

## Transcribed Excerpts from Interview of Paul Wilson, Born in Buxton, 1992

### *Excerpt 1:*

**Frances Hawthorne:** “You were telling me that your dad, Jacob Wilson was agent for the Company.”

**Paul Wilson:** “Yes ... the Buxton Coal Company. I don’t know if that’s what they called it or not, but Buxton is the one that sent him out to get workers to come out and work in Buxton and mine the coal, and he did. He got a lot of people.

**Frances Hawthorne:** “Did he go out of state to do that?”

**Paul Wilson:** “Yes. I don’t know where he was in the south, but he went through the south to get workers. On one trip he got a man to commit himself to come (and that same night ... or maybe it was the next night), the man told him that “they were planning to do bodily harm to him, because he was taking the cheap labor out of the south.” Dad cancelled his plans, got some women’s clothes, and that was the way he got out. He dressed up in women’s clothes and got out of the south.” (don’t know when it was, and I don’t remember where, but this is what he told me.)”

“I have a brother-in-law of mine, Tommy Mitchell. I was telling him this story one day; (about dad putting on women’s clothes). He said, ‘your dad brought us out of the south’, and I don’t know where they came from.”

**Frances Hawthorne:** “You are talking about the tommy Mitchell’s family?”

**Paul Wilson:** “Yes. Tommy Mitchell’s family.”

**Frances Hawthorne:** “So, your dad went down south, and a whole family would come back.”

**Paul Wilson:** “Yes, they would put money into the bank, (now I didn’t see anything, but I was told it was \$50,000 and that was a lot of money in those days) but that was to take care and for bringing a family and their belongings, on the train. I don’t know if any men came out of the south and then sent personally for their families, but dad went prepared to bring them all up. It was quite a thing!”

“My nephew was asking about, ‘how in the world could his grandfather have \$50,000, in the bank, in his name, to bring laborers out to work in the mines, and died without a penny in his pocket. (they talk back and forth about this in the family ... They’re strong!) That’s where I got that story, but dad didn’t tell me anything about that \$50,000.”

**Frances Hawthorne:** “That would be a tremendous amount of trust, wasn’t it?”

**Paul Wilson:** “Yes. But you see in Buxton, (and I guess that’s why I am so hipped up about it) ‘if your word isn’t any good, then forget about the rest of it.’ Now they did that! Dad didn’t have anything, but they put that amount of money into the bank (in his name) for him to bring out the

families, (and didn't know how many,) but he was to bring out the families, (and didn't know how many,) but he was to bring them up north, and that was to face the white miners. They had a union, and they already had threatened to stop work or something, so these people already had black workers then; but there weren't enough of them to make any difference. So, when they start bringing all the black families to Buxton, and the company had 200, maybe 500 or 600 acres ... they gave you about half an acre, or something like that, for you to have a garden, so you can grow your own garden. This lady, Mrs. Tate, called me, (till her dying day,) 'her boy'. She had beans, and she needed bean poles. She put me into business when she told me she needed some bean poles. I went down into a reservoir and cut down those willow trees, came back and sold them to her for bean poles. And of course she told others that I sold bean poles, so ... "I was in business at an early age."

**Excerpt 2:**

**Frances Hawthorne:** “Going back to Buxton, and I know you are quite proud of your dad, being an agent...what other things in Buxton you can say you were really proud of and looking back, you were glad they happened and etc.”

**Paul Wilson:** “Well, what I see today, I was proud of everything that we have in Buxton. I couldn’t believe it, my brother Joe, worked very hard trying to get black teachers down there. He talked to a fellow, (who was white) who he worked with and went to the show with. They came here in Des Moines, and decided they were going to go to the show, and was shown a sign telling you where you set at in the theater. Now, that didn’t make any sense ... no kind of sense at all!

**Frances Hawthorne:** “I remember you saying, ‘if you got the people from Buxton, they would fill up a theater and there wouldn’t be any place for the white folk to sit.’”

**Paul Wilson:** “In Buxton, there two ladies, they called them the ‘Landlord Sisters’ (both French)...and they ran the theater ... and had everything on the second floor of the Y.M.C.A. When you go in there, whites and everybody else went in there, and didn’t interfere with you. It would have been a nice thing if they had brought the KKK into Buxton.”

**Frances Hawthorne:** “Why do you say that?”

**Paul Wilson:** “They wouldn’t be around today. Never! Never!

**Frances Hawthorne:** “What ... would you have done to change them or gotten rid of them, or what?”

**Paul Wilson:** “Well...”

**Frances Hawthorne:** “When you were living in Buxton, around the year 1900 and 1923 ... there were riots happening in other parts of the United States, was there any special reactions with people in Buxton?”

**Paul Wilson:** “Not unless they came to Buxton. We didn’t have any time to get out of line in Buxton. Those people were so appreciative of the fact that they were permitted to live a normal life...”

***Excerpt 3:***

**Frances Hawthorne:** “What kind of hours did the people work then, any set hours?”

**Paul Wilson:** “Yes, I don’t remember. They had a train (because the mines wasn’t in Buxton ... in another area) that picked up the miners at certain times, dropped them off and brought them back. I don’t remember what they hours were. They were regular ... (like you go down and work so many hours and ... you could that if you wanted too) but you wouldn’t have any transportation until that given time, because it was too far to walk.”

**Frances Hawthorne:** “So no matter how long you worked, they kept track of the amount of coal you had mined?”

**Paul Wilson:** “Oh yes! They always taken an empty mine car to the entrance rooms where you mined the coal. If you wanted to sleep all day ... you could sleep all day, but then ... you did not get any money. It wasn’t like giving you so much money if you were there. You made the money yourself, depending upon the amount of coal you had dug. Some of the fellows would go in and use the dynamite, put it in the wall, and that would blow the coal and slate out too. The company was paying you for the coal, not the slate.”