



In collaboration with
ANITA WHITEHURST,
Descendant of Piney Woods Free Union

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Interviewer(s): Rachel Kamis

00:00	Rachel Kamis	If you could just start by telling us about yourself?
00:04	Anita Whitehurst	Okay, my name's Anita Whitehurst. I'm from the Jamesville-Piney Woods area. I pretty much grew up here. I wasn't born here, but my family is from here. Well, I pretty much grew up here from the age of three and up. My family is actually from the Piney Woods area. Our area pretty much was agriculture, growing up with tobacco and cotton and different types of soybeans and peanuts and fields of that nature. In this area, a lot of us, especially like my grandfather, he was a farmer, which had us growing up helping him with the tobacco, even sitting on a pail, standing on a pail, trying to help actually do the tobacco and stuff in hand. Our area is family oriented. Everybody up here is pretty much related through their bloodline some kind of way because way back when, it was pretty much they couldn't get around and stuff, so there was a lot of cousins marrying cousins and a lot of that nature going on too. I can pretty much tell you as far as our area, we had land, we were self-sufficient. We had about four or five different stores in the area that pretty much helped everybody sustain itself. When a person was in need, they would help each other out. I mean, if they knew somebody needed food or something, everybody would get together and they would help that individual. And it was a loving community. We've gotten a little bit away from that now, but it's not like it used to be. I mean, there's still love there, but it's not like

		<p>when we were growing up. When we were growing up, everybody took care—you were your neighbor's keeper.</p>
01:43	Rachel Kamis	<p>Yeah, that's something that we've heard a lot today, people talking about that type community and looking out for each other. It's really beautiful to hear. Can you tell me a bit more about how you're connected to Piney Woods Free Union?</p>
01:58	Anita Whitehurst	<p>I'm connected through my grandfather. My grandmother lived up here too, so it was a combination. My grandmother migrated from the Bertie County area, and she moved here along with some of her siblings. My grandfather, his lineage dates back to Stewart¹ and Lucretia Cordon. And then they had Leanna James and Leanna married John Pierce. And John Pierce had my great-grandmama Sally. And from her came my grandfather Patrick, and from Patrick, my mother Robina, and from Robina, me. So that's as far back as far as the lineage on that side, but I can't do justice without my grandmother's side. Her mother and father were Amanda Powell and Deb Whitehurst. And then they had my great-grandmother, which was Sally. And Sally had my grandmother, Odie Virginia. And then she had my mom, Robina, and my mom had me and my sister. So that's the lineage of Piney Woods for me. Like I said, the ones that you've talked to previously, they were all my cousins. We're pretty much every shade, mentions of everything, but the line is thick through here. And we're proud of our community. A lot of times with the land, if the land was passed from generation to generation, it has gotten out a little bit. Some of the people aren't holding on to their land like they used to. So stuff was passed on and if it's not passed on, then a lot of the younger ones are trying to keep it in the community or trying to buy it so it doesn't get out of the community, as such. And it's pretty much agriculture. I mean, we're trying to think of different things to do with the land since farming is not like it used to be as far as this area goes, but with that being said, it's still that family land. And we're trying to keep it that way as long as we can.</p>

¹ Stewart James

03:53	Rachel Kamis	What are some of the things that you've done to keep it in the family? Is there anything—because you're talking about this—is there any more specific examples?
04:03	Anita Whitehurst	Well, sometimes, when some of the people die, the land gets put up for auction. Some of them may have dementia or something and not able to pay like they were used to, and it goes up for auction for some reason. Or a lot of the ancestors have moved away. A lot of the children have moved away, and it doesn't mean as much to them as it does to the people that's in the community. If you're not here and you don't experience it, it might not mean as much to you as somebody that lives here. You're trying to make sure we get good air quality, we get good soil quality, we get good food, and able to sustain our community. And not just our community, but surrounding communities because Piney Woods still stems out from other communities too. There's the Dardens area that have the same type of connection with our church, and this church as a whole was like the mother church, which kind of sustained and had all the other churches connected to it. And it was a mixed church. So, it wasn't just African Americans Our area was pretty much Indian, they call it Mulatto. We had the Whites, we had the Blacks, it's a combination. It's like a melting pot, so to speak, but still the bloodline runs deep.
05:19	Rachel Kamis	You mentioned that you moved here when you were three, right?
05:21	Anita Whitehurst	Yeah, I stayed with my grandmother. My mom had to work, so me and my sister were down here, and my grandmother pretty much raised us. And now she's retired and has moved back home.
05:34	Rachel Kamis	Your mom or your—?
05:35	Anita Whitehurst	My mom.
05:36	Rachel Kamis	So, she's also in the area now?

