

Name:	Frankie Taylor Jones
Date of Birth:	December 23, 1933
Place of Birth:	Kodak, Kentucky
Date of Death:	May 11, 2005
Parents:	Frank and Cassie Taylor
Spouse:	Ralph Robert Jones, Sr.

I remember well the trips our family took to Kodak, Kentucky when I was a little girl to visit my Daddy's brother who was a coal miner living in that community. It was always a day filled with adventure for my siblings and me. We looked forward to sailing paper-made boats down the creek, swinging across the creek on an old tire suspended from a rope tied to a branch far up in a tree, playing on the coal train cars, even when we knew better! It was always a treat to visit Uncle Ralph, Aunt Frankie and our cousins there in the coal camp.

Kodak, located near Vicco, Kentucky, was often referred to as Meem-Haskins when I was growing up. It is believed that Meem-Haskins was the last name of the owner of the coal company and was from Dayton, Ohio. According to my research, the Meem-Haskins Coal Company operated in Kodak from 1930 to 1955 and employed 150 workers.

I lived in Cleveland, Ohio in the early 80's. For at least two summers I drove back home to Hazard and conducted oral history interviews from some of our elder members in the Black community, including Frankie Taylor Jones, Aunt Frankie. I sat down with her in 1983 to collect her story of growing up in Kodak, married life, and life as a coal-mining family. (Her interview is part of my larger article published in "Reshaping the Image of Appalachia", edited by Loyal Jones, 1986, entitled "The Black American Family in Southeastern Kentucky: Red Fox, Kodak and Town Mountain".) – Emily Jones Hudson

Frankie Taylor Jones shares her experience of going to school in the coal camp

We had this one little, old-roomed school. Everybody went to school, and it was so full. Had one schoolteacher, we fought and scratched. We had John Willie Combs; he was teaching then. John Willie Combs taught me when I was in school. The school was a little old brown building... down the lower end, where the cemetery was, it set right there in that bottom.

Did Blacks and Whites go to school together?

No! The White kids had a school on down the road, they had different rooms. Their school wasn't like our school, we had a little one-room shack.

Was there a name for the Blacks school?

No, didn't have no name for it. Just Kodak Colored School is what everybody called it. Go up in the Colored holler is what they'd said. All the white people stayed on down below where we stayed. The White's school, they had about five or six rooms. It was a big gray building on the left side of the road right before you get onto the dirt road going up into the holler. The bridge (right before the dirt road) separated the Blacks from the Whites.

Frankie Taylor Jones shares about family life

Ralph's mother (Mabel Allen Jones) taught Sunday school. Ralph's family had chickens, cows, hogs... we didn't have any of that... well, we had chickens.

How did Ralph's family own so much? I don't know, I don't know if Ralph's father made more money or what, I don't know. Ralph's father, Will Jones, was a member of the Masons, if that had anything to do with it.

(Speaking about after marriage.) We had our own garden. We had our own hogs made our own lard. We didn't have deep freezers, we carried water from a spring. There used to be a pump, but it broke so we used a well bucket and dropped it down there. The kids would go get water before going to school. Played football with milk cans, played Church.

Ralph worked in the mines. Carl (Ralph's brother) worked in the mines. Everybody worked in the mines but Billy (Ralph's younger brother). But Billy was always building. He made all these little fancy chicken coops on the outside the house; they had an outside house, you know, where they stored all their hay for their stuff in the wintertime. Billy would build couches, but Carl and Ralph always worked in the mines. Ralph been in the mines before he went into the army. Ralph spent about three years in the army, then he went back in the mines.

Where the name "Meem-Haskin" came from?

Now I'm going to tell you what they told me. I don't really know. But they said it was a man that owned all the land, and it was named after him. I don't know whether it's true or not. But that's what they say, that's where the company got its name from this man. And now they call it Kodak Coal Co. But we always got our mail in Kodak. Just the tipple and mines were mostly named after him, but the mail always came to Kodak. The houses and everything up in there belonged to the coal company. They just charged house rent. When they got their paycheck, the house, stores, everything belonged to the same company, they paid so much out of their paycheck. If it was \$25, they took out \$25 before they even got their check.

They sold the houses; we bought the house we stayed in, but they wouldn't sell the land. That's why everybody moved because they kept the land. I guess for coal and this kind of stuff, you

know, and we paid \$50 a year for the land the houses stood on. If you moved, you had to tear your house down (Ralph and Frankie moved out of Kodak- around 1972). There were only four houses left up there.

Was that all the Black families that lived up there?

Yeah me, Bobbi Jean, Winkie, Aunt 'Dessa... all kin people.

There were no Black people who lived below the tippie? Ms. Gussie stayed up on a little hill. The only reason we moved is because they (the coal company) wanted to truck the coal out of the holler. They were wanting to buy Ralph a trailer and set it down there in the flat on the side, but I said I wasn't going to move down there. I liked it up there (the head of the holler in Kodak) because we could raise our own garden and stuff like that.

