it was Dr. Ramsey who <sup>erected</sup> ~~paid~~ for the building,  
~~for~~ None of the members had any money. However, <sup>the church</sup> ~~we~~ paid him back over  
the years, ~~and~~ It wasn't a question of having to wait until we saved the

money before we could build; <sup>he ~~paid for it~~ immediately,</sup> ~~That's the way we got our building~~

After that, let me ~~say~~ <sup>as I said when I was 9 yrs old</sup> I obeyed the Gospel. I was baptized <sup>including</sup> at 26th & Jefferson <sup>in</sup> Nashville.

Boyd: They took you all the way over there?

Woods: Well they couldn't baptize me in Gallatin.

Boyd: Not even in a creek?

Woods: Not in January, ~~when I was baptized.~~ We didn't mind driving over to Nashville <sup>and would prefer ~~that~~ this</sup> than to fool around in the river anyway. Even in the summer time the creeks around there were dry so you had to go to the river ~~but~~ <sup>would have</sup> of course, there ~~was~~ <sup>to be</sup> special places <sup>because the Cumberland River through Sumner County is all deep, there ~~were~~ <sup>being</sup> no shallow places, ~~you~~ <sup>you</sup> just didn't <sup>find</sup> any places where you could baptize.</sup>

Boyd: ~~Did the Doctor (Ramsey) ever pull out of the Methodist Church?~~

Woods: ~~Yes, he left the Methodist Church~~ <sup>Mr Ramsey</sup> When Marion Holt came to Gallatin, identified himself, and said he was a member of the Church of Christ. Nobody knew it when he came up and said he was a member of the church. Then he went on to explain why he was in the Methodist Church; that it was because he did not find a congregation of black Christians and he did not feel wanted in the white congregation. And he wasn't - there never was any doubt about that. He couldn't go up there. I don't know whether he put in pressure <sup>on the white brethren</sup> or not, I doubt it. He had been put under enough pressure as a Negro doctor in Gallatin. ~~He had been hit by~~ <sup>hit him</sup> a white doctor, Dr. Reese, with his fist, for some reason ~~thing~~ even before this time. Incidentally, Dr. Reese's hand withered. He died with <sup>a</sup> ~~that~~ withered right hand. He spent the rest of his life practicing with his left hand, and always had to have a chauffeur to drive his car. Naturally, Dr. Ramsey was an unpopular doctor as far as the white community was concerned.

Boyd: Was he allowed ~~to practice and use~~ <sup>the</sup> the hospitals?

Woods: We didn't have a hospital in Gallatin until recent years. <sup>It was an established fact</sup> back in those days nearly everyone from Gallatin who went to the hospital



went to Hubbard Hospital which was at the Meharry Medical School in Nashville. Very few went to ~~Vanderbilt or to~~ ~~Vander Bookhouse~~ General Hospital, or anywhere else.

Boyd: Back to your family. Where they were born - something of their history.

Woods: My mother <sup>was born in</sup> ~~is~~ ~~native of~~ Sumner County <sup>in 1898</sup> My dad was born in Wilson ~~County~~ <sup>in 1894</sup> My mother will be 71 years old May 4th. My dad, if he <sup>were</sup> were alive would ~~be~~ <sup>have</sup> been 75 on Feb. 4.

Boyd: Were they children of slaves?

Woods: No. Their parents were not slaves although they were living in ~~those times where we can just about know, according to~~ Tennessee history.

As a matter of fact, that part of the state of Tennessee was a little more liberal than other sections of the state. What I mean by that is that the blacks and the whites got along a little better, <sup>than they seem to have</sup> I never knew <sup>elsewhere</sup> in my lifetime some of the experiences I've heard others of my age speak about that went on in <sup>other</sup> ~~their~~ parts of the state, especially <sup>in</sup> the west.

