

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farm Life in West Virginia

Personal Experiences

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GROVER MACE

Interviewed

by

Bernice Mercer

on

May 14, 1981

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farm Life in West Virginia

INTERVIEWEE: GROVER MACE

INTERVIEWER: Bernice Mercer

SUBJECT: education, canning, weaving, farming, family life,  
soap making, herbs and medicines

DATE: May 14, 1981

ME: This is an interview with Grover Mace for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Farm Life in West Virginia, by Bernice Mercer. We are at Mr. Mace's home, 5937 Western Reserve Road, on May 14, 1981 at 1:00 p.m.

Mr. Mace, would you begin by telling us about your parents coming to West Virginia?

MA: Do you want to know when they left West Virginia, and why we came here?

ME: No. Tell us about in getting to West Virginia. Was your father born in West Virginia?

MA: No.

ME: He came to West Virginia from where?

MA: Connecticut.

ME: From Connecticut?

MA: Yes, he traveled by a covered wagon. They had two cows with them and they would stop the wagon where there was water and feed for the cows and horses. They had oxen pulling the wagon. They would sleep at night in the wagon. They settled in the West Virginian woods, clearing out a little place. They built a log house, living off whatever the woods provided.

ME: Before we go any further, I want to ask about your mother. They were married before they left Connecticut?

MA: No, they were married years later in West Virginia. Father was just a young man when he came there.

ME: You never saw your grandfather?

MA: No. My grandfather was out milking a cow, he and his wife, when the war was on. A bunch of soldiers came while they were milking that cow. They had a good, fat calf. They just shot the calf and cooked it right there; they built up a fire and ate it. They wouldn't give him anything for the calf and something was said. I never knew what it was, but they shot my grandfather--killed him right there. That was during the war.

I can't remember the place where they stopped and made a little home. There was a store in that town which supplied all of the residents' needs. There was also a post office founded and they named it after my people, Mace.

ME: Your father's name was?

MA: George.

ME: And your grandfather was?

MA: I can't remember that. My mother's name was Mary Linger before she was married.

ME: Her people came there?

MA: Her people were there. I don't know where they came from. They were German and they lived near.

ME: By the time you would remember, there was quite a settlement.

MA: Oh, yes, the country was all settled up.

ME: The people were doing a good deal of farming?

MA: They raised sheep. My father had three hundred head of sheep at my first remembrance. He gave me the job of looking after the lambs. During the spring, they run around the field; there were no barns. This was also the time of the year when the little lambs came, and if they were not cared for some of them would die or get killed. It was my job to go out among them. When I would hear a little lamb cry because it was cold, I would go and put him in a bag and then carry it in the house. I would put him in warm water and give him warm milk to drink, rubbing him dry before taking him back. His mother would search for him by calling to all the lambs. He would hear her and she would answer him. She would come right to him; she knew. That was my job until I was eighteen years old.

ME: How young do you think you were when you started doing that?

MA: I can't remember; I was just a little kid.

ME: Do you remember having playmates? Did you have a brother?

MA: Oh yes, I had four brothers. There were thirteen of us children. Father and mother made fifteen. We made our own maple syrup. We also planted sugarcane every year and made sorghum molasses. We had sorghum molasses all year round. We made vinegar out of the molasses too.

ME: You had a lot of neighbors?

MA: Oh yes.

ME: These people had sheep too?

MA: Nearly everybody had sheep and cattle. That's the way they lived.

ME: But they had to farm too?

MA: Oh yes.

ME: They raised other things besides cane?

MA: They raised everything they wanted to eat. We never thought of going to the store to buy something to eat.

ME: All your grain and vegetables?

MA: They would dry so much stuff. I never saw a Mason can, a glass can, until I was I don't know how old. They [my parents] had little, stone jars that they put an upside down saucer on. They put sealing wax around it for storgae. That would keep it fairly good. Then the Mason jars came, and they cold packed. I would sit there day after day after day thinking about all that.

ME: These days there are a lot of people who realize that they can still do some of these things, not all of them, but some of them. They only need to know a lot about the details. By the way, what sort of a plow did they use?

MA: Our first plow was just a shovel plow. It turned the ground over and stirred it up. They made them out of wood themselves. I don't know where they got the piece of steel that they made and bolted on. I remember this so well.

I don't know how old I was, but we went right in the woods and turned out two acres of heavy, big, old timber for 30¢ a bushel. We peddled those peaches and got home before dark.