Did most of the white families live in trailers?

They had quite a few trailers but most of them, just like we did, owned the homes, but they didn't own the land. Some of them are still like that up there. Their houses were better than ours; their houses, some were painted, they had nice porches, we didn't have no big, beautiful houses, you know.

We had Church in the schoolhouse. Through the week was school and on Sunday was Church. We would get up and go to Sunday School and after that have 11:00 o'clock service, just like they do now. We used to have a preacher named Rev. Thomas, long time ago that lived on the camp, him and his wife. They were Baptist, we didn't have nothing up there but Baptist, that's all we knew.

Where did the White families go to church? They had their own church, you know where the bridge, where the store used to be up in the hollow? The other street that went the other way from the road that went up into the hollow, well they had church up there, they had a church house. It was quite a few more white people than black. They had a nice church.

Did you all (Black and White) have a hard time getting along?

We used to fight a lot, when we had to go to the store, we had to go down by the white camp to the commissary. Quite naturally they going to throw rocks at us and holler 'nigger' at us from their porch. But we used to fight all the time, the parents never bothered us, just the kids.

What kind of things could you get at the commissary?

Prices? They were cheap, we 'drawed' script, we didn't trade with money. Like where Ralph worked at, they had an office that you put a script card in the window, and they'd give you maybe \$25 or \$30 and you take that in there and you can trade and get your groceries. They wasn't high, you could buy clothes, we bought all our kid's clothes at the commissary. They had groceries down one side then on the other side of the store, they had clothes, pants and other, you know, stuff like that. Not the good clothes like they wear now but back then they were

pretty clothes. They were cheap, not high like they are now; you could buy cream for 8 cents a can.

Frankie Taylor Jones shares about the life of a miner in Kodak

Did most of the Black miners who worked in the mines live in Kodak?

Some of them came up towards Breeding's Creek, like John C. Clayton and his father. That was a long way to come, but they made pretty good money, and you could hardly find work unless you were working in the mines. So that's why they came up there.

Did Black miners and White miners get along?

Ralph never had no problem. He said that one time he had this boss that was just bad to say nigger. When the big mines closed down- Kodak mines- they closed the commissary down. The mines that are up there now are not the same ones that were being worked during Ralph's daddy's time. It's not the same drift mine. The one Ralph and them worked in is closed in. When Ralph worked there, they had trains to come around, all that's gone. They don't have a drift mine now, they just take the coal up there and dump it into the tipple. Back then Ralph and them would hand-load cars with shovels. Been over 20-30 years since they closed Meem-Haskins mines. Other mines had contracts with the tipple and continued to truck coal to the tipple augar mines.

Ralph switched to night watching when the mine closed down. There were picketers, all the little tipples were picketing. They didn't want anyone working the tipples. They were blowing up the tipples, they weren't getting the price on coal they wanted. They didn't want no trucks to come in. They blowed up the tipple and coal trucks. One night Ralph was night watching, the picketers came up and ran him off. They dynamite the tipple, and it burned and burned for a long time. Approximately 20 years ago, in the 60's, they rebuilt the tipple. The mines even tore up the tracks, blowed them up, to keep coal from being bought in. Some of the mines were unrecognized. Some of them weren't unrecognized; that is what they (the mines) were mad about. They set up there and let the contract run out. They wouldn't sign it for a pretty good while and maybe they would just take in non-union coal. The union men that got paid good money, they would get mad and wouldn't let 'em bring this coal in like that. It was the union men that was picketing. Ralph was in the union, sometimes when they (the mines) come out picketing, they wouldn't let them work for three or four months. Times really got hard.

("Times really got hard." I can clearly remember how during those hard times, Billy Jones, my dad and Ralph's brother, would grocery shop in Hazard and deliver those groceries to Ralph's family in Kodak. Week after week until the mining dispute was settled.)

Here is a poem inspired by my childhood visits to my Uncle Ralph and Aunt Frankie's home in Kodak, Kentucky. The trips were usually on a Sunday afternoon and that meant sitting down at a supper table prepared by Aunt Frankie.

AUNT FRANKIE'S TABLE

Kodak is filled with colorful memories

Sunday supper at Uncle Ralph's

Coal wasn't the only goal

A seat at Aunt Frankie's table

Was the mouth-watering prize

Fried chicken fit for a king

Every part of that bird eaten

Including the liver, gizzard, and wing

Tomatoes so fresh they bled red

A mountain of mashed potatoes

Buttered from top to bottom

Sprinkled religiously with salt and pepper

Green beans snapped the night before

Seasoned with fatback

Cornbread fried brown in the skillet

A mean side of collard greens

Corn on the cob

Apple cobbler and fresh-squeezed lemonade

It was an honor to have a seat and feast

At Aunt Frankie's table

On a Sunday afternoon

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