

J.C. Porter's Interview with Sarah Porter Martin of Helena, Montana Daughter of James M. Porter, son of Andrew Porter December 1979

Transcribed October 2007 by Vicki Porter Pasterik
from a CD copy of the original interview

This interview was conducted over the telephone and some of Sarah's answers were inaudible. Information that was repeated was left out of this transcript, as were things unable to be understood clearly. – VPP

JC: Do you remember anything about your Grandpa?

Sarah: No, my grandparents were all dead before I was born.

JC: Have you ever heard them say anything about your Grandpa?

Sarah: Uhm - no, I don't believe I have. Now my mother was a Long and she only had one brother - Edward Long. When my father and mother got married, they got married in Bowling green, KY. My mother was there working for some people and my father was born in Old Virginia. My mother was born - let me think - it's been a long time since I went over these things. I can't remember but I know when they got married, my father went there to work in the sawmill and my mother was working for some people there. And that's where she met him.

JC: Do you know the date they got married?

Sarah: No, I'm sorry. I was only four years old when my father got killed. My father and my brother both got killed.

JC: Was some of your family born in Bowling Green? Kate thought she was born in Bowling Green.

Sarah: Let's see. I believe Andy and Lucy were born in Bowling Green, then after that they moved up to Stark, KY. All the rest of us was born there in Stark. Ed, then Kate, then Bess, Floyd, Elliot, Bill and me and then Charles. Charles was the baby. He died there in Middletown. I didn't get to go to mother's funeral. They died close together.

JC: Why did your dad go to Bowling green?

Sarah: He was working at a saw mill. He was born in Old Virginia. He was just looking for work. (Inaudible)

JC: Who were your mother's parents?

Sarah: I don't know. She had one brother named Ed. That's all I know. (Inaudible)

JC: Your Mom's aunt raised her?

Sarah: Yes - she stayed with her aunt until she got old enough to go to work

JC: Have you ever heard of your aunt named Elizabeth Hunt?

Sarah: No, I don't believe.

JC: She was your Dad's sister. In the census, she was living in Bowling Green and he was living with her.

Sarah: I didn't know any of his sisters. I knew all the brothers. All my uncles were preachers but my father. But he was real good. He helped build the church and donated the land there at Stark to build the church on, but he hardly ever went to church. Now Mother was quite a church goer and she made all of us kids go.

JC: Your Dad didn't go to church too much, though?

Sarah: He didn't go to church, but he gave them the land and built the church there at Stark. And he helped build it and he done all he could. But he just stayed around home. When it came to a donation or doing anything, he was right there, but hardly ever went.

JC: Do you remember all your uncles?

Sarah: My father had 5 brothers and they were all ministers. Uncle John, Uncle Elick, Uncle Steve - he died in Wisconsin - I was over there. And Levi.

JC: And your dad made 5?

Sarah: No, he had 5 brothers besides him. I can't remember the other one. I think one of them died when he was a little boy. I forget what he died from but he was just a little boy. He was the youngest one. My father was born in Virginia, just across the river from where the White House stands now. Right close to Washington DC. My mother told me. I've heard her talk about it lots of times. My ancestors - my mother was part Irish and my father was part English.

JC: Some of his people came from England, huh?

Sarah: Yes. That's where his grandfather and his father were born in England.

JC: His father was born in England?

Sarah: No, his grandfather.

JC: Wonder where his father was born?

Sarah: I don't know. I don't remember it all. My father died when I was just four years old. He whipped me one time and when you have time I'll tell you what over (laughs). He whipped me with a big willow switch.

JC: I've got time now if you want to tell me.

Sarah: OK then. You know years ago when I was little they turned them old grindstones. I was making little old mudpies in the wood shed. Mother had a little old stove in there and I was baking mudpies. He said, "would you go in the house and get me some water and turn this grindstone for me? I have to go across the field here to (inaudible) I said, "Just a minute till I get my pies put in here." He said, "You go ahead and finish your pies and I'll go get it." He took that pan and went out and right in the corner of the wood shed was a great big weeping willow. I thought he was going for the water, but he set the pan down in the yard and (got a switch and) walked back to the wood shed and said, "Step outside here, daughter, just a minute." And I started screaming when I saw that switch. He said, "No screaming". He was a great big old tall man. He took ahold of my arm and held me and of course I wore dresses then. I was barefoot and bare legged. He whipped me until the blood was running down my

legs. And poor old mother, she walked out and said, "Jim, don't you think you've whipped her long enough?" and he said, "Well, Cindy, I didn't send for you. You go in the house. If I need you I'll call you." When he turned me loose, I ran around that big old house about three times. I was just a screaming, and he said, "No more screaming. If you scream, (you'll get more)." So that was the end of that.

