

## Oral history with 81 year old male, Jackson, Kentucky (Transcription)

Tape 60

Interview with <unintelligible text> on Comparing Living Conditions of the early 1900's to Now, October 26, 1971

Begin M53 A(1)

Ron Allen: Give us a biography of yourself, when you were born, etc.?

<unintelligible text>: I was born October 18, 1884. My father was born in 1851. His name was <unintelligible text>. He was living during the Civil War and they couldn't go to school and learn to read and write. He was a log contractor once and he didn't have any education but he could do excellent bookkeeping and he never made a mistake.

Ron Allen: Where was he a contractor?

<unintelligible text>: Yes, raised in Wolfe County. He was a logger. He had a first cousin. He was a little older than my dad and they neither one could read or write. And they had no bookkeeper, they kept it in their heads. You don't find many people like that today, do you? My daddy was a great man, He got hurt while logging in 1875 and he never could work no more, just piddled around. He wasn't what you say a cripple but he was pretty lame. He couldn't lift. He was about my size. I went into the Army when I was 19.

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Ron Allen: Was this World War I?

<unintelligible text>: It was just after the Spanish-American War about 2 years after.

Ron Allen: Tell us what you know about the Spanish-American War.

<unintelligible text>: Well, Edmond Dewey in about 1899 walked about 70 miles away from the base in Manila, Philippines. I've been in the old church, what was standing. They claimed it was seventy miles from the base. I was in one onetime and it was full of bats. I never saw so many bats in all my life. I got out of their quick, too!

Sam Smith: Was it an old stone church?

<unintelligible text>: Yes, it was in an old stone church. The rainy season over there was from June to August. Thatr's when they did their farming. They

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raised rice and had rice paddies.

Ron Allen: Where did you serve in the Army?

<unintelligible text>: Well, I took 3 years in Kansas, Ft. Leavenworth and 2 years and 3 months in the Philippines in the second enlistment and my third enlistment in Thailand

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1912 to 15. I stayed out of the army for about a year and a half after my first enlistment and then went back.

Ron Allen: Were there any plagues or fevers while you were in the Philippines?

<unintelligible text>: Yes, I had malaria fever while I was over there. I got so I couldn't even talk, couldn't whisper. I never (was able to do a) thing for about six months.

Ron Allen: Do you know what they used to treat malaria fever ? Was it quinine?

<unintelligible text>: When I was in the hospital, the doctor told me the medicine they were giving me made me sick. The doctor told me they were giving my hypodermics. They didn't understand ( that the medicine was making me sick) it and they were giving me that medicine every hour. They gave me too much and it was for I don't know how many hours I couldn't even talk or hear. They doctor came in and (saw) how much medicine they had given me and he said it was no wonder I couldn't talk.

Sam Smith: Could you tell us how Jackson was around the early 1900's?

<unintelligible text>: In 1901 or 02 they were just getting rid of this Hargis feud. They had the National Guard here and there were a lot of people killed. Of course, I lived over in Wolfe County then but I came up here once and a while. Those were queer times around here then.

Ron Allen: Who was President during the Spanish-American War?

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<unintelligible text>: McKinley. See, they (the Spanish) sunk our fleet in the Cuba Bay, that's what started the war. They went in and invaded Cuba and they

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bought the Philippines from then , then had to go take them. Had a brother (who) went over there in that.

Sam Smith: What kind of recreation did you have back then?

<unintelligible text>: Square dancing, sixteen hands up and gone again!

Sam Smith: What other types of recreation did you have?

<unintelligible text>: I was over in the Philippines when the cholera broke out. We were under quarantine for six months. The doctor said whiskey would keep that off to a certain extent. We were laughing. (We tried it.) Did some drinking to keep it off. It did. Three of us took it (cholera) one night and two got over it. That slowed it, the whiskey. You go on so you didn't pay any attention. We had a pretty good time though, part of the time.

Sam Smith: Do you remember the old sawmill they used to have over here at Quicksand or in Jackson?

<unintelligible text>: Yes, they had one over here in this bottom. My kinfolks had that over there, the Days. They operated it over there in South Jackson. They had done away with it before I was old enough to know much about it. They had a big mill over there.

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Ron Allen: How would you say that living conditions have changed since the early 1900's.

