

## Interviews with DARGAN BROOME

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*The following is a summary of two interviews, not a verbatim transcript. One interview was by Bob Wood (January 2011), the other by Bob Wood and Arlene Andrews (February 26, 2011). Report by Arlene Andrews. Bob reviewed this report with Mr. Broome for accuracy on January 5, 2012.*

*Note: I will refer to Mr. Broome by his first name, Dargan, because we have several generations of Mr. Broome's in the story.*

"Good morning, Mr. Broome!" We greeted him on the back stoop of the sturdy old house covered with weathered clapboards.

I introduced myself as his neighbor, given that I live near the other end of Persimmon Fork Road.

"Well, they named the roads wrong," Dargan noted. I looked obviously puzzled, so he continued.

"The Piney Grove Church is down the road they call Persimmon Fork. It used to be called Piney Grove Road. And this road out here, called Piney Grove, used to be called Persimmon Fork Road."

Already we've recovered a bit of lost history.

Mr. Dargan Broome, at age 87 (b. 1924), lives in the house he has always called home. The house itself is a historical treasure, built before the Civil War. The family was told Sherman's troops passed by and chose not to harm it. Dargan is uncertain who originally built the house, which is made of heart pine wood and sits on a flint rock foundation. In the yard is a flat rock that the Indians used to grind corn.

Dargan's father (Durham Arthur Broome) was born in the house, so it has been in the family a long time. Dargan's grandfather (Dargan Strother Broome, pronounced Durgan) was born somewhere nearby. His family told stories about how his granddaddy rode a mule to a meeting to see Wade Hampton when he came through Blythewood while running for governor. Dargan's granddaddy came to live in the house when he was 8 or 9 years old. It was owned by some widow ladies and they left it to him. Dargan's granddaddy raised nine children in the house after his wife died in childbirth. Dargan's granddaddy asked his daddy and mama to come live in the house when Dargan's sister was born, so they came and stayed.

Electricity came to the house about 1948, through Fairfield Electric Cooperative. Before that they had Aladdin (kerosene) lamps. They cooked with a wood stove in the kitchen and heated the house with wood fireplaces. They got water with a bucket from a 60-foot well until it went bad, in about 1968. Dargan's father heard the well collapse. He then had a new well dug and put in an electric pump.

One of the barns has been in the yard as long as Dargan can remember. The other was built just after World War II. Dargan has seen the barn full of corn, from top to bottom. He has also seen it full of hay.

Dargan's granddaddy gave the house and 100 acres to Dargan's daddy. His daddy farmed the acreage around the house. In later years Dargan's daddy owned two school busses. The first bus was a 1927 Chevrolet pickup truck with tall sides. The other Dargan's daddy drove on contract with the Fairfield County schools until 1943. Over the years, Dargan's daddy wore out both busses.

Dargan's daddy also served as the local magistrate. Dargan can still remember his father coming in from the fields because neighbors had appeared at the front door. His father would step inside the house, change clothes, and step onto the porch to hold court. His magistrate's office was inside the house. Mr. Broome had a deputy, Mr. Wallace Beckham, who would go get people the magistrate needed to see. (Broom Mill Road resident Margie Coleman is Wallace Beckham's daughter.)

The people who came for help were mostly local residents who had disputes. They might ask Dargan's daddy to take out a warrant on someone. The senior Mr. Broome would discourage them, saying, "You don't want me to do that." He would try to get them to settle their disputes. Sometimes he would get help from Jim Kennedy, an African-American who ran the store in Simpson, on the right where Highway 34 meets Syrup Mill Road. (Dwight Kennedy fixed lawn mowers.) Dargan does not remember any racial strife in the area.

Long ago, where Broom Mill Road crosses Big Cedar Creek was the Broom Mill, a water-powered grist and flour mill. They ground corn for Sherman's troops. Dargan never saw it, but there was an old sill (support beam) visible on the creek bank for years. Dargan has never heard of "Distow," a name that appears on an old map as being where Syrup Mill Road crosses Big Cedar Creek. Dargan recalls that George Raines had a water-powered gin house and grist mill near there. His grandfather took him there. It burned down while his grandfather was still alive.

