Mr. & Mrs. Albert Jones
of Blounts Creek

Introduction

Article by Tammy Hodges and Robin Buck

On the afternoon of April 24, 1985, Mr. Roy Armstrong, Robin Buck, and Tammy Hodges went to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Jones. Mr. Albert Jones was born February 9, 1904, and he still lives on his farm although he no longer farms. Mr. and Mrs. Jones were married April 30, 1921, and have been
married 64 years. Mrs. Jones was 14 years old when they got married.

We were welcomed into the home of the Joneses with warm friendly smiles. Our first impression was that there was a lot of love in that big old house and between the hearts of those two old folks.

Our purpose at the Joneses was to find out how life was 60 years ago, how farming was different, how they raised and hunted their own food, and how their income was back then.

LIFE: What we like to do is talk to people who've lived in this area for a long time because many of the younger people here don't know what it was like living here 60 or 70 years ago, how farming was and how life was. So we like to talk to older people who can tell us the way things were. Let me just ask you first, were you born in this area around Chocowinity?

MR. JONES: I was born in Blounts Creek.

LIFE: How long have you lived in this area?

MR. JONES: Since 1941, on this farm, but had lived here a long time before I bought this farm; rented land.

LIFE: Tell us how farming was different back then when you were young.

MR. JONES: Well, there was a big difference back then; we farmed with a team.

LIFE: With a team?

MR. JONES: Yes, a team of mules. We pegged our tobacco with our hands, with a wooden peg.

LIFE: How were the mules to work with? Were they stubborn or were they easy to work with?

MR. JONES: Well, some of them were good mules to work with, and some of them weren't too good.

LIFE: Were they pretty accurate about pulling the plows straight, or did some of them kind of wander off?

MR. JONES: No, they didn't wander off, but some of them were more sluggish and didn't plow as well as others.

LIFE: What kind of crops did you mainly grow when you were young, tobacco?

MR. JONES: Yes, tobacco and corn and cotton.

MRS. JONES: Sweet potatoes and field peas.
LIFE: How about livestock? Did you raise any livestock?

MR. JONES: Well, we used to raise hogs. We raised our own meat.

LIFE: Would you slaughter the hogs yourselves?

MR. JONES: The ones that were sold?

LIFE: Yes.

MR. JONES: No, we would sell them alive.

LIFE: Would you slaughter some for yourselves to eat?

MRS. JONES: Yes, about six or seven for our own use to eat. We would always kill them in the wintertime along about Thanksgiving, and that was our meat for the next year. We didn't have to buy any meat; we always had plenty of ole big hams in the smokehouse. And whenever you wanted one, you just went out there and got it.

LIFE: Would everybody in the neighborhood get together when you would slaughter hogs?

MRS. JONES: Yes, we would have folks to help us, and we would help them when they got ready to kill.

LIFE: A lot of people today don't know anything about slaughtering hogs. Could you kind of tell us how you go about that, the whole procedure of it?

MR. JONES: Well, we would kill them, and we had a barrel that we would scald them in, with hot water.

LIFE: How would you kill them?

MR. JONES: With a rifle, a 22 rifle.

LIFE: And then the next thing you would do was to put them in the scalding water after you killed them?

MR. JONES: Yes, we would carry them on out, where we were going to butcher them and pick them and then scrape them, then clean them before we hung them up to butcher them.

MRS. JONES: He had what you call a gallus, you know!

LIFE: A gallus?

MRS. JONES: Yes, two forked poles that would hold two hogs, and then they took them down and had a thing to cut them up on.

LIFE: Who would butcher them, just different people? Or did you have somebody that was especially good at that?
MR. JONES: Well, most of the time we would have someone especially doing that, to butcher them.

LIFE: Now, after you would butcher the hog, would you put the meat in the smokehouse?

MR. JONES: Oh, yes! We would cut it up out at the smokehouse. We had a barrel to put the pork in and a shelf in there to put the hams on. We salted them and let them stay until they struck so many weeks. Then we would take them up and wash them and hang them up and smoke them.