<unintelligible text>: Living conditions are better, much better. Time's changed, too. was thinking last night where I'd read where someone was making molasses. Well, that's late making them at this time of the year. But, back a few years ago I've seen them making molasses on election day. I've seen them cutting up corn on election day. You don't see that anymore about 1904 or 05. Don't see that anymore. Back then, they planted corn in March. My dad used to plant corn in March. They don't plant it now until April or May. Now it's May to June. It's then cut up in August and September. September is late to cut corn now.

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Sam Smith: Did it once snow in May?

<unintelligible text>: In 1894, the 19th day of May, great big snow. I guess there were four or five inches. I can remember that well. I'd been 10 years old that October. Yes, there's a lot of difference in the time. People are a lot different, too. Back then, if a man sold his vote everybody turned against him, wouldn't have nothing to do with him. Now, that's a common thing, I know that because I worked for the election.

Sam Smith: Did they have very many killings around election time?

<unintelligible text>: No, not near like they do now. It's pitiful. Yea. One time I bought a whole family at an election. I'll never work in an election no more.

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Ron Allen: How would you say that transportation, living, food, conditions, etc., have changed?

<unintelligible text>: Well, transportation's different. Until a few years back, you didn't have the cars. You had buggies and most of the people went to church in wagons and mule teams. You don't see that anymore. You don't see the buggy anywhere. I saw one on television the other day and it looks odd now. I believe the first automobile I ever saw was in 1905. I know it wasn't long after they came out that I saw one. I heard on television the other day that there were so many million in use in the United States today. I saw my first car in Kansas. It was a funny looking thing, I thought.

Ron Allen: Now we can just go to the store anytime we want and buy anything we want to eat, what did you do back then?

<unintelligible text>: You had to go and trade then. Down my ways, there was this old merchant. He had the biggest country store I guess there ever was.

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(It was) a hundred feet long and I guess about sixty feet wide. And he had anything in that you wanted. He'd get you a sawmill if you wanted it. He had a threshing machine to make wheat or thresh wheat. If you'd go over there and name something he didn't have, why the next time you went, he'd have it. He'd go to Cincinnati about twice a year and buy goods. Yes, he had the biggest country store I've ever seen. As big as most in town. He had anything you wanted. Shoes of all kind, guns, etc. and back then you could buy a good pair of shoes for \$2.00. I remember the first pair I ever had cost \$2.00. People thought it was something to give \$2.00 for a pair of shoes. If you spent that much, why it was awful.

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You could buy a good pair of shoes for \$1.25. But then, you worked for 50c a day. I was paid 50c many a day. I worked in the coal mines in 1920 and I went down to Lee County in 1919 and worked in the coal mines a little while. I'd never worked in the mines before I went down there. Working in coal I made a couple of dollars a day. I thought that was fine and it was then. In 1920 I got a job as a track helper at 68 c an hour. I'd worked two days and my trackman got sick and couldn't work and couldn't come back so they kept me to be in charge of it all. I'd only worked two days on the track and I didn't know anything about it. They said, "Now you'll get 80C an hour." I couldn't believe that, I went home that night and told my wife and we were both awful glad. I didn't believe it (80c an hour) until I got a paycheck. I was working there one day and a man came that wanted some track laid and he wanted me to but I told him that I could lay a track but wouldn't be sure if it was in the right place or not. He told me he would show me how and what to do. I worked a year there but I quit. It was awful hard work. I moved back here. I worked over here at the supply house a little while. There was a track man that came here on time and somebody told him that I could lay track. He came to me and asked me

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one day, "Are you a trackman?" I told him no. He said, "Did you ever lay track?" I told him that I had worked on it. He said come and go with me. I had had two mines and I didn't want to switch here. He took me to this mine and said that he wanted some track laid a certain way. It looked awful complicated. I put that in and changed the whole thing. There were five trackmen there and he made me head trackman. I didn't like that at all because I didn't know what these other fellows would think about it. And old fellow that had come here from Tennessee and who had worked on or laid track for 40 years, I talked to him about me taking a job and he said, "Why take it, what's the difference between being head of trackmen and anything else? You'll be in your territory and I'll be in mine." One day the manager asked me if I could lay a chug hole switch. I told him I could if he showed