What we did with that money was bought stuff for school. When it came time to go to school, my first year in schooling, a man rode six miles horseback and taught me my ABC's for \$25 a month. There were so many winters I can remember where we didn't have any school at all. We didn't have money. When we didn't have money, the teachers didn't do anything.

ME: They had to pay the teacher. How big of a school did they have?

MA: There would be forty or fifty children in a one-room school.

ME: Was it made out of logs?

MA: No. They had to haul Poplar trees and I forget what other kind and have it sawed. They planed the school's siding by hand, right on the ground, and built it.

We had no church. [The townspeople] had a meeting at our house; there were a couple dozen people there. They talked it over before and one agreed to do this and one agreed to do that. Father agreed to cut all the timber. I would saw it and then put it on the ground to build the church. He would do that; it was his job. Those great, big Poplar trees you could buy right on the stump for \$1 a thousand. It cost \$3 a thousand to cut them and saw them into boards. That's what he did.

ME: Would they make a pit for the sawing?

MA: No, they cut stone and put that on the ground, letting it stick out a little bit and setting the church on that.

ME: How did they saw it?

MA: They cut logs into split rails and fenced them, two acres. They burned all the wood, brush, everything. There were a lot of stumps in there. My father went in there and planted two peach pits, one on each side of the stump. Then us children started to work in the field. We wanted to go along with a hoe and chop little holes to plant a little corn, beans, and some pumpkins. Another one would come by and cover it up. You couldn't plow because of the roots, so you just hoed the ground.

The third year, there was a crop of peaches. All the limbs just layed on the ground. They were white, freestone peaches. Father wondered what we were going to do, but finally he got another neighbor to come in. He had a wagon, just like us, and they cut down Butternut trees, sawing them into little strips to place inside bushel crates. A levelful would be a bushel. That wagon would hold 90 bushels. They got a neighbor to come and some men to help and we picked all of the peaches that were in that orchard that day, putting them into piles on the lawn.

Then they sorted them and put them into the crates. Next they put the crates into the wagon. They were done at almost midnight. They would eat, shut the wagon, and start to town. They drove ten miles over the rough ground with the wagon. I think we had 90 bushels, if I remember right. When we got to town there was a place where we could water the horses and tie them up. There was wood and you could build a fire to make your coffee or cocoa.

Most of the sawing was done by water--great, big waterwheels of power. When they finished building the church, they didn't owe a dollar on it. Everyone that agreed to do some sawing, did it; it was all dressed by hand in tongue and grooves. Just think of that.

ME: Do you suppose that church is still there?

MA: No. There is about 80 feet of water where that church was. They built a dam across from Hilda Hill. It backed the water up ten miles. Part of the farm where I was born is also under-water.

ME: What is the name of the present town?

MA: Where the dam was?

ME: Yes.

MA: Horner. Up the valley a little ways, they had a loom that wove cloth for people.

ME: Did they use machinery to turn it too?

MA: They did most of that by hand. They had looms to wind wool into strings. It was all done by hand.

ME: Your mother and your sisters didn't spin at home?

MA: Oh yes. They had all that. They had a big loom.

ME: A great, big spinning wheel?

MA: Yes. There was a big spinning wheel and a little spinning wheel. The first was a little one. One time a neighbor was over who asked if the big one was first. I said, "No, the little one was first." You had a peddle and you would feed wool in there and the spinning wheel would twist it. After it twisted, then they put it in a skien.

ME: But it was pretty big?

MA: That would be big. The big spinning wheel took it and twisted it harder. Those were great days.

- ME: This first spinning wheel produced yarn, like you could knit with?
- MA: It took the wool. After we sheared the sheep, we would wash the wool and get it clean and dry.
- ME: Where would you wash it at?
- MA: Right in the creek. Anywhere where there was a spring. We would dry it in the sun.
- ME: Did you use soap on it?
- MA: Yes.
- ME: And of course you made your own soap?
- MA: We made our own soap.
- ME: I know about that because I make soap myself.
- MA: You pull that wool out, push your peddle, and twist it a little more. The wool would stick together unless it was twisted.
- ME: When you got done with that operation, you could knit with it?
- MA: Yes.
- ME: If you took the big wheel, you could make it smaller and tighter.
- MA: It twisted it tighter and made the string smaller. It depends on what you wanted. If you wanted the string big, you could use the little when you wanted it. The loom would weave 54" wide; that's wider than a bed you know. The strings were cotton. They are called chains.
- ME: Where did they get that from?
- MA: They made that out of hemp. Do you know what hemp is?
- ME: Yes. Did they grow it themselves?
- MA: They grew it themselves. They would make the string. In later years they bought it, but I don't know where.
- ME: Was that like flax?
- MA: Yes, flax.
- ME: It was flax that they used?
- MA: Some used flax and some used hemp. They're about the same thing. A number of years ago, a lady went somewhere and

bought a loom; she had it down the cellar. I think the whole country tried to help her, but nobody could help her. She was down there one day and she said, "I wish I would have never seen this old loom." She couldn't get it to work. One day I said to my wife, "Let's go up. I know [how to work it]." Every piece in that loom was the same as in this house. I started to put it all together. She had the thread and I started to weave. She thought it was wonderful.