I really don't know much about any part of the state except right around where I was born: Gallatin, Nashville and in that area. We never did have it too bad there. People usually ironed out their differences. ~~and~~ If there were misunderstandings between the races and it brought about a fight and ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> Negro won ~~the~~ <sup>it</sup> battle, usually <sup>did not result in</sup> a hanging, ~~did not result~~ from that. That's just the way it was in my section of the country.

Boyd: ~~That is milder than in some sections.~~

Woods: ~~Oh yes, you can sure say that.~~ And as far as Gallatin was concerned whites and blacks, <sup>Of course it was the poorest whites</sup> ~~who lived next to~~ <sup>the black</sup> ~~lived all over Gallatin.~~ <sup>always scattered the city.</sup> We have always buried in the same cemetery. ~~There was no such thing as a Negro cemetery and a white cemetery,~~ (although we had a special spot, it was all in the same cemetery.)

Well, that's progress! ~~Woods: That Gallatin.~~  
Boyd: ~~When I was tracing the Boyd history, I had to get into~~ Tennessee <sup>by way</sup> ~~history in the process.~~ When the first white people came <sup>of lumbering</sup> ~~over the~~ <sup>map,</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>end</sup> ~~Sumner County,~~ they came right on through to Nashville <sup>in</sup> Sumner County.

*(French Lick)*  
In fact, Nashville and what was called Bledsoe Station were two of the earliest settlements in <sup>middle</sup> Tennessee.

*Woods:* That's true, and that ~~the~~ <sup>Bledsoe</sup> Creek/Bledsoe <sup>Lick of</sup> ~~the~~ Sumner County is rich in our black history, too.

*Boyd:* What are some of the early remembrances that your folks have talked about in terms of racial history or anything else about the church.

*Woods:* There wasn't too much about the church.

*Boyd:* They never travelled or heard about the church before?

*Woods:* No they never travelled much and my mother had never heard anything about the church. My father knew about it. Wilson County had a much longer history of the black church than Sumner County, but he never was a member of any church until he was baptized into the Church of Christ. He lived to be an old man without having been affiliated with any church. Now my mother leaned toward Methodism, but she, too, was never a member of anything. Nothing just quite made sense to her; always so many unanswered questions, and preachers and people she talked to were never able to give her answers to those questions. We as children went to the Methodist Church Sunday school until I was baptized <sup>into the church of Christ.</sup> We went there for only one reason: Mom said you go to church down here, the Methodist Church, and we went.

*Boyd:* Did she go?

*Woods:* No, very rarely did she ever go. But she would send us to Sunday school. In that first year, before we got our little church built, we used to worship in the AME building. They would have their service and then we would have ours.

*Woods:* As to schooling, my family was too poor for my sister and me to begin school when we reached ~~that~~ school age or 6 years, so our mother taught us to read at home from the Bible. She must have done a good

*Woods:* ~~job~~ ~~with~~ ~~me~~, at least, because

~~because I was ahead of the children at the time.~~ Although I was behind, <sup>grade-</sup>wise, I was still ahead of them and could do the work of the children that were my age. That way I got the promotions. The

same thing was true when I went to NCI. <sup>In 1941, the same year we built our church building,</sup> ~~As~~ I left Gallatin to go to NCI, I was 11 years old and in the 3rd grade. ~~What grade should I have been in at 11? normally, an 11 year old would have been in the 5th grade.~~ ~~Boyd: 5th or 6th. grade.~~

~~Woods: I was 11 in 1941, the same year we built the church building. That is the year I went to NCI. Right here I realize I may have misrepresented some of this history. The church must have started in 1939, actually, because we sort of drifted around about 2 years before we moved into our building. Back to NCI, Dr. Ramsey, <sup>Well</sup> ~~seeing~~ <sup>saw</sup> how well I read ~~I don't want to sound boastful, but I~~ <sup>in public and that</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>never</sup> was the type of boy that minded getting up ~~and reading~~ <sup>and</sup> making a little speech, that sort of thing, and I was pretty good at it, <sup>asked my mother and me if I would like to go.</sup> ~~Dr. Ramsey knew about~~ <sup>NCI, I</sup> Bro. Keeble's school in Nashville, and in 1941 the school was just <sup>started</sup> ~~started~~ in Nashville. It had been in Silver Point, Tenn, ~~at~~ <sup>Boyd was to admit it off I was</sup>~~

~~Boyd: where is Silver Point?~~

~~Woods: Silver Point? Where is that?~~

<sup>Silver Point is,</sup> Woods: I don't really know where ~~it is~~ I've never been there. But I know that is where the school came from to Nashville. <sup>That brings up</sup> ~~There is another~~ bit of history that ~~I won't divulge~~. I won't even go into it here.