Then my brother Bill, just before my father got killed, we were out in the woods chopping wood. Bill wasn't hardly big enough to chop. I said, "Wait just a minute and let me clear these shavings off." He said, "I ain't waiting for nothing." and he came down and cut my right first finger right off.

JC: He cut your finger off? Is that right?

Sarah: It scared Bill so bad, he took off running and went way over on the other hill to the farm and my father walked to the door and said, "What on earth is the matter with you?" And I said, "Little Bill cut my finger off." And of course it was numb see. And he said, "Pick it up and bring it to me and I'll put it back together." And you know he took a splint and put on that and poured turpentine on it and it growed back together.

JC: Do you have feeling in it?

Sarah: Yeah! I can milk cows and everything else.

JC: Which finger was it?

Sarah: My right front finger

JC: Your first one?

Sarah: Uh-huh

JC: How far was it cut off?

Sarah: About half way

JC: When were you born?

Sarah: April 8, 1902 in Stark, KY

JC: You know your grandpa's name was Andrew Porter.

Sarah: Was it? That might have been who my brother was named after.

JC: I imagine it was, that would have been his grandpa. And he's buried there in Old Fairview Cemetery in Elliot County.

Sarah: That's where my father was buried.

JC: Well, you're dad's parents are buried there too. Your dad's mother was Lucy Cornett and she was from Grayson County, VA and as far as I know your grandpa Porter was born in Wythe County, VA, but there may be something to this being from Northern Virginia up close to the White House in Washington.

Sarah: He might have lived there later, see, but I thought my mother said that's where he was

born.

JC: I imagine there's something to that, I'll have to look into that. If that's a story that's been passed down through the generations, there must be something to that.

Sarah: Well, I'm sure there is.

JC: And as far as you know, your grandfather was from England.

Sarah: That's right. And my mother's family was from Ireland.

Sarah: I suppose you've heard about my father's death and my brother Ed's death.

JC: About your brother Ed's death - how did that happen?

Sarah: Andy and Ed went to a dance. My brother Ed was dancing - the man that killed him - he was dancing with his girlfriend. And he went over, mother said - and I've heard Kate say so, too) and he said "I don't want you dancing with my girlfriend." And Ed said, "Well, I didn't ask her, she came and asked me if I would dance with her and I did." And he got mad over that and he said, "I might not kill you tonight but it won't be long." So he killed him.

Sarah: And my father got killed over a school election. Josie Skeens was a neighbor. Ed and Andy were both school teachers. She came up to my folks' house and she wanted to get the school but she was afraid that she couldn't pass the test. I've heard my mother tell about it. For about a week or two she came up to our house to get Ed and Andy to help her. And she didn't know that either of them wanted the school and she didn't pass her test. And they got ahold of her some how or other. My father was there the night they had the elections. They said, Did you have any help in this? And her father was there and he shook his head, no. And he storied, see. And my father raised up and said, "Josie, didn't you ride up to our house and get Andy and Ed to help you afraid you wouldn't pass your test?" And she went to crying and she said, "Yes, I did". And that made her father mad and he raised up and said, "Jim Porter, I'll kill you for exposing my daughter." And he said, "I didn't expose her, I was just telling the truth." And he said, "I'll kill you and it won't be long" - just like the other fellow said. His name was Henry Kegley. And he got killed in Sandy Hook, KY in the courthouse.

JC: How much later did this happen?

Sarah: Not very long

JC: How did it happen? I heard your Dad hit him over the head with a chair or something.

Sarah: Well, John Will Greene was in the courthouse with my father and he seen him coming and he said, "Jim let me open this back window and you jump out." And he said, "No, I never believed in running, I'm going to stand my ground." And he seen him coming and he said "He's got a switchblade" and my father picked up a chair, he was going to strap him but they got in a scuffle and he shot him.