ME: Did you learn to weave when you were young?

MA: Yes. I weaved at home with my family.

ME: How old were they when they started weaving?

MA: Maybe ten years old.

ME: Your brothers and sisters would all weave?

MA: My mother and dad would take one boy and one girl and their job would be to get dinner and wash the dishes and clean up. The other two would weave. Each of us learned to do all of that.

ME: What about running the plow? You had horses for that plow, or did you use oxen?

MA: You could hitch one horse. You would tear the ground up. On a ground without roots or rocks, you could plow a furrow twelve inches wide and then turn it over. It was called a hillside plow. You would plow across, and take your foot and kick a little lever. You would raise up and turn the plow over and then you could plow right back.

ME: That was an improvement, wasn't it?

MA: Oh yes. That's way back.

ME: It would be quite an invention to turn it over too.

MA: My father was called on a jury and he was gone a week. We had a hog that weighed 250 pounds. I was thirteen or fourteen years old and he said, "You butcher the hog and make sausage and sugar cure the hams, and put it away."

ME: You had an education?

MA: I had never done that. I had seen it done and helped out, but he told me to do it while he was gone.

ME: Did you call in your brothers and sisters on that?

MA: No. I had seen it done enough times to know how to do it. Then my sisters and brothers tied a rope and dragged him. We

got it done.

ME: What kind of equipment did you use to scald the hog? Did you have a big barrel?

MA: We had a barrel. In those days, some of the farmers made them. Where they got those steel hoops to put on them, I never knew.

ME: They had all the wood they ever wanted?

MA: They would put a barrel at an angle and heat the water in big kettles, pouring it in there. Next they put the hog in there and dashed him up and down. Because my sisters and brothers helped me, we got the hog cleaned, took the insides out, cut him up, and did everything. When dad came home, we had the sausages made and everything was done.

He made you do it if you could. If I tried and couldn't, he wouldn't whip me. If I wouldn't try, look out. He would go after me.

ME: Were you the oldest?

MA: No.

ME: You had older brothers?

MA: I had one younger brother. There were thirteen children: Five boys and eight girls. In the steel mills, there was a little, short man who was superintendent and liked to tease me. Macy said, "How far is it around your waist?" I said, "Four feet." (Laughter) He said, "Where do you get your clothes made?" I said, "There is a tent factory in Cleveland that makes them for me." They started laughing. He had to torment me. One day he said, "Do you have any brothers and sisters?" I said that I had four brothers--I was five--and each boy had eight sisters. He didn't quite understand and they laughed. They just hollered and laughed. I had beat him so bad he couldn't say anything. I couldn't understand why people weren't happy. Why didn't people laugh?

ME: Did your brothers and sisters fight?

MA: Very little. We weren't allowed to.

ME: What about the neighbors' kids, did you ever have neighbors that had fights?

MA: Very little at our place. At other places they did. Some of the neighbors made cider and let it get hard, and they would drink and dance and carry on. That wasn't allowed at our place.

We kept holy on the Sabbath day. There were no pleasures

on Sunday--you went to church.

ME: Were you Presbyterian or Lutheran?

MA: Methodist.

ME: No dancing?

MA: I couldn't understand . . . When I got old enough, my mother let me read the Bible. Then I got interested in it and kept reading. I would ask her why. The Bible speaks about being happy and rejoicing in so many hundreds of places. It says to be exceedingly glad and love your neighbors as yourself. Do good unto them that they ache you. I said to my mother, "They didn't do it." She said, "They weren't right inside; they hadn't accepted God and weren't with him." I wanted to know why. We had grace at the table; we had prayer meetings before we went to bed. I didn't know what else there was. The preacher came to our church and held a revival; he preached for seven night straight. His text was on hell. He preached on that every night. He preached about what an awful place hell was, what happened to you, how you suffered forever and forever. If you were good, if you made peace with God and lived right, you would be happy forever and ever. I wanted that.