LIFE: So you put salt in them first and let them sit for several weeks?

MR. JONES: Oh, yes, they had to stay there so long.

LIFE: And then you'd hang them up and smoke them?

MR. JONES: That's right.

LIFE: Would you use any particular kind of wood for the fire?

MR. JONES: Yes, we mostly used hickory wood to smoke them with.

LIFE: When you had a ham cured like this, smoked, could it stay a long period of time in the smokehouse without going bad?

MR. JONES: No, sir! I ain't never had nothing to go bad after we done all that.

LIFE: And you said that you put pork in a barrel?

MR. JONES: Yes, we had a barrel to put pork in.

MRS. JONES: We would make pickle out of salt and pour over this pork, and it would keep in there long as there was any in the barrel.

LIFE: Would this be your main source of meat to eat?

MR. JONES: What we raised, yes.

LIFE: How about telling us what it was like not having electricity. How would you heat your house back then? Did you have a wood stove?

MR. JONES: Oh, yes.

LIFE: What about water?

MR. JONES: Oh, we had a pump, and we pumped our water, and way back there we had a well to draw our water up with a bucket.

MRS. JONES: In moving around from place to place like we did before we bought this farm, most places we just had a well that we drew the water out of, and some places we might have a pump. But we
didn't have no electricity, and we
din't have no running water and no
nothing like that until after we
bought this farm.

LIFE: What about milk? People
tell me that was a real luxury,
that it was so hard to keep it.

MR. JONES: Well, we used to have
a milk cow and had milk to drink.
LIFE: You couldn't keep it very long, though, could you? I mean, wouldn't you have to milk the cow and drink the milk pretty quick?

MR. JONES: Pretty soon we would have to drink it after it was milked; it would sour, you know.

LIFE: Did you make butter?

MR. JONES: Oh, yes, we made butter.

LIFE: How would you do that?

MR. JONES: [Laughing] The ole lady would have to tell you how to do that!

LIFE: How would you make butter, Mrs. Jones?

MRS. JONES: Well, before I got a churn, I put the cream in a jar, a quart jar, and then shook it and shook it and doused it around until it turned to butter, and that was kind of a job. But I've made a many a pound like that. But then I bought a churn that has a handle on it that held a gallon of cream. And that was after we got electricity and a refrigerator. And I keep my cream until I got a turn full, and then I'd churn it. And I had a cow at that time that would produce a pound of butter a day.

LIFE: Is that right?
MRS. JONES: Yes!

LIFE: Do you remember when you first went to school, what was that like?

MR. JONES: When I first went to school?

LIFE: Yes, sir, what was it like, what was school like when you first went?

MR. JONES: Well, Ha! Ha! I didn't go too much, and I didn't get too much education neither! I didn't never like to go.

LIFE: He played hooky a lot, I think!

LIFE: You started working on a farm early, didn't you?

MR. JONES: Oh, I did, yes, sir. I enjoyed working when I was just a small boy. I'd a whole lot rather stayed home and work than to go to school!

LIFE: Do you remember the first tractor you got?

MR. JONES: Oh, yes!

LIFE: I bet that was really something, wasn't it--back then?

MR. JONES: That it was! My oldest boy was farming with me when I got the tractor, and he done the
One of Mr. Jones' early tractors
most work with the tractor. I didn't never do too much with it, myself. It was what they call a "Super A." It was a Farm All.

LIFE: Do you remember when you got the tractor?

MR. JONES: Somewhere in the early '50s.

LIFE: Many people today don't realize--because all they see is tractors--but how much more could you do with a tractor than you could do with a mule?

MR. JONES: My Lord! You could do so much more, three times what you could do with a mule.

LIFE: Three times as much! So it really speeds things up?

MR. JONES: Yes, sir. That it did.