Center Creek Road used to be called Center Place Road. Tob (pronounced "Tobe") Robertson, an African-American who dug wells, lived at the fork in Center Place Road 50 years ago. (This is now the intersection of Center Creek Road and Wood Branch Lane.) The Center family lived in a two-story house uphill from Center Creek. One generation had only girls, who had dances with Dargan's father. The girls either died or moved away, and Margaret Sloan bought the house and the land around it. Later, before Center Creek Road was developed as a residential neighborhood by Frank Hunt, only African-Americans lived on that road. The road and surroundings changed a lot when the area was developed as a residential neighborhood.

When Dargan was growing up the Broomes raised cows and hogs and usually had about 25 head of beef cattle. They raised sugar cane to make molasses., Howard Trapp, an African-American had a mill for making molasses on Syrup Mill Road (near Blythewood Road) – that's how that road got its name. The Broomes grew cotton, which they carried to Winnsboro to sell. Farmers went to town in Winnsboro on Saturdays to conduct their business.

The Broomes raised all kinds of vegetables – butterbeans, string beans, squash, okra, tomatoes, Irish potatoes, collards, turnip greens, and corn. The ground was hard red clay, but they could grow peanuts. They had two pecan trees planted in the spring of 1924, just before

Dargan was born in October. The trees, of two types – papershell and hard, were given to Dargan’s father by his grandmother, Evelyn Boney. The Broomes would load the vegetables on a truck and take it to the textile mill in Winnsboro to sell to the workers there. Sometimes, they would take their extra produce (like watermelons) by truck to Columbia to sell. They took the corn for grinding to Robbie Rimer’s grist mill near Rimer’s hardware store in Blythewood.

The only time they got apples, oranges, and raisins was at Christmas – it was wonderful.

Dargan’s mother canned everything. They would sometimes have bonfires in the yard. They roasted sweet potatoes under the coals and put sheet metal on top of the coals, where they roasted peanuts. Mr. Broome’s mama would get up every day and fix food for the day laborers, the Black people who worked on the farm. She fed anybody who came by the house.

Three sharecropping families lived on the Broome land. Dargan remembers them singing in the fields while they worked. “It was the prettiest music I ever heard in my life,” he says. They were the families of Tom Austin, Pete Goins, and Doc Watkins. Eleck Henderson lived in a house on the way to the Broomes’ pond. He would eat Sunday breakfast with the Broomes. The way sharecropping worked is for the family to live and work on the land and give one-third to one-half of what they grew to the owners.

Back in those days, families did not eat steak and fish every day. Jim Kennedy had a meat market, where you might get a little piece of steak. The fish truck would go around to the stores and bring croakers on the weekends. The Broome men hunted quail, rabbits, squirrels, and possums, and Dargan’s mama would fry ‘em up. There were no deer around then. They went possum hunting at night. They would tree the possum, get him down, put him in a sack, and go look for another. They then put their night’s catch in a box under the house and fed them cornbread and potatoes with buttermilk. Then Dargan’s mama would roast the possums with sweet potatoes.

Dargan used to hunt quail with his bird dogs (two English setters and a Pointer) and a shotgun. He would go to the tract of land across Syrup Mill Road now owned by Rollie Huffstetler. An old cemetery is there.

The Broomes did their banking in Winnsboro.

Louie Condon had the Fairwold Stock Market at Highway 21 and 555, near the railroad track. The Broomes bought their cattle (sold on Tuesdays) and mules and horses (sold on Thursdays) there.

There were lots of stills in the area. The landowners either had stills themselves or rented their land to still operators. If the still operator did not pay his rent, the landowner would turn him into the law.

When Dargan was growing up, Henry Bass (of Blythewood) still drove a mule and buggy to Sandy Level Baptist Church. Mr. Bass could say the most beautiful prayers.