ME: Did the girls do any different work? Did they do all the same jobs as the boys?

MA: In the home?

ME: Yes.

MA: Yes, they went and hoed corn with us, whatever.

ME: There wasn't any discrimination?

MA: No.

ME: Somebody had to keep weaving and knitting all this cloth for all these clothes?

MA: That was going on all the time.

ME: Did you have coal oil lamps?

MA: Yes, we had coal oil lamps, but in later years they made candles. My father would make candles and we had them. We didn't use them as much as the kerosene lamps.

ME: So your own town really had quite a lot of things that you could buy. You didn't need to buy any food except what you mentioned, salt, soda, and coffee. That was it as far as food. What about the other items you had to purchase?

MA: At the hardware store, you could buy cloth, steel, and wool. You could buy a lot of things. They had great, big bolts of cloth just hundreds of them stacked up. You would get a bolt of cloth down and unroll it. There were tacks on the counter, and you would pull the cloth and get the number of yards you wanted. You would take it home and make dresses and skirts.

ME: Was that made in England and shipped here somehow?

MA: I don't know where it came from.

ME: In other words, you didn't have to make every kind of cloth yourself. That was mostly for women's clothes, right?

MA: They made shirts, undershirts, drawers and all kind of stuff for men.

ME: During the springtime, the whole family would be out planting things?

MA: Yes. You should have seen the garden we had. Dad plowed a level piece of ground for almost two acres. They went somewhere and bought a few thousand feet of lumber for the fence boards, 6" x 1" x 16' oak. They had locust posts and we built a fence around that. We had a gate on one then. That was all a garden. It was nothing for us to have eight or ten barrels of sweet potatoes to put in the cellar for winter. We put that down in dust. In the summer we would pick up road dust and bury the sweet potatoes in the road dust.

ME: All dry?

MA: Dry, real dry. There were mulberries, blackberries, cranberries, dewberries, and every kind of berry that grew.

ME: Wild?

MA: Wild, yes.

ME: Those would be canned?

MA: Yes.

ME: Were the peaches dried?

MA: They would dry the peaches, yes.

ME: Ninety bushels, think of that.

MA: It took seven bushels of peaches right off the tree to make one bushel of dried. The dried we would hang up anyplace. They would keep for years.

ME: They called that peach leather, didn't they?

MA: No.

ME: I've heard somebody call it that. Did they string them?

MA: Some they did. We made what we called a dry house. It was a little building ten foot square and it had a little, coal stove in the center. We had our coal and we put it on shelves close together. It would take seven bushels of apples peeled and sliced, or seven bushels of peaches pitted and halved. We would lay them on the boards to dry out. When they all got dry there was a bushel of dry ones. We could also put them in flour sacks and hang them up in the shed until they were dry. We would cook them and make pies and make everything. Jelly, oh the jelly they would make.

ME: Would they use molasses for the jelly?

MA: Molasses or maple syrup. I can remember the first sugar I ever saw was brown sugar. There was 196 pounds in a wooden barrel. It was brown, not like today. That was cheap, but I don't remember what it was.

ME: That would have been cane sugar?

MA: Yes. Later on came granulated sugar.

ME: Brown sugar was a lot more nutritious.

MA: Nobody cared for granulated sugar. We liked maple syrup and sorghum. We had a machine to squeeze it out. We made that all ourselves. We didn't have to hire anybody.

ME: Did you have to peel the outside of it off or something?

MA: With the cane, no; it would grow high like corn. It had a pod where you had to pull out the seed. You would cut that off, take the leaves off, cut it off to the ground. We had a machine that was three years old; it was 8" in diameter, something like that. There was a hole 16' long with a mule hitched on the end of it. The mule went around and around. When I was just a little kid, I would sit there, put the sugarcane in there, and squeeze the juice out. While the mule was going around, somebody would come with a bucketful and take it out. We had a big row of kettles and we would boil it down. There was always something to do.

ME: Does that seem pretty pleasant as you think back to all of that? Was that a pleasant setup with all that work to do? Did you get tired of all that?

MA: I liked most of it. I didn't like being whipped when I didn't think I needed it. Years ago when I needed it, I didn't get it. I would always do what I was told to do, if I could. If

I tried and couldn't, then they wouldn't whip me. Otherwise, they would whip me.

When we were at the table, it was just like . . . Maybe everybody would be as sober as a judge. Maybe one of my sisters would look at me and I would make a funny face and she would laugh. They would want to know what she was laughing about. You were not supposed to laugh at the table. She would say, "Grover made me laugh" and my parents might tell me to go to bed without any supper. It would depend on how they felt about it.

