

CONSULTANT: James Thomas Emery (spelling?)  
AGE: 72  
RESIDENCE: Caldwell, NC  
OCCUPATION: Farmer  
INTERVIEW DATE: July 14, 2016, approx. 10:30 am  
LOCATION: Orange County Senior Center, Chapel Hill, NC

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*Note: My previous consultant, Michelle McKee, knew Mr. Emery and participated in the beginning and end of the interview. She helped with introductions. Mr. Emery has a thick accent, and was difficult to understand at times.*

**So you've already heard the gist of what's going on. 1999, what's the first thing that pops into your memory about that time, when things changed from 1999 to the year 2000?**

I think it was the impression on the finance things, that wasn't all that great on finance. And then, 2000, that's when everything went sour.

**Were you working as a farmer back then?**

I've always farmed on the farm I'm on now. But I worked for the phone company in Durham, too. I was with Verizon for 34 years. But I've always farmed on my granddaddy's farm.

**Were you working for the phone company in 1999?**

Yeah, I was working from '79 to 2004.

**Do you remember anything that they did because of that Y2K bug? Do you remember the Y2K bug? Where the computers, the date changing over –**

Yeah, they took all of that. We had a bunch of crises where they went down and everything else.

**Oh, you actually remember some mishaps?**

Yeah, they went down, the computers went down. They changed systems one time, and they got another system, because it went down.

**What were you doing for the phone company?**

Engineering.

**Wow, so you were really in the thick of that.**

Well, I drew cable...I worked storm damage when Hugo came through. I had to go to Monroe. We worked 12-hour days, seven days a week.

**I'm from Charleston. I remember that.**

I think we spent a month and a half there. Seven days a week.

**So you said that computers went down because of that Y2K bug, was that when they were trying to prepare for it, or was this after?**

Um, I don't remember how they done it, but they all crashed down at Markham. We lost a bunch of prints and I had to go back and pull the old things out and re-put them in it. I do remember that.

**I spoke with you earlier. You said that you don't remember that New Year's Eve...**

Not, just as far as it being New Year's Eve, I don't, but.

**Do you typically do anything on New Year's Eve, or just stay home?**

I go to church every Sunday at New Year's Eve. We have what they call Watch Night service from 8 to 12, every New Year's night. Pray the old year in.

**But you didn't attend that night?**

Yeah, I go all the time, but it's nothing that special, we have it every year.

**So you don't remember, but you were probably there?**

I was at church. I've been going ever since 1991, so I know we had it, because we had it every year.

**What denomination was that again?**

Gospel Baptist Tabernacle. It's right here on Orange Grove Road, right there at 40.

**And what do you typically do at the New Year's Eve service?**

They have six or seven different preachers, preach the old year out and the new year in.

*I smile and repeat his line; he repeats it, too.*

**Do they have some special sermons for New Year's?**

Yeah, well they have six to seven different preachers, from about 7:30 to 12:30. They have something to eat; they break at 10:00 and go back after they get through and eat what's left.

**Do you remember people in the church being worried about starting the new millennium, about it becoming a new century?**

I...don't know. I can't say one way or the other.

**So you don't remember any preachers talking about it?**

No, I don't know. I know that this past New Year's, they said we were living in the Last Days, of Christ. Most of them did.

**That was this last year?**

Said we're living in the last days. Said America is getting worse and worse, but the answers and all that [unintelligible]. God took his hand off America. So I don't know, but I know, there's a whole lot of...there's more mess then there's ever been before.

**So do you feel like it's worse than it was back in the 1990s?**

Well, as far as violence and storms and everything else, yeah. We have a whole lot more floods...See, if you look back in November, you seen houses going down the Mississippi River, and you didn't see that before. When the rains came through, a lot of the preachers brought that up. God was putting his hand on it, doing what he can and can't do. So I don't know.

**As a farmer, have you noticed things change in your line of work, since the 1990s until now?**

Yeah, we've had...well, you always have droughts, but we've had more rain this year where I'm at then we've ever had before. So I mean, there's no doubt about it. We haven't even gotten anything planted on my farm 'cause it's wet yet [?]. It's been wet ever since we sprayed it in April; hasn't been dry enough to plant. That's rain.

*I bring up Watch Night again.* **Are there any other holidays where y'all gather for special services?**

No, they have church every Wednesday night and Sunday night and every Sunday morning. I mean, it ain't but two people there, the door's gonna be open.

*Michelle helps me clarify the question, using Halloween as an example.*

No, I don't think...we don't have nothing on Halloween.

**Do you know why they call it Watch Night?**

No. I just know they've been doing it ever since I've been going over there. They've always had it. They have a good turnout. Most of the church comes; most of the church people come.

**Do you remember any other New Year's, before or after that?**

Not really, because I always went to church ever since I've been going over there.

**What was your family situation like at the time? Were you married, did you have kids at home back then?**

Yeah, my second wife. She had two stepdaughters; all three of us were going to that church over there. Because I went to Little River Church in Caldwell until we got married. I was a Presbyterian; she was a Baptist. You can't make a Baptist out of a Presbyterian.

*I make a joke about my wife and end the formal interview. Michelle joins the conversation and asks what James said. Rehash of the Watch Night service.*

**I meant to ask this: did the service go through midnight every year?**

Oh yeah. That's what you do. He starts praying about 10 minutes to 12. You pray the old year out, the new year in, ask God to bless you for the new year. They do it every year.

*James tells Michelle about Gospel Baptist Tabernacle and its location.*

See, I was going to Little River Presbyterian Church, which was formed in 1752. It's on Little River Church Road out there in southern Caldwell.

*James talks about a longtime tradition in which the farmers from "all five churches" in Caldwell (Little River, New turn? Walnut Grove, Burns' Grove, and New Bethel) gather at homecoming (Sunday before Thanksgiving) to celebrate at a single church. They rotate which church hosts it, and it's been going on since 1752. James discusses the history of his family farm, which has been in his mother's family since the 1700s. It would be worthwhile to follow up with James on this topic.*