This is the history of how ~~the~~ NCI, came up with the building over there at 24th Avenue and Batavia and how they forfeited the property where the Fort Green school now is. This used to be property that was owned by the board of directors of the Nashville Christian Institute. As I said, there have been many sordid details where black Christians have been rooted out of things that they really had that were good, and it shows up as history, but it doesn't show up as black history, and it doesn't show up as church history. It was overlooked because it was done in such a manner that it would be a reflection to show it up as church history.

Boyd: Tell it like it is!

Woods: Oh brother! if I get into that, I know some things that would make you flinch. However, back to me. Dr. Ramsey knew that Bro. Keeble

was setting up this school and he called on me and asked how I would to go down there. I told him frankly that I didn't want to be a preacher. After all I was only 9 years old and I didn't have that in mind. I'm bitterly opposed to <sup>the policy of</sup> trying to decide at that age; still am. I'm pretty frank - just like my dad in that respect. When he told you what he meant, that is exactly what he meant. Anyway, one thing I didn't want to be was a preacher. I could lead the singing, administer the Lord's Supper; I could do anything that was to be done, but I refused to preach. I wouldn't even get up there in the preacher's place.

Boyd: Why? At this early age, what had turned you this way?

Woods: There wasn't any turning - I had always looked upon preachers as men, old men at that. ~~I~~ had never seen any young preachers. This was in Gallatin and all the preachers I had ever seen were old men. In the Methodist Church, in the Baptist Church, all were old men. I didn't know any young preachers. And young preachers among the Negroes is something you don't see very often anyway. That is the reason it was such a sensation to see boy preachers; it was something that we didn't think boys were supposed to do. The only reason, I suppose, is that we hadn't ever seen any. We seem to have created a superstition that this was something supernatural that boys were preaching and knowing their Bible like they did - you see these boys could quote more Scripture than the old people. They had good young minds and could read well and they were putting on quite a show. And they were telling it just like it was. And so, Dr. Ramsey was impressed with all this - he didn't tell me so, but he must have said to himself: "Now if these boys can do this, we've got a boy right here <sup>that can do that.</sup> ~~that can do that.~~" I could read, as I said, and I could talk, and in my section of the state we never did have much difficulty speaking fluently. We spoke pretty good English, just what we picked up. We didn't know much about rhetoric, but we knew by listening to other people how to get by pretty good. Well, I would up going to NCI at his expense. My

mother thought it was a good thing. <sup>Wm</sup> Dad <sup>by</sup> was sort of neutral; said that if that is what I wanted to do, it didn't make any difference to him, one way or the other. I was in the 3rd grade in Gallatin, at 11 years of age, and when I arrived at NCI they didn't have a 3rd grade; they started at the 5th grade ~~and~~ this school was that just starting. So rather than miss a student, which they didn't have many of - paying, boarding students at \$16.50 per month, they gave me some tests to see if I could do 5th grade work. And believe it or not, I knew how to do fractions already. I had been exposed - the lady that I worked for in Gallatin - taking in wood, coal that kind of thing - was a retired school teacher and, oh my goodness, she would just spend hours, just as long as I would stay there, teaching me arithmetic. She was a math teacher.

Boyd: Who was she?