In later years, they would take two horses, hitch them up, put them in a plow, and plow in the spring of the year. He couldn't do that at all. He couldn't get along with the horses. They would do anything I wanted them to do. I loved those horses. My father would get mad; he would jerk them and holler at them. He couldn't get along with them.

ME: If there were times when you had more of something, would you sell, say, the meat or wool?

MA: Sometimes we would sell bushels of tomatoes and all kinds of stuff that we would raise in the garden, cabbage, because we had a surplus.

ME: Did you take them to town and sell it at the market, or did you peddle it through town?

MA: No. Later on one man bought a store, a big, general grocery store. He did a big business. He told my dad, "Mr. Mace, I will buy any vegetables that you've got." He would buy them and we would sell cabbage and beets and anything that grew in the garden. That's how we bought our things for school in the fall and winter.

ME: What about books? Did you have to buy any school books?

MA: Yes. We always had to buy McGuffey Readers. I liked them so well; nearly everything that I got out of them, I could study and say by heart. I learned the multiplication tables by heart and I still know them.

ME: You wouldn't happen to remember the name of your arithmetic book that you got your stuff out of? It wouldn't have been Raye's Arithmetic?

MA: I think it was McGuffey.

ME: It could have been; I don't know. I thought he wrote just readers.

MA: I can't remember like I should. Do you want me to repeat a

poem for you?

ME: Yes.

MA: This is about a chicken. It says:

Once there was a pretty chicken,  
But his friends were very few.  
For he thought there was nothing in the world,  
but what he knew.  
He often in the farmyard  
Had a very forward way  
Of telling all the geese and hen and turkey  
What they ought to do and say.  
Mrs. Goose, he said, "I wonder that your squawkings  
You should let go out paddling in the water.  
It will kill them to get wet."  
"No, it won't," replied the chick,  
"And no matter if it do."  
"Eggs are really good for nothing  
What's an egg near you."  
"What's an egg?" Said Mrs. Tortoise  
"Can it be you do not know?  
You yourself were in an eggshell,  
Just one little month ago.  
If kind of wings had not warmed you  
You would not be out today,  
Telling all the hens, and geese, and turkeys,  
What they ought to do and say.  
To be very wise is a pleasant thing no doubt,  
But when young people talk to old people  
They should know what they're about."

That's just one; I knew dozens of them. When I went to school  
it was just natural for me to study and repeat it.

ME: You didn't consider it worth to go over it again?

MA: I got it by heart. I was fourteen years old, and I saw this  
girl I married. I had never seen her before and I liked what  
I saw. Although she was a total stranger, I made it my business  
to get acquainted with her. When I was fifteen years old I  
had a date with her.

ME: A date amounted to going for a walk or something?

MA: I walked her home from the church. There were twenty-five  
or thirty of us carrying lanterns. They were having a big gala.  
In front of her house there were cut stones about eight feet long,  
three of them, piled up. She stood up on the first one. It  
was almost 12:00 and she wanted me to come in. I said that I  
better go home because it was almost 12:00. I put my arms around  
her and told her where I had seen her and that I liked her the

first time I saw her. I said, "If ever I get married, you're the one." It took me eight years to marry that girl, but I did. She was one of the sweetest women who ever lived. In all those years, I have never seen her mad or bawl anybody out. She was the most wonderful thing.

ME: Her people were farmers too?

MA: They were German farmers. My father was Irish and English and Scotch Irish, a duke's mixture. I told him that is what ailed him.

ME: That might have accounted for the temper. (Laughter)

MA: He had an awful temper. My mother was the opposite.

ME: You raised wheat?

MA: Yes.

ME: And you raised corn?

MA: We raised just everything you could think of. We planted about a quarter of an acre of buckwheat every year. When it got so thick, I would cradle it.

ME: What does "cradle" mean?

MA: When it got dry, we would take it to the barn and take a flail and beat it out. If there was enough water to run the big waterwheel before the steam came, we would grind it with an old coffee mill by hand. We made buckwheat cakes.

ME: You didn't have a waterwheel of your own?

MA: No.

ME: Would you take it away?

MA: About three and a half or four miles. It was thirty feet across. It went up the stream, dug a little ditch around the hillside, and made a spout. On the rim of that wheel, there was a hole where things would hold a washtub of water every two feet. When two or three of them would get full, it would start to roll and it would keep rolling. It wouldn't go very fast, about twenty-five revolutions a minute, but that would grind your wheat and your corn. You give 1/8 of your wheat to have it ground. We would get buckwheat ground if there was enough water. Otherwise, we ground it in an old coffee mill.