LIFE: I heard that you did a lot of hunting.

MR. JONES: Yes, I did.

LIFE: What kind of game did you hunt?

MR. JONES: Well, way back there I done all kinds of hunting: fox hunting, deer hunting, and coon hunting.

LIFE: What did you like to hunt the most?

MR. JONES: Well, I actually enjoyed the coon hunting. Sure did. It was of a night, but I enjoyed it.

LIFE: Tell us how you would go about hunting coons.

MR. JONES: Well, we had a coon dog; and, ah, carry him out and turn him loose in the woods and if there was a coon in there, he'd find him and tree him! And we'd go to him. And a lot of the times the coon would be in a hollow tree, and we'd have to cut the tree and sometimes he'd be outside where we could shoot him.

LIFE: So sometimes it would be a hollow tree, and the coon would get inside and then you'd have to cut the tree down?

MR. JONES: Yes, yes, we'd have to cut the tree down.

LIFE: Do you remember any particular dogs that you had that were real good at finding coons?

MR. JONES: Oh, yes, we had a dog we called Dewey; had one we called Lead.

MRS. JONES: Now that was a special one! He ordered that dog from Nashville, Tennessee.

MR. JONES: Yes, I ordered that dog from Tennessee.
MRS. JONES: And he was the real main dog!

MR. JONES: He was a good dog. The first night I had him, I fed him good and carried him out and loosed him in the woods. And there come some dogs running a coon pretty close to us; and soon as the coon went up the tree, they quit. Ha! Ha! They weren't no tree dogs, see! And he got on that track and come to that tree and went to barking. And I went there, and I could see the coon. He was on the outside, and we shot him. And that was the first night, now, that I went with him.

LIFE: The very first night?

MR. JONES: The very first night.

LIFE: Would you say he was the best dog you had?

MR. JONES: Well, he was just as good as any one I had.

LIFE: Was he the only one you sent off for like that to buy?

MR. JONES: Yes, he was the only one that I ordered.

LIFE: How about hunting deer. How was that different? Would you use dogs for that?

MR. JONES: Oh, yes, we had deer dogs and fox dogs. And I'd kill some ahead of my dogs and some-
times kill some ahead of somebody else's dogs. We'd be hunting, a bunch of us, you know.

LIFE: You hunted foxes also?

MR. JONES: Oh, yes.

LIFE: Would you be on horseback doing this?

MR. JONES: No, no. We'd be standing on stands. We'd know about where they'd run; and when the fox come out, we'd shoot him, see. Kill him or miss him, one, where the dogs would run him out to us.

MRS. JONES: If they missed a deer when they were deer hunting, they got their shirttail cut off.

LIFE: Is that right! If you missed a deer, you got your shirttail cut off?

MR. JONES: Ha! Ha! Yes! But nobody didn't ever cut mine, but they did some of them we were hunting with.

LIFE: Was that supposed to show that they were a bad shot?

MR. JONES: Well, it was just something they were messing around with.

LIFE: You said that you didn't go shopping very often when you were young. You would go very infre-
quently and buy a lot of things all at once. What was it like when you'd go shopping?

MR. JONES: Well, when I was renting land, the fellow that I was farming with would stand with me at the store, see; and we'd get our groceries from there. And it would be charged to us, and then we'd pay for it in the fall when we sold our tobacco.

LIFE: Most of your food in the early days, I guess, you raised yourself, didn't you?

MR. JONES: Yes.

LIFE: What food would you buy?

MR. JONES: We had to buy salt, sugar, and coffee.

LIFE: How about flour?

MRS. JONES: Most of the time we had the meal ground because we raised corn, you know. And they had mills around. We didn't have to buy meal; we had it ground. But we bought sugar, coffee, cheese, and things like that that we didn't have.

LIFE: Mrs. Jones told us that she loved to make fresh biscuits and that she canned many vegetables.

MRS. JONES: We had plenty of vegetables. We raised them, and I canned a lot.