Woods: Her name was <sup>an old maid,</sup> Miss Georgia Chenault, <sup>whom ~~we~~ we children referred to</sup> ~~an old maid.~~ We called her "Teddie." ~~all the children in town called her Teddie.~~ She was just like a mother to that part of Gallatin, and just about all of black Gallatin lived in two parts of town - what they called Baptist Hill, on ~~one~~ <sup>the area</sup> side of town, and ~~the area~~ <sup>the area</sup> around the fair ground, on the other side of town. School was across town from where I lived. Well, ~~with~~ Taddie's help I could work fractions even better than the students in the 5th grade were working them. I never had any trouble with math, even algebra. So I was ~~put~~ in the 5th grade - I never did 3rd & 4th grades - and I finished the 5th grade in the upper bracket. Of course there were only 10 or 12 of us in the 5th grade, but I was right up there. / That was in <sup>Brother A. C. Holt was my 5th grade tea</sup> e: 1941. In 1942 I passed to the 6th grade and Sister Annie Tuggle was my teacher. You know, one teacher did it all. ~~Brother-A.-G.-Holt-was-my 5th-grade-teacher.~~ In 1942, Fred Gray, Robin McBride and that group of boys came from Montgomery. We were catching fire then. Atlanta, Ga. began to be tuned in to our station; we got men like Kelly Mitchell and his brother, Bobby Mitchell, and the Georgia boys began to roll in.

~~When I passed to the 7th grade, Kelly Mitchell was a grade ahead of me,~~  
In the 7th grade we had a teacher who had just been discharged from the  
Armed Services - a WAAC, who was a very aggressive, but a very smart,  
even brilliant lady. Her name was Miss Thompson *from Nashville.*

Boyd: You can't remember her first name?

Woods: I've forgotten it. Her name didn't impress me for at that time  
I had it in my mind that I disliked her. She told the principal, Mr.  
Frank Fogg, deceased now, that I was more of a nuisance to the class  
than a help; that I was advanced and it reflected, and she suggested  
that I be promoted to the ~~8~~<sup>(?)</sup>th grade. I had been in the ~~8~~<sup>7</sup>th about half  
a year. Well, the principal considered this, and he passed me, so I  
caught up with Kelly/ *Mitchell, which was important to me at the time*  
I ~~finished~~<sup>started</sup> the 7th, ~~8~~<sup>changed to</sup> 8th and passed to the 9th  
at the end of that year. That's the way I came up. Actually, I  
started late, but I got out early. I was 17 when I got out. Well,  
Kelly got ahead of me again because I never went to summer school - I  
worked every summer. But he went to summer school and that is where he  
and Bro. Keeble's granddaughter, Dorothy, got ahead of me that one  
semester. We were in the same grade for awhile. So much for that.

*R* My preaching started -- well, there ~~was a rule, of a sort of built-in~~  
were a student, boy student, who ~~was a rule, of a sort of built-in~~ law at NCI  
that if you/could talk good, then you preached. And the better talker  
the better preacher, and you go to go on trips with Bro. Keeble. It was  
a fascinating thing, you know, to go on those trips, and you couldn't  
go unless you did preach - so that is where my preaching started.

Mrs. Lambert ~~Campbell~~<sup>Campbell</sup> was the public speaking teacher. She came out and  
worked with us - taught us how to stand, make gestures, and how to get  
our speeches up, and we got to be pretty fair. So when we got this  
down pat, it was a little rule from the dormitory (Bro. Matthew was the  
dean) that if Bro. Matthew told you that you were leaving with Bro.  
Keeble on Monday morning, and this was on Saturday, then you started  
packing. I had always been taught to respect your elders. So that is

the way I got to going with Bro. Keeble. I went on quite a few trips and I liked that. Too, you couldn't go unless you were capable of keeping up with your school work; you couldn't go and lose time, so naturally they took the smarter boys; the ones that it was easier to get their lessons, the more brilliant boys.

Boyd: Did you have to study on your trips?