ME: You ground corn quite a bit?

MA: Yes.

ME: You had cornbread and cornmeal mush?

MA: Yes. We raised a lot of pumpkins and fed them to cows. We kept the seeds, washed them, and got them dry, real dry. Then we put them in this old coffee mill and ground them. We sieved them, and we ate what we sieved out. I can get that in a catalog now. Once in a while I do get some of it, sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds. Some of the neighbors that know I do that . . . Do you know the name they have for me is "Crazy." They say, "That old man down there is crazy." My son-in-law is one of them. Two of my daughters-in-law say, "He's crazy." But if they want something that I've got here, I'm something else. I don't get mad like a lot of people. I don't think I've been mad in three years. I don't swear and I don't chew and I don't smoke or drink or anything like that. I never did since we built that new church when I was a boy. Do you want me to tell about the services?

ME: Yes, it sounds interesting. You told me about the guy who came in and preached about hell, but you didn't hear that from your preacher did you?

MA: Yes. He preached on hell for seven nights.

ME: But that wasn't your regular preacher, was it?

MA: No. He was a new minister who came from another church.

ME: I'm talking about your regular minister.

MA: My regular minister didn't do that. This was a new man who came in for just two weeks service. When I went to the altar and prayed my heart out, I didn't get anywhere. I didn't get satisfied. All week I went to the altar every night praying. Sunday morning, I don't know what they were doing, but I was sitting there in the congregation praying under my breath. I asked the Lord to do away with me altogether. I wanted him to just do away with me; I didn't want to go to hell. It was such an awful place. They said you would go there for sure unless you did something. You had to make an effort or you would go there. I made an effort; I did everything I knew to do, but nothing happened. This Sunday morning, I was sitting in the congregation praying under my breath, asking God to do something for me. One thing I did ask was for him to do away with me altogether. I just wanted to disappear; I didn't want to go to hell. Now I have become willing to have him do something for me. All at once I was the happiest man; I was never happier in my life. I was on my feet. I moved over maybe fifteen feet. A boy I went to school with who was the same age--we were chums--I went to him with my arms stretched out. He came running up in my arms praising God. We just praised the Lord; we didn't care who heard us. I don't know how long

we praised him. Back twenty feet sat an old man. He was sixty years old; we were just boys. He had never been saved. He came to church regularly and he could sing, but he was never saved. We went to him and he came right up in our arms. All three of us were saved. We were so happy. You could look around in that church and see that kind of work going on all around. People couldn't get in the church; there were crowds standing looking in the window. When I got home I told my father and mother, "Your grace at the table and your family prayer has never meant anything to me. It's just a habit; it's just something to do." Then our home was different; it was something to do now. I never, never forgot that. What a blessing that was for us. My father and mother began to act different altogether. I never forgot that.

ME: This was in the evening when they had these meetings?

MA: This happened on Sunday morning.

ME: Didn't they have church in the evening too?

MA: Yes, they had it in the evening too. They also had Sunday morning church.

ME: That answers my question.

Did you raise hemp?

MA: Yes.

ME: Later on, you got cotton for the looms?

MA: Yes.

ME: Is hemp like flax?

MA: It would grow on a stalk three or four feet high. I would take the skin off of it and make cloth out of strings, and tie it into knots.

ME: Did you have to soak it and beat it like flax?

MA: I can't remember just what they did. That was in the very early days. They had more flax from what I knew. Later, they had what they called hemp. They also had another one which grew up four or five feet long. It was like a pipe stem. When it was dark, you could peel it off and make strings out of it. I don't know what they called it.

ME: Did your folks raise gourds and make dippers and bowls out of them?

MA: Dippers, yes. There were springs around the farm and there

was a gourd hanging. You could go and get a drink with it.

ME: You had springs all around?

MA: Yes. Some gourds were good to eat. I ate some gourds.

ME: I suppose all kinds of squash too?

MA: Yes. When I moved here--I think it was sometime in July--I planted two rows of cabbage seeds clear across there, 150 feet long. I think I did that in July. I just planted the seeds and took a raking board. There were little heads of cabbage until it began to freeze. They were the size of an orange. They were real white and just solid. I've never seen cabbages solid in my life as that was. They were hard as a rock. When it began to snow, I would go out there, and pull it up, turn it upside down, and set it in a row. I would throw in six inches of dirt on each side. I could go out there anytime in the winter. I don't care when it was, I could always get a head of cabbage. It didn't freeze either.