The Broome family received health care from a lady doctor, Dr. Portia, until she moved out West during the Great Depression. People paid her what they could, or paid her with fruits and vegetables, but they got so there was no more to give. Later the Broomes went to Dr. John Buchanan in Winnsboro or Dr. McCants at the maternity hospital (also in Winnsboro). Blacks

and Whites went to Columbia Hospital, but there were separate facilities for each. Back then the undertaker would drive you in the hearse like it was an ambulance.

What has changed since then is that people used to help one another. If someone was sick, neighbors were right there to help. Now people seem to be more selfish. When Dargan's daddy had typhoid fever in 1930, Dargan and his brother stayed at a house near their pond with an elderly African-American woman, who took care of them.

Growing up, Dargan attended Sandy Level Baptist Church. His parents drove to church in a 1929 Model-T Ford until they got a 1931 red Chevrolet. Gladys (Mrs. H.B.) McLean played the piano at Sandy Level for years. The church was warmed by a pot-bellied stove. The spring-fed baptismal pool behind the church was cold. Dargan and Bubba Sharpe cleaned out the pool. Dargan's sister and her children attended Crooked Run Baptist Church on SC 269.

Dargan's father (Durham Arthur Broome) attended Piney Grove Methodist Church when he was growing up. When Durham married Annie Bell Boney, they began attending Sandy Level Baptist Church. Dargan's parents are buried at Sandy Level. Dargan's grandfather is buried in a family cemetery off Broom Mill Road about 1.5 miles from Dargan's house. This is near the homes of David Ferguson and Chip Broome.

Broom Mill Road is named after the Broom family's mill. Dargan's father or grandfather slowly began adding an "e" to the end of his name, hence the difference in the names of the road and Dargan.

Dargan's mother (Annie Bell Boney Broome) was the daughter of Charnel Boney. Annie's family lived in the old house that used to sit on Boney Road just southwest of the Michael Road entrance to Lake Ashley. Annie had a twin sister, Claire Boney Martin, who lived near Hagood's Store. Dargan's uncle Tally Boney ran the funeral home on Langford Road across from the Martin house. Tally did not embalm – he paid other funeral homes to do that. Boney's Funeral Home provided ambulance service. Dargan used to help his uncle with funerals. Tally Boney also ran a store, where he sold fertilizer, in a brick building near Boney Store. Bunk Wooten opened another store right next door. Dargan remembers the Langford brothers, George, Sidney, and Clark.

Felix Rimer ran a public swimming pavilion with a nice bathhouse at Rimer Pond. This was the only recreation around. Dargan and his father and three Black children would go pick blackberries and then go to the pond on July 4. They brought their own food and picnicked. Felix Rimer also built the first gas station in town, across from where a Sinclair station would later be put. Rimer sold the gas station to Mr. J.R. Creech, who came to Blythewood to work for the railroad. Mr. Creech married Frances Jeffers and Tally Boney married Virginia Jeffers, Frances' sister.

The family went to Winnsboro on Saturdays, and they went to Blythewood on Sundays for church.

In the 1930s Ed Broome ran the Blow Fly Café at the corner of McNulty and US 21. After church Dargan played inside the Blythewood railroad depot and played ball in the sandpit nearby.

Across the railroad tracks were pens for cows. Hoboes would jump off the trains.

Dargan remembers Charlie Wilson, father of Roger Wilson, and Howard and Harry Wilson. Elton Wilson ran the dime store. Dargan remembers that Marshall Hawley, an active member at Sandy Level, owned the building where Robert Buchanan formerly had his dentist office (at the southern corner of Blythewood Road and Main Street).

Dargan does not remember any talk about why the county line was moved in the early 1900s.

Dargan graduated from Greenbriar High School in 1943. That year his daddy had a heart attack, and his doctor told him to stay out of the sun. He could no longer farm or drive the school bus, so from then on Dargan took care of his mama and daddy. Dargan would carry his daddy to the doctor and druggist and his daddy would say, "I don't want anybody to see you helping me." Dargan got a two-year military deferment and drove his Daddy's school bus.

A lot of the county roads were dirt roads, muddy when it rained. It was hard to ford the creeks. Syrup Mill and Broom Mill Roads were not paved until the 1950s. Mr. Fred Muller dammed Persimmon Fork Creek, and Mr. George Walker later bought it.