LIFE: You canned them for the winter?

MRS. JONES: Yes, we canned beans. When we first bought this place, we bought it through the government; and 500 quarts was our limit to what I was supposed to can in the summertime. And we worked in tobacco; and I cooked dinner for hired hands, sometimes 18 people, and helped with the tobacco too. And, then, that night we'd sit up and peel fruits, peaches, and apples, shell beans. And I always had to work even if I had to sit up at night to get my amount of vegetables for the winter.

LIFE: You would cook for 18 people?

MRS. JONES: Yes, when we were taking in tobacco, back then everybody fed their dinner to the people that helped them work. And when it come dinnertime, they were expecting some dinner; and that was a big job!

LIFE: Now they give them a Coca Cola and a moon pie, and that's about it.

MRS. JONES: No, people don't do that anymore; they just don't do that. We don't raise no tobacco since we got older, not able to have anymore tobacco. We don't have to do it, and I'm glad of it because that was a job. I have got up at 2:00 in the morning and
Mrs. Jones in her youth
started cooking to have enough food for all our help and us to have dinner.

LIFE: What would you cook usually for the people that worked in tobacco?

MRS. JONES: Well, I cooked vegetables and potatoes and things like that and biscuits, big piles of biscuits, beans and collards. Mostly we had beans because they were easier to manage and get ready and to cook then because collards in the summertime is tough and it takes a right good while to cook them. Mostly we had green beans and butterbeans and snapbeans and a lot of field peas. And everybody liked them. Potatoes and tomatoes, we would slice a big bowl of tomatoes; we always had a plenty to cook and fix.

LIFE: What about meats?

MRS. JONES: Pork and hams. Pork cooked with the vegetables to season them, had plenty of lean meat on it. And a lot of times you could have a big ole ham bone that we had sliced the meat off of for frying and put that in the pot and cook it with your beans. And that was your meat right there. And people used to have mostly what they had to have at home, and they raised it at home. They didn't go to the grocery store then like they do now to buy practically everything you eat. We
had chicken, and we had eggs and potatoes and all kinds of vegetables and things. We already had it at home. It won't no problem to go in the kitchen and cook up a real good meal. It wasn't the problem it is now. We have to buy a lot of those things now that we had plenty of back then, so there's been a lot of change in the times.

LIFE: Did you make cakes?

MRS. JONES: Oh, yes, sir!

LIFE: What was your favorite cake?

MRS. JONES: Well, I don't know. I made so many cakes until I don't know. I liked them all. They all eat all I cooked, so I guess they were all good. Chocolate cake and lemon cake were my favorites.

LIFE: Do you remember how Christmas was different when you first married and were young from what it is now? What would you do Christmas?

MRS. JONES: Well, we cooked things. We always boiled hams, cooked cakes, and cooked potato pies. Any my family always like potato pies and still do—if I cook them.

MRS. JONES: The dog he was telling you about had treed a coon, and he'd sell the hide. And a lot of times after we'd paid up in the fall, we didn't have money to go buy Santa Claus. I come and brought some money that he had got from selling a coon hide. There was $3, and we had to have sugar to make the cakes and make the potato pies. And we had three children at that time—my oldest daughter, Vera Lee; Herbert, our son; and Julius. At that time, I went to town that evening. My uncle was still in town that evening, so I had $1 left, and with that dollar to have something for each one of them to have on Christmas morning. With the dollar I bought Herbert Earl a mouth harp, Julius a picketknife—he liked to whistle—and I bought Vera Lee a rag doll, and I bought a bag of fruit, some apples, and some candy and some oranges with the dollar. Now that's how far I stretched it! We were just as happy as we could be. We had what we needed and we had plenty to eat and we loved each other and we were happy and satisfied with what we had! It's not like these times now. You made the best with what you had, made do with what you had; and you enjoyed what you had. That's been a long time ago.

LIFE: What about church? Did you go pretty regularly to church?