05:38	Anita Whitehurst	Yes, she's in the area too. And then my uncle did the same thing. A lot of our older people, they moved away for job opportunities, but a lot of them have returned back. If they didn't pass away in the areas that they were living in, they have moved back to live. Some say they would never come back because there was nothing here, but a lot of them have come back.
05:58	Rachel Kamis	And what was it like growing up here?
06:02	Anita Whitehurst	Growing up here, we did a lot of playing outside. We did a lot of hopscotch. We did a lot of tag. We helped with the farming, helped with the gardening. It was a combination of a lot of agricultural stuff. And when we were growing, actually, they didn't have plumbing. So, it was like having to go tote water from a pump and pump water, and then we had the outhouses here, all of that.
06:32	Rachel Kamis	When you think back, if you think about some memories of smells or what you hear when you think of home, what do you think about?
06:42	Anita Whitehurst	Home is like—our area here was pretty much the flowers in the springtime. A lot of them had a lot of beautiful flowers. They had the flower gardens. You had the smell of the flowers, even though I'm allergic to it, I have allergies. But outside of that, the beautiful smell of the flowers in our area. When they're disking up the peanuts, the peanut smell, things of that nature. Or when they're home cooking, because when they cooked and everybody shared their food, the apple pies, the blueberry pies, the blueberry dumplings, the fried chicken, the watermelon, the feast.
07:25	Rachel Kamis	Blueberry dumplings? What are those?
07:28	Anita Whitehurst	It's like blueberries, and then you take dumpling, and you take sugar, and you take butter, and you put it in there, and you make the dumpling. You boil the blueberries, and then you put the dumpling in there, and let it simmer, and it covers up the dumplings. And then some people put Miracle Whip on it. But it's just great. It's just those home cookings, the sweet potato pies, all the good foods that all the elderly people used to cook. And some of those recipes they

		passed from generation to generation, but a lot of times, we can't cook as well as they used to cook in the day.
08:09	Rachel Kamis	Yeah.
08:10	Anita Whitehurst	Right?
08:12	Rachel Kamis	That sounds great. I wanna try blueberry dumpling now. So, I'd love to hear more about your family growing up. Was there any person or friend or person in your life that was particularly impactful?
08:27	Anita Whitehurst	I would have to say my grandmother. My grandmother was like our rock. She was pretty much the rock of our family as far as trying to make sure everything got done, trying to make sure you did things, and at an early age, she had a stroke. Me and my sister had to learn how to go to the grocery store and get groceries. We had to learn how to help her and help her do things. So, it was like a growing up process. You kind of grew up a little bit earlier, but at least now you know how to do those things. Some people don't. So, it was a learning process. But I would say she was my rock.
09:02	Rachel Kamis	How old were you when she passed?
09:05	Anita Whitehurst	When she passed, I was 37.
09:07	Rachel Kamis	Wow.
09:09	Anita Whitehurst	And in my family, there's either three-years differences or ten-years differences in the different things. So, when my grandmother suffered her stroke, that kind of was a downward, and then on the end, she got sicker. But before then, she lived a great life. She was in her 80s when she passed away, she still did a lot and taught us a lot and told us how to do things, because we'd always run and say, "Ma, how to do so and so," and "Ma, how to cook so and so," and she would tell us. So, it was pretty much a learning process.

09:46	Rachel Kamis	What were some of the lessons that you took from your relationship with her?
09:53	Anita Whitehurst	She would always tell us things like, glad that there's a child that has this at home, work hard to have things, work hard to accomplish things, help people along the way. Because a lot of times if you help others, it always comes back to you. Being nice to other people, trying to be respectful, trying to treat everybody the same and trying not to show any type of prejudice toward people because they might not be in your situation or a different situation. So, it's just trying to be an uplifting person when you see somebody in need, try to help them pretty much.
10:29	Rachel Kamis	Those are really good lessons.
10:31	Anita Whitehurst	It is.
10:32	Rachel Kamis	Do you feel like you've passed that on to your family?
10:34	Anita Whitehurst	I do, because I'll tell my niece and nephew different things that we were taught, or we learned. A lot of the younger people, just want things like yesterday, it's the microwave type thing. A lot of times stuff takes time. And a lot of the older people, they used to really sit you down and teach you. They used to teach you how to iron clothes, how to fold them, how to do different things, how to do knitting, how to do quilting. A lot of those things they passed on to generations and they told us about it because—I had a great aunt one time tell us how to fold, and I was like, “Why are you telling me that for? I'm not gonna be doing that. He better know how to do that himself.” Stuff like that. But she would sit there and tell us how to do things, tell us how to cook things. So it wasn't just my grandmother. We had great aunts and uncles also that impacted our lives too, telling us how to do things and what we need to do and how we need to be careful for ourselves and not to take a lot of stuff for granted and to be humble.
11:31	Rachel Kamis	It sounds like you had a lot of good influences.