JC: He shot him? He didn't stab him but he shot him huh?

Sarah: That's right. And my brother Ed, John Holbrook is the one that killed him. He cut his throat and then stabbed him right through the heart.

JC: Henry Kegley that killed your father, did he spend any time in jail?

Sarah: No, he left the country. He knew he was going to get killed. My father had too many friends. He rode a horse maybe about 30 miles. He got off the horse and waded the stream a long way and he got away and he went to Texas and I heard later that he died in Texas.

JC: What about the guys that killed your brother? Did they take off, too?

Sarah: No. I don't remember all that. Kate can tell you all about that.

JC: John Will Green, now he was a relative of yours wasn't he?

Sarah: No, he was just a good friend. He ran a store there.

JC: Didn't he marry one of Steve's daughters?

Sarah: Well he might have, I don't know. No, Steve only had two daughters and that was Dorothy and Jewel.

JC: Well, those were the ones in Wisconsin. He had some in Kentucky, too.

Sarah: Yeah, that might be so, but I only knew the two.

JC: Talking about Steve Porter in Wisconsin, Did you know his son, Charlie? Does he have any kids living up there?

Sarah: He had some kids, but I don't know if they're living or not. I haven't lived there for quite awhile.

JC: How long have you been gone away from there?

Sarah: About 32 years. (Laughs) Uncle Steve, he sent for me. He took pneumonia. I went over there and I stayed all night and all day and I guess he died around 11 o'clock that night. And he said, "Sarah, honey, you hold my hand." And they were crying and went outside and I stayed right there and held his hand until he died. He had gallstones and couldn't pass them. He took sick and was staying with Bob Porter's son, Roy. Roy came down and got me and said, "Sarah, Uncle Steve is awful sick and I'm going to take him home." So he took him home and he only lived 3 or 4 days and he sent for me to come. I was holding his hand when he died. Oh bless his heart.

JC: He was a fine man wasn't he?

Sarah: Oh, you bet he was. He used to ride the train way back years ago and go up to Elton to preach.

JC: Did you hear about the group of them that went up to that area way back in 1907? They were the first ones to come. (No.) I guess Charlie went up there then and a bunch of people from down there. Did you know Jewel Shanks is still living?

Sarah: Is she? I've been gone from there so long I haven't heard from any of them.

JC: I guess she's 84. I just wrote her a letter a month or two ago.

Sarah: And Dorothy died, huh?

JC: Yeah, Jewel's the only one living. And your uncle John has two kids living. Jim Porter, his son and Florence Williams his daughter. They're younger than you are a little bit. And Elick has three kids living. Uncle Everett Porter and Harlan is by his third wife and Irene Flannery and they're living. See he was my great great grandpa and his first wife, Laura was my great great grandmother. Then he married Lizzie Stewart and they were divorced and then he married Kate.

Sarah: Yeah, I know Kate Pelfrey (inaudible - something about Burton?). It's been so many years it's hard to remember.

JC: I'll write you a letter and ask you all about your family.

Sarah: I was so tickled when I got your letter. I hadn't read the letter and I looked at that picture and I said, "Oh, mercy" and I knew it as soon as I looked at it. And I knew the old house that was made out on the front porch. It was a great big old white house and had a great big old front porch and back porch and had a great big stone fireplace.

JC: What was that log building behind the house?

Sarah: Oh that was the smokehouse. My Dad killed about 14 hogs and he cured them in there.

JC: Your dad didn't build that house, did he?

Sarah: No, Mose Adams built it and he died and his wife was quite old, too. And my dad loved the Adams' and he bought it.

JC: Is that the first house he bought after he moved from Bowling Green?

Sarah: No, he lived at Stark and he had the post office and had a little old grist mill and had a little gasoline engine and he ground flour and meal and cracked corn and so on and we had a little store and post office and my mother and sister had the post office and he took care of the store and on Saturday, that's the only time he ground meal was on Saturday. And that's when everyone took their horses and their cars to that little mill and if they wanted cracked corn for the horses he'd do it as fine or as course as they'd want it. It was just across the road. My father named that post office.

JC: He named it Stark?

Sarah: Yes. It was about 20 miles to Enterprise. And he told my mother, I'm going to put up a little country store and he said I think we should have a mill out in this part and so he said I'm going to put a little post office and (end of tape)