ME: That is something that would be fun to try.

MA: In the spring, when I wanted to plow the garden to plant, I would have to take out some of them and put them in the cellar.

ME: But you still could use it?

MA: I also bought rhubarb seeds and planted them. I had a whole bunch of it. People wanted to know what I was going to do with it. I said I would do some of the things I used to do when I was a boy. In the fall, when it began to get cold, I would have the wheelbarrow and would dig this rhubarb, bringing it down and put it in the cellar. I had a bed that wasn't quite as big as 1/4th of this room. I took my little truck and all the buckets I had and I went to New Middletown to get a bucketful of sand. I poured the sand over them and I took the hose and wet it down. Before Christmas, we had rhubarb pies and we had dumplings. We made some jelly too. We enjoyed that all winter long. In the spring, I would dig it up and take it back out there. People didn't know what to think of this old man. They called me an old man. They would say I was crazy for doing this and doing that. I was used to that.

ME: You had a lot of seeds that you had to save every year?

MA: Every year.

ME: From all those plants?

MA: Out of all of those, I would let two or three of them go to seed. I would save that seed all year.

ME: That must have been a lot of work getting that seed?

MA: We didn't know anything but work; work all the time.

ME: There are some of those plants that you don't have anymore. You don't grow hemp; you don't grow flax. But were there other plants that you remember that people don't use?

MA: I don't remember any.

ME: The thing of it is you remember so much. You remember a lot more than some people ever knew.

What about melons?

MA: Melons, we had all kinds of melons. The neighbor had a different kind and we divided them.

ME: That is what I was wondering. People saved their seeds, and they got the best ones.

MA: People went and helped one another, whether you were sick or well. It didn't matter how you were. I wish it was like that today.

ME: That's exactly what we're making this tape about.

MA: I wish it was like that today.

ME: What things on the farm and garden did people do together?

MA: They got together to do anything one or two couldn't do. They would bunch up. They would come to our place and quilt, maybe do a quilt in one day. There would be two or three who would cook a head or two of cabbage and ham and have dinner. They would all eat together then. They would get that quilt completed in one day. They were happy.

ME: What about butchering time?

MA: We all did that together.

ME: And harvest?

MA: When we butchered a cow, which we did every year more than once, everybody in the neighborhood got a piece of it, everybody. It didn't cost anything. Everybody got a mess. They were glad to help one another.

ME: They got together at people's homes and they got together at church and sometimes they got together at the school, is that right?

MA: That's right.

ME: You talked about using that cradle. You remember the cradles?

MA: Oh yes.

ME: You used one yourself?

MA: I used that cradle when I was fifteen years old. We always raised buckwheat and had pancakes and all different things. We never had anything else to do it with, only a little reaper of the hand, a little sickle.

ME: That's worse.

MA: I would like to tell you about when it came to making the hay. There would be maybe eight or ten neighbor men. They would all gather at our house to cut the hay. The first thing they would do is kill a sheep or a hog or a calf, some animal, cut it out and cool it, pump cold water on it, cut it up and get it in iron kettles, and put it on two-legged stakes or poles. There were maybe three or four of them. That whole animal would be in there cooking now. While it was cooking, they would bring their thighs, grab them all by hand, and they would grind them, fix them if there was anything that was wrong with them, and they got them ready and drove stakes in the ground and put up a temporary table in the shade. When it came dinnertime that meat was ready. They had all kinds of stuff out there. Of course, the women worked with them.

ME: Some children turned the grindstone?

MA: That was my job to turn the grindstone?

ME: When you were small?

MA: When I was little. They didn't realize how hard that was. One or two of the men spoke about it and relieved us.

ME: They would get another child?

MA: Yes. They would get everything ready to make hay. They would come early in the morning. There were maybe ten of them, one after another, going around ten acres. They stayed there until that was done. They would come in and rest a little while and maybe eat lunch and go back and stir that hay.

ME: They would stir it with forks?

MA: Yes, wooden forks, nearly all wooden forks. When the hay got ready, they had to rake it by hand and put it in big shocks. They would put two poles under that shock and carry it to the barn or carry it to the stack. They would stack that or put it

in the barn. They didn't care how long it took them. They would work till 10:00 at night to get it done. When they got our hay all up, they would go to the next neighbor. They worked together. There were eight or ten neighbors there who worked together all the time in everything.

ME: Probably all of them had big families?

MA: Yes.

ME: So there was the cooking and the grindstone turning. Didn't the children sometimes help with this raking?