11:35	Anita Whitehurst	I did, I really did. And some of them told us what not to do too. So, to do and what not to do.
11:41	Rachel Kamis	Did you listen?
11:42	Anita Whitehurst	Yeah, I did. I did, I did.
11:44	Rachel Kamis	Yeah, that's good.
11:45	Anita Whitehurst	I didn't like whippings. You can press that button every so often, but you do have to be careful about it.
11:54	Rachel Kamis	Yeah. Fair enough. What does the legacy of Piney Woods Free Union mean to you, and where do you consider home?
12:02	Anita Whitehurst	I consider this home because I grew up here. I've lived here. I've worked here. I've tried getting jobs other places, but it brings me right back home. So Piney Woods is a safe haven. People know people. People pretty much are your neighbor. Your neighbors are pretty much your cousins. If they need something, if they want you to help them with something, you're there pretty much to help them if you can. Or if you know something that somebody needs, or you can tell somebody something, you'll try to help them and say, "Okay, if this is what you need, have you looked into this or have you looked into that in order to help yourself?" Because you know, some people you can help, and some people you can't help, so you can give people information, it's just what they do with the information after they get it.
12:44	Rachel Kamis	Yeah. But you take that first step. And the legacy, what does the legacy mean to you?
12:52	Anita Whitehurst	The legacy of Piney Woods is the history. Everybody growing up, and the elderly teaching the young people what to do and how to do, and trying to keep the land, and just the whole family aspect—family is family. It really is, family is family. I don't care how far long or how many cousins versus cousins versus cousins, they're still family. And at the end of the day, if you can help them,

		<p>you'll help them. And that's pretty much what Piney Woods is. A lot of people have gotten a lot to themselves, but the actual heart of Piney Woods and the ones that actually grew up here, we know what it's like. We know what it's like to struggle. But at that time, even though we were struggling, it didn't appear to be struggling because it was just the love that was there, the helping people that was there. If you had extra sweet potatoes, here they are—if you had extra anything. If you saw somebody, they actually did help. I know a lot of people now, today, have gotten away from that, but some of us are still here that when they do get things, they do help pass it out to some of the elderly people. And if they know somebody that's in need, they do try to help them out.</p>
14:10	Rachel Kamis	<p>Community-centered thinking. Yeah. In what ways have you learned about the history of Piney Woods Free Union?</p>
12:26	Anita Whitehurst	<p>Well, pretty much from my great aunts and uncles. They would sit me down and tell me, “Okay, this is who your great aunts were, who grandfather was, this is what he used to do.” And they would tell us who those things were. And a lot of times you can write them down, and then you could talk to other cousins, and they might have the same great-great-grandmother and great-great-grandfather that you have, but you’re just through a different lineage of that—it's like the tree is going, but there's a little branch over here that you're stepping out from. And it’s like generation to generation. And a lot of times with our history too is if they have old photos, they'll share them now because people have died and things have gotten pushed away or packed away and you really don't get a chance to see, “Oh, what did they used to look like?” Or “Do I have their eyes?” Or “Do I have their features?” A lot of times you can look at some of the old photos and you do have some of those same features as some of the other people do, so it's like that generational gene pool, and some of it is real strong in Piney Woods.</p>
15:30	Rachel Kamis	<p>Do you have any relatives that you look like from way back?</p>
15:34	Anita Whitehurst	<p>Well, on my grandmother's side, she had an aunt that she said I favored. And then on my grandfather's side, he had an aunt that I favored. So, I guess it was like a combination of the two. As far as</p>

		attitudes, or the eyes, or the nose, or the way you carry yourself, or they used to be that way so some of that stuff has rubbed off on you and not even realize it has.
15:59	Rachel Kamis	My grandma says that I look like her grandma, which I'm named after. I've seen the photo. I don't know if I see it, but yeah.
16:09	Anita Whitehurst	There's something about it that sparks an interest.
16:12	Rachel Kamis	So, I'm getting towards the end of the question list. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about—about yourself, your family, Piney Woods Free Union?
16:24	Anita Whitehurst	It's just our history is a strong history. And it doesn't need to be pushed under a bushel, it needs to be shined. Because Piney Woods is a area that's been family-oriented, just like a lot of other small communities too. I'm sure there's a lot more that their stories haven't been told, but we've always been told about the mule, the cart, bringing it to church. We've always been told about how things were back then and what they used to do. And a lot of times they used to have a Founders' Day when they came out and they would dress up the old-timey ways. They don't do that as much as they used to, but to me, the history of Piney Woods is rich. The land is rich. The history is rich. The agriculture is rich. The people—some of them have died, but the ones that are still here, there's a little bit that's trying to keep things alive in a community that is dying because a lot of our kids aren't coming back because the jobs aren't here. So that's one thing about the area—the jobs aren't here like they used to be. A lot of people are moving away, but you do have that few that are trying to stay strong for Piney Woods and the Free Union area. Like I said, I grew up here. We used to go to the candy store. We used to participate in different activities that we had here. And we just loved it because at that particular time, it's all you knew. So, if that's all you know, that's all you're gonna do. But if you go branch out a little bit, you can always bring things back to

		your community to help—the resources and stuff like that. It needs it.
18:07	Rachel Kamis	Yeah. And that's the reason people are coming back, right?
18:10	Anita Whitehurst	That's true.
18:12	Rachel Kamis	Yeah, nothing like home.
18:13	Anita Whitehurst	That's true too.
18:14	Rachel Kamis	All right, well, that's all I got for you. Thank you so much, Miss Anita. This was a pleasure.
18:19	Anita Whitehurst	Thank you.
18:20	Rachel Kamis	I'm honored to speak with you. We really appreciate you taking part of our program and look forward to getting these oral histories back to y'all soon.