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me how. He told me how but I didn't lay it the way he told me. He came to me after I got it done and said that that wasn't the way that he had told me to do it. I said that I knew it wasn't. I said, "But this is much better than the way you told me." He said, "Can you run that machine (the cutting machine) over that?" I told him that I never did. He asked me to back it over the tracks and I did. The manager said that was a new design over the track and that he was glad of that. It worked good. Instead of a car having to go all the way down the track then back, it could run any time and (at) almost any place. One day he came to me again and said that they needed a "Y" put in over at a certain place. He said that there wasn't a man on the job that knew how to put it in and that he had never seen one put in and I said I hadn't either. I told him that I had seen them on the railroad. So, I put that in. I'll show you a picture of the track I laid. (HE SHOWS A PICTURE OF IT) Why, I wound up being the best trackman on the Kentucky River. Ha! Ha!

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I put it in and then had to take it out in about six months. Then, before I left I put it back in. There are 16 tracks that go over that. One man said that while I was laying the track that I was the craziest man he had ever seen to lay that track in such a way. They wanted me to go up to Blackey in Letcher County. They wanted me to lay tracks up there. I went up there and they had some of the awfulest track I ever saw. I never saw anything like it. They had me to show them. Yes, there was this old fellow from Pennsylvania and he was the superintendent up there. They got to talking about track in mines in Blackey. This old fellow from Pittsburg said, "Well, I've got the best trackman on earth. He lays more track and better track." Another fellow said, "What could he lay?" The fellow from Pennsylvania had a picture and he said, "Well, there's one that he laid." This one said, "Why that it would take a crazy trackman to lay track like that." After I put that in, I was paid \$1.50 an hour. I was offered a better job in a different mine but I wouldn't change. I was close to my old job

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and had a good place to live. I was paying \$4.00 a month rent and lights furnished. That \$4.00 was just for the coal I burned.

Ron Allen: How did you get meat anytime you wanted it back then? How was it preserved?

<unintelligible text>: If you went to the store, they would just whack off ever so much you wanted. If you wanted a piece of bacon to cook in your beans, why they'd pull out a big old middling and cut off a piece and weigh it. It was just what you wanted, a dollar or 50 cents worth, sometimes more, sometimes less. I remember one time I was in a store and a fellow came in to get a quarter's worth of meat. After he went out, they were laughing at a man buying a quarter's worth of meat. It was about a pound, Now, you go to the store and get a pound of meat and nothing is said about it. Of course, now that pound costs you a dollar and something.

Sam Smith: When they killed their hogs and beef, how was the meat preserved? Dried?

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<unintelligible text>: Some people would take a ham and hang it up in what they call a smokehouse and smoke them. I think they called it hickory smoking. My mother always used hot ashes over them at first and let it stay on the meat for a day or two and then washed it off and hang them up. She never had trouble with them. I had an uncle and he'd do the same thing. They did a lot of pickling in those big barrels, too. They'd make sauerkraut, pickled corn, pickled beans, etc. Now you don't see anything like that. You got to the store and get those now. And potatoes, they'd raise some of the awfulest lot of potatoes there ever was. An old fellow came to my mother one time and there was a little barn off to the house and he said, always called my mother <unintelligible text> was her name, but almost everybody called her <unintelligible text>. This old fellow said,

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'<unintelligible text>, if you let me tend that garden out there in potatoes, I'll give you half of them." She told him to go to it. When they dug those potatoes, my mother wound up with 60 bushels and so did he, 120 bushels of potatoes all together. You couldn't sell them back then because everyone had plenty of them and you would up throwing them out. They are about 3 or 4 dollars a bushel now. So, I don't think you'd care much for throwing them away now. We usually put our potatoes in a warm house. Some people put them in the ground. They'd dig a hole, put them in and cover them up.

Sam Smith: Tell us about the old brogan shoes? What they looked like?

<unintelligible text>: They'd sell for \$1.00 or \$1.25. They looked awful. They just came out here toward the toes and came straight up. (They were) plain toed like a glove or something, some laced and some buckled. I wore them with the Buckle. I never wore them with the laces. They came above your ankles. They'd last some people a year. I had a first cousin one time that wore about a 13 or 14 shoe.

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