Woods: We sure did. I give the teachers credit for this: they would give you your work for the amount of time you were away. If you were out a month, then you had work for the month, and some times/<sup>we</sup>were out that long. Bro. Keeble wrote a number of letters every day and our homework would be in one of them. I had to take examinations while on the road ~~and mail them in~~ and mail them in. And we always passed, too. The first graduates that came from NCI had to go to secular colleges, too. <sup>Negroes</sup> At that time ~~you~~ couldn't go, for reasons that we have already established, to a so-called Christian school. Lipscomb was right there in Nashville, but we couldn't go there. Most went to Fisk or Tennessee State. Those were the two schools in Nashville. And it might be interesting to note that the freshman students came out of NCI <sup>were</sup> far advanced from freshmen anywhere else in Nashville, or anywhere in the state, I guess. We became choice students to the extent that Tennessee State --we were the kind of school that was looked down upon by the school system, but our graduates were so impressive at the college that the State College (Tennessee) made a request to use NCI for their practice teachers. So we got a number of practice teachers right there. And we didn't ask for them - we got them because of the work we were putting out. They were impressed because we didn't do anything but go to school. <sup>R</sup> We went night and day. And I'll tell you another thing, we were studying Greek when we were in the 7th grade. Brother Pittman would teach anybody Greek that would come to the class! He taught at Lipscomb during the day and he taught us at night. In his sessions we didn't know what time it was. We didn't have any special time limit - we just stayed

*We didn't have a training so we were not*  
there until we got the job done. ~~We would~~ stay until he left and then go to bed.

Boyd: Because you were dorm students, you could stay these long sessions?

Woods: Yes, that's right. These sessions were not only planned for the dorm students, but for the other black ministers in Nashville ~~who~~ <sup>who</sup> had not had any kind of religious training. Believe it or not, in 1952 you could just about count all the academically trained, black ministers in the brotherhood on one hand <sup>and you might not have to use your thumb.</sup> The ones that went through the Bowser Institute received training - he gave it to them - but didn't nearly the number go there that came through NCI - not nearly the number. Nor were they exposed to the qualified teachers that there were at NCI. Make no mistake about it, we had the cream of the crop as far as teachers were concerned. Though they were not teaching us on a college level, they were teaching college material on a high school level. There was a fellow in Nashville by the name of Cheeks, and other students, that I suspect know as much about Greek as any of Bro. Pittman's students, for he was teaching them the same thing in these night sessions. They all knew it too. They knew how to go ahead with it, read it and all that. Cheeks, well, he is really something. Never saw inside a college door, but he mastered Greek. I didn't fool with it too much, it never did appeal to me, particularly, which I regret now. Too, I worked and didn't have as much time as a result.

Boyd: When you said you worked instead of taking Greek, do you mean you had the option to work instead of attending certain classes?

Woods: Well, there was an option to it in this respect: if you didn't have a job you went to classes. I was one of the cooks at the school, even though Dr. Ramsey was paying my way, I worked. In fact, it didn't make any difference who paid, you all still worked. My mother taught all of us, boys and girls, to do all sorts of work: cook, patch, wash, iron, all those things. I could cook as good as my sisters at 9 years old.



The ones that paid worked the same as the ones who didn't. When I went there we had outdoor latrines, and we all helped with the work of keeping them sanitary, winter and summer. Finally, in 1945, ~~they decided to~~ <sup>about the time the war was getting bad</sup> they decided to lay a sewer line up to that side of Nashville, so ~~when they ran the line up there~~ <sup>then</sup> we could have inside toilets. We didn't have anywhere to build them and we had a lot of space under that old building, but it had to be dug out some before we could build; and that ground was as hard as a rock. That school had been up there for 50 years or more at that time, the old Ashcraft School, that is what the NCI building was. I understand it has been torn down now. Anyway, we dug all that out and put the toilets in. We did all that work, cement, carpentry, all of it. I could name the boys who helped with the work.

Boyd: Who were some of them?