Dargan joined the military in 1945, first with Army infantry, then heavy artillery. He was stationed in Okinawa, where he guarded the airfield. Dargan could see the difficulties the American troops had encountered when they captured the field during the war. He finds it unbelievable that they were successful. Dargan got a dependency discharge to help back on the farm again.

After the war everyone was looking for jobs. For a while everybody had "rockin' chair money," about \$30 per month discharge money to use for trade school. They got used to making money in the service (instead of farming like before the war). Lots of people stopped farming to work in the mill. Many farmers came from Georgia to work in Winnsboro. In May 1950 Dargan applied to work at UniRoyal in Winnsboro, where they made fabric for tires. Mr. Bunch, who was like the police at the mill village, knew Dargan because he came to the mill to sell vegetables to the workers. They hired Dargan the day he applied and he started work at 11pm that night.

For 25 years Dargan worked the night shift and would leave home in the rain or the cold. He worked in the weave room doing odd jobs for 17 years. His last job was air conditioning repair. He retired on October 1, 1989, after 39 years of service.

Now when people work eight hours they want to go home and relax. Dargan used to work eight hours than go home and work the cows, farm, and garden. For years Dargan and his father had Maude the mule for help working the farm. In the 1950s they bought the mule for \$100 from Gene Allen, a Black man on Syrup Mill Road.

Dargan did not marry until he was 43 years old, in 1968, but he says, "Then I married the best." Her name was Isabelle Frick. She was raised near where US 321 crosses Big Cedar Creek, where lots of Fricks and Ballentines live. Dargan and Isabelle were married at Beulah Church on US 321 and then started attending Winnsboro First United Methodist Church. Isabelle was a specialist in ladies wear, especially hats and dresses. She owned a shop in Winnsboro, Isabelle's, but she let her friends buy on credit and was losing money, so they sold the shop. Mrs. Broome went to work at Belk's in Winnsboro, and then later with Mr. Ernest Probst, selling best quality clothing. They would go to the Merchandise Mart in Charlotte to select clothing. Later she did club work with the Clemson Extension Service in Winnsboro.

Dargan has no children. His sister, Edith Broome Lyles, lives in the Greenbriar area of Fairfield County. Her son, James D. "Jimmy" Lyles and his wife Tandy live nearby and check on Dargan. Jimmy is a private detective who runs Special Investigations Unit. Dargan's brother, Foster (deceased), had a son, Russell, who lives in Spartanburg. Foster's other son, Jamie Broome, is a Baptist minister in Kentucky. They have two boys.

Isabelle had breast cancer that spread to her lymph system. The Good Lord took her in her sleep.

Isabelle's mother, Patti Frick, lived to be 104 and never complained. When Isabelle was sick and had to be in the hospital, Dargan took care of Ms. Frick in his home. He would give her sweet bread and coffee. When Mrs. Frick went to the Fairfield Nursing Home, she was like the queen over there. Dargan went to see her every week.

Dargan's father deeded 76 acres to each of his three children and they got 33 more acres when Dargan's father died in 1971. Dargan and Isabelle built a screened house down by the pond they put in themselves on the property. They had picnics there. The family would fish and sometimes spend the night there.

Compared to what it used to be, the Town of Winnsboro is dead now – so much is on the bypass. Isabelle had a nice house in Winnsboro. Mary Green, the psychic, told Isabelle to sell her property and use the money for fun. The psychic told Dargan where to find his lost ring. Dargan has been a Mason for 50 years.

Dargan owned 2.7 acres near the Kelly Ballentine house in Blythewood. He bought it for \$600/acre and sold it for \$5000.

Dargan meets for Bible study on Monday nights with a diverse group of people, young and old. They meet at their homes, where they eat together and watch the preacher on a screen. He goes there for the Word of God. His house is too small, but he has hosted the group at the fishing pond house.

A lady who worked at the mill painted a picture of Dargan's house; it is hanging in the big room of his home.

When Bob asked Dargan what he would like to pass on to the next generation, he said, "Young people need this Bible right here," and he teared up.