MA: Yes.

ME: When the grain was on the ground, somebody had to tie it up. They used those hemp ropes for that.

MA: The grain?

ME: The buckwheat.

MA: You mean after it was cradled?

ME: Yes.

MA: After it was cradled somebody polished it, tied it , and bundled it. We didn't leave it lay. They would put them in bundles and then in shocks.

ME: Who would be doing all that?

MA: Two would be on top so that the water could drain off. When it got dry, they would take an old sled an ox and haul it to the barn. They would lay a bunch of rails in there and there would be sheets under them. They would lay the wheat on there and take flails and beat them out.

ME: You handled a flail yourself?

MA: Yes. I had nothing else. I used that when I was just a kid.

ME: Then the reaper machines came.

MA: Yes.

ME: Do you remember that?

MA: Yes. The reaper came and he would cut the wheat and drop it. You had to go along and bind it after him. Later, they got it so that it bound itself. A little bit later, the thrashing machine came. Eight horses . . .

ME: In a circle?

MA: In a circle. The chaff and the straw went out in one pile. That thrasher machine of mine could lift one end of it. If they had good luck, they could thrash a hundred bushels in a day with those horses. People in those days knew what to do to make a living. Now they would laugh at you.

ME: Do you remember the first kind of reapers they had? Was it a John Deere?

MA: I don't remember the name of it.

ME: That began to make a difference in the neighborhood.

MA: I don't remember the name at all. I used to know all that by heart before I had my stroke.

ME: What was your town in West Virginia?

MA: Weston.

ME: This period when you tied grain up by hand, did you use hemp that you raised yourself?

MA: Yes.

ME: You didn't have to buy it?

MA: We made strings out of the hemp.

ME: You had herbs and medicines?

MA: Yes.

ME: Do you mind telling about some of them?

MA: Some that we made medicine out of?

ME: Yes.

MA: Poke was one; it was a great medicine. It is today also. Mullein is one of the best that grows.

ME: Mullein?

MA: A year ago, after I had that second stroke, my feet swelled up so that I couldn't put on stockings. I went to the hospital and they did what they could. I told them one day, "I'm going home tomorrow." I happened to think of that mullein. I came home and a boy found a great, big bunch of mullein for me. We cooked it and I put my feet in it and it drew that right out. It was black and dirty, but what the heck. People couldn't

understand how I knew that. Good Lord, I'm 95 years old. People who would bruise their foot on a stone and it would swell up, or have a boil or a splinter in their foot, this mullein would bring it right out.

Onions were another one. If you had a cold and didn't know what to do, just beat up onions with a mallet and put them hot right on your chest. Another thing was kerosene, lard, and gum of camphor. Mix that all together for pneumonia fever. As hot as you could bear it you put it under your arms and all over your chest and have a big, hot cloth to lay right on your foot to keep it hot. In fifteen to twenty minutes, you would take it off and put another hot one on. That would bring it right out

ME: You mentioned poke. Is that that tall thing that has got berries?

MA: Yes.

ME: How did they use that?

MA: When it came up young, they used it for greens and made pickles out of it. It was good. After it got big they would cook it and soak a foot or hand in that liquid. I can't remember the other things they used it for.

ME: Did you ever know of something that was good for poison ivy?

MA: Poison ivy never bothered me. I could rub it on me anywhere and it would never bother me. It would ruin other people. There was something that would kill it, but I can't remember what it was.

ME: There is a weed around now called Jewel weed. I don't know what they used to call it.

MA: When the good Lord made this earth, he did a good job. You can look out there, and I don't care what kind of weed you can find, there is a use for it, if we only knew it. If we just knew what was there for us and used it instead of running to our doctor.

ME: Where did you get things like pepper and spices?

MA: They raised all those things. You would be surprised what those old ladies had put away. There were peppers and spices of all kinds; I couldn't name them. They went to the store for salt, coffee, baking powder and soda; those were the four things. They raised everything to eat. Parsnips, they would let two or three or four of them go to seed in the spring. They wouldn't dig them; they would save that seed.

ME: Cabbage too.

MA: They would have all kinds of seeds. One time when my wife was living, I had beans growing outside on a wire as high as you could reach. One day she went out there and picked a basketful. She laid that basketful of beans out and I took my ruler and measured them. There weren't any of them less than eight inches long. I hunted and I found them in a catalog the other day. I'm going to send for them. If I only raise one hill, I want to keep that seed. They were great, big beans to can. I loved to live the way we lived. What a pleasure it was.

END OF INTERVIEW