Woods: Well, let me think. I was one; Kelly Mitchell, Clarence Whit Robert McBride, Lee Grant May, Brother Matthews, the dean of the school, was the supervisor of the job. Incidentally, as far as I am concerned, Brother Matthews did more for NCI than any one man that I know. He is deceased now. A boy by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ Williams - most of these boys were from Montgomery, Alabama, and they were the ones who usually stayed there through the summer. I didn't do much of the digging, because as I said, I was the cook, but I was in the group helping.

Boyd: Was it in the summer when you started those tours with Bro. Keeble? Describe some of them.

Woods: Well, the first <sup>summer</sup> one I went on was the worst. It was to Natchez, Miss. ~~We~~ We didn't have to wait until summer - we travelled in the winters too, as long as you could keep your school work up. The first trip was, as I said, to Natchez, the year I was 14. It was a summer meeting - I forget the months - and very hot. July or August, it must have been. We had scheduled a meeting there to be held under a big circus tent; to last one month. And we had that meeting. There were no Negro Christians

in Natchez at that time, that we knew of. And being no <sup>negro</sup> Christians there we had a terrible time. We had to eat in <sup>a</sup> restaurants downtown, which wouldn't have been so bad, but we had to <sup>at the way</sup> walk. We ate two meals a day; breakfast about 10 o'clock, and dinner at about 5. The other meal you just made out by eating crackers or whatever you had, if you had the money to buy anything. I had a very bad experience in Natchez. I knew Dr. Rucker who had moved from Gallatin and I knew his children. I met one of his boys on the street, his name was Ellington, and we were talking - you know, greeting each other and a white lady pulled up her shade and she was very, very insulting. (This was a street where no Negroes lived). She <sup>called us 'niggers' and told</sup> ~~told~~ us if we didn't get off the street she would call the police. I was just getting ready to give her a piece of my mind like I would have done in Gallatin when he told me that was the way they did down there. In Gallatin I wouldn't have had to worry about what I would have had to worry about in Natchez. I was ignorant of how things were in some places, as I mentioned before, I just didn't know that things were like that. Well, I learned.

And I had another experience with tokens similar to this. I had a quarter, my daily allowance that we could use to buy stamps, stationery or extra food. Well, I had bought a nickle package of envelopes and a little tablet, 10¢ in all and I gave the lady my quarter. She gave me 14¢ and some little blue and white tokens which were for sales tax which I didn't know anything about for we didn't have a sales tax in Tennessee at that time. She didn't explain to me, and I looked at all those little things and I said, "Lady, I didn't order these, I think you made a mistake." I thought she was selling me something for the other penny. She asked what I was talking about, instead of explaining it when she saw I didn't know what it was, or asking me where I was from. I said, "Well I spent a dime and you gave me 14¢, so you take these back and give me my penny because I don't want these." So she went and got the manager and <sup>He referred to me not by name, also,</sup> he came and wanted to know what the trouble was. I said there wasn't any

trouble; that I had spent 10¢ and was supposed to get 15¢ back. You see I had something in mind to get to eat that cost 15¢! Well, instead of him explaining, he started talking about throwing me out of the store, etc. Still not knowing the facts I started to give him a piece of my mind, I was a pretty big boy for 14, but the boys that were with me started telling me to come on out of there. One of the boys was from Oklahoma, <sup>Harrison?</sup> Patterson Reed, and two were from Montgomery, Alabama, so they knew what it was all about. Well we went out - I wasn't ready, though. That was a ~~bad~~ <sup>bad</sup> experience for me.

Food  
Reed  
Patterson

Besides all that, lizzards and roaches, scorpions and all types of creep- things would crawl all over the house. And, oh yes, a storm came up and blew down our tent. <sup>which came from</sup> Brother Keeble decided we could save money by having the boys put the tent back up, but we didn't know how to put up a big tent like that. It had five of those big steel posts down the center and the material was torn. You just had to know what you were doing and I just said I wasn't going to try to put that tent up, and there was a little misunderstanding about that. (Laughter) But some people came, finally, and get the tent back up. And that was that.

what  
Keeble  
chooses to  
New Orleans  
La  
the white people  
some