MRS. JONES: Well, me and the children did because I went with my moma and my daddy or my uncle. He [Mr. Jones] was no no church—
goer; he was mostly out a hunting something. I went to church and carried the children to church.

LIFE: Looking back at farming, Mrs. Jones remembered the difficult job of curing tobacco. When you would cure the tobacco, you would use wood for the fire?

MRS. JONES: He [Mr. Jones] done that for a long time, well, all the time until after we bought this farm. Because anywhere he rented, he'd have to cut the wood and put it in the furnace. And so we cured it with wood, and I had to sit up all night long until Herbert Earl got big enough to be trusted with it. I helped him out. He had his shift, and I had mine. And won't I glad when it come time for me to go home, go to the house and go to sleep. And then he'd finish out the night.

LIFE: I bet it was really hot, wasn't it?

MRS. JONES: Well, sometimes it was. But our weather back then really won't like it is now; it cooled off at night. And just sitting out there under the shelter and listening at the frogs and things like that, it didn't seem bad. We might have a hot night once in a while, but it won't always too hot out there. It was pretty comfortable, I thought, because you really didn't have to go in the barn. We had a flash-light and he had your thermometer hanging up and all you had to do was crack the door open and see what the temperature was. And whatever stage the tobacco was in would be what you'd want your temperature if you had just put it in the barn and you were yellowing it and I don't even remember now what he'd have at that. Anyway, it was not bad. To think about it now, the way things are, it would be awful bad to have to go back and take on things like that again. But it was not all that bad.

LIFE: Mr. Jones told us that his two feet were his transportation when he was young. You would walk five miles to where you worked?

MR. JONES: Yes.

MRS. JONES: That was when we had first got married. We got married in April, and he was working off five miles there and five miles back.

LIFE: You didn't have any other way?

MR. JONES: Yes, I had to walk. Them days you worked from sun to sun too.

LIFE: You told us that you bought your farm in 1941 and you had 40 years to pay for it?

MR. JONES: Yes.
LIFE: How long did it take you?

MR. JONES: Paid for it in four years.

MRS. JONES: But it was all signed up that we could of had 40 years if things hadn't of gone well. But we made good crops then; four years and we paid it off. It wasn't any large sum of money, not like someone would pay now.

LIFE: I bet it was big back then, wasn't it?

MRS. JONES: Yes, I think so. We thought it was big. But I told the lady when we were getting everything arranged to buy the place, I said, 40 years, that's too long to have a debt hanging over you. I'm going to do some hard digging to pay off that debt before 40 years is past. And the Lord blessed us. We can't do anything ourselves without the Lord's help, and he blessed us to have a good crop them years. And we paid for the place. And he bought a mule during the time of it and a plow and a cutaway harrow, something that you cut the land up with; he bought that and paid for it and the mule and the place.

LIFE: You look like you've had, and still are having, an enjoyable life. Why do you think you've had a good time?

MR. JONES: Well, I think the Lord has blessed us, and we've had a good time.

LIFE: I guess that's a good answer.

MRS. JONES: We worked together. Whenever he went to work, I went to work. And so we worked together. The good times and the bad, whatever situation we found ourselves in, why we accepted it and made the best of it.

Conclusion

The time we spent at Mr. and Mrs. Jones's home was very interesting and enlightening. We gained a great respect for these two wonderful people. We learned a lot about how their life had been, the respect and dedication they have for each other, and how they worked together to get the most out of life that they could. We were greatly impressed with the fact that even though they didn't have much money, they could always find a way to get the things they needed. Mrs. Jones bought her three children Christmas presents with just one dollar. We could tell they had great love for each other and their children. We were impressed by the way the whole family worked together; and even though they didn't have much money, the most important thing to them then was that they had each
other. We enjoyed our time spent with them and thanked them for having us in their home and sharing their life with us.

Tammy Hodges and Robin Buck with Mr. & Mrs. Jones