

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Mecca, Ohio

Teaching Experience

O. H. 105

FRANK BENTON

Interviewed

by

Beth Hanuschak

on

April 9, 1979

FRANK W. BENTON

Frank Benton is the son of Austin S. and Jessie Meacham Benton. He currently resides at 6440 Yoder Avenue, Kinsman, Ohio. Born May 20, 1896, in West Mecca to a family which originally helped to settle the area, he is a graduate of Mecca High School. Following high school, he attended Ohio University and Kent State University majoring in Education. After college he taught at Vienna schools (1915-16) and Mecca schools (1916-17, 1919-1925). His career was interrupted by World War I. During the war, he served in France, Belgium, and Germany. In 1925, Mr. Benton began a new job with Newton Steel Company where he was employed until 1935. Prior to and during World War II, Mr. Benton worked for the Federal Machine Tank Plant. In 1950, he worked for Biggins, Inc. until his retirement in 1976.

Mr. Benton is married to the former Myrna L. Byham. Their family included: Marie Kramer, age 54; Jessie Smith, 49; and the late Harriet Greenwood, 35.

Mr. Benton is active with the West Mecca United Church, West Mecca I.O.O.F. Lodge, and the American Legion. His personal interests include history and art.

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INTERVIEWEE: FRANK BENTON
INTERVIEWER: Beth Hanuschak
SUBJECT: History of Mecca, Ohio
DATE: April 9, 1979

H: This is an interview with Mr. Frank William Benton for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Beth Hanuschak on April 9, 1979. The subject is the history of Mecca, Ohio.

Let's go back, Mr. Benton, all the way to your parents. Let's start with them. What were your parents' names? What were they like?

B: Why don't we start with the first Bentons in West Mecca?

H: Okay, fine.

B: In 1828, Herman Benton and his wife, who was a Mason--and the Masons were the second people to settle in West Mecca--and then his son, Orris, bought a farm with the Beaver Dam on so he could have a sawmill. And that farm remained in the family until just a few years ago, when the last Bentons left. Now, what was it you wanted to know about me, when I was born?

H: How many children in your family? When were you born, how many children?

B: I was born in West Mecca.

H: What year?

B: On May 20, 1896. Now that's a long time ago. (laughter) We had three girls: Marie, who is now Marie Kramer; and Harriet Greenwood, she passed away in 1965; and then Jessie; she is Jessie Smith now. I first went to school at the district school, which is about two miles north of West Mecca for the first year and I was only about, well, probably not quite six. In those days you could go as quick as you were able to. (laughter) Then the next year I went down to the district school at West Mecca. One of my first teachers was Arner Clark and the other one was Cory Stevens, who was a lawyer in Warren afterwards.

Then they centralized the school in 1904 and they built two centralized school buildings, one at West and one at East Mecca because they got into a fight. They were first going to have one at the center of the township. The people in West Mecca and East Mecca never got along. They do today, but they didn't then.

Then they built the one at West Mecca just west of the center and the East one just east of the center over there. So I started school there and I graduated from there but in those days we only had three years of high school. So I went to Ohio University, summer school and worked out my fourth year of high school. Then I went to Kent University to work out more credits--but it was Kent State Normal in those days--enough credits so I could get my teacher's certificate.

H: How many years was that?

B: I just worked it out in the summer school at Kent.

H: Oh, is that right?

B: Yes. In those days you could do that. Six to twelve weeks, whatever you wanted to do. Then I started teaching in Vienna; that would be in 1915 and 1916. I taught in the district school there. They centralized Vienna soon after and where I boarded is now where the airport is. It was at the home of Charlie Griffins.

Then I started teaching over at Mecca. When the war broke out, I went into the Army in 1917, came back after the war was over in 1918, and was hired again at Mecca and taught there until I resigned

to go to Newton Falls to the Newton Steel Company because I got a hundred and fifty a month and that was quite a change from the pay at West Mecca.

H: When you were teaching, how much did you make then?

B: I finally got up to a hundred but everybody said that was too much to pay a teacher. I started out with thirty dollars a month in Vienna, paid fifteen dollars a month for room and board in Vienna.

H: You were in the war. What exactly did you do in the war? Tell us a little bit about that.

B: When I got across I was in the 52nd Telegraph Battalion and we went to the front. Then we built lines through Holland, Belgium and then after the war was over, we went into Germany. We were at Neuwied, Germany and I went to school there but they had a German woman teaching. I was taking up English and why was it just English? We had to take that course. She didn't know as much about the English as I did because I'd been teaching it so I really helped her out on that because we had quite a few from down South which weren't too good when it came to education.

Then when we came back, I started teaching again. Then I went to Newton Steel where I was in charge of materials and when they built the plant in Monroe, Michigan, I went up there in charge of materials. I resigned up there and came back to West Mecca. Then during World War II, I worked at the Federal Tank Plant in Warren until the war was over.

H: Let's go back a little bit. You lived during the "Roaring Twenties." What can you remember about that? You read so much about it--the flappers and the speakeasies. Can you relate to that?

B: I don't think we had much of that in Mecca. (laughter) No, we didn't. In the 1920s, I don't know of any of that excitement. We'd go to Cortland to roller-skate and that was about all. Maybe we'd go once in awhile to Warren to a movie.

When you're dealing with history, now take Mecca in the 1920s. There wasn't much to change and since the oil excitement was over with everything was pretty quiet.

H: Mecca wasn't really affected then by the Roaring Twenties?

B: No, it wasn't too much. I don't know.

H: How did you get back and forth to Warren? Was there a train you used?

B: At first we went in a horse and buggy.

H: Horse and buggy?

B: I used to take my mother to Warren where we had relations living. At that time it was on Elm Street, which was out of the city limits. Now it's downtown. But I used to go in the horse and buggy. I was janitor at the school and in order to buy a suit to graduate in, I went to Warren and I paid fifteen dollars for that suit.

H: That was a lot of money then, a lot of money.

B: In those days, yes, for I was paid fifteen dollars per month.

H: So the 1920s really didn't affect you. What about the 1930s then? What can you remember about the Depression? I know, myself, I used to hear stories all the time from my parents. I had a grandfather who used to sell fruit to people. What did you do to survive the 1930s?

B: I was then with Newton Steel in Monroe, Michigan and everybody had been laid off at the Newton Steel Plant. They called it the Newton Steel and I was lucky because I was on salary.

H: What was it? How much were you paid then, do you remember?

B: They kept the foremen on and every month they cut it fifty dollars--our salary. We got down to a hundred and fifty, I think, by the time we left there. But you could go to the grocery store and for \$25.00 you got an awful lot of groceries. Monroe was quite a nice town. I enjoyed it there but my wife was too homesick and she was ill part of the time up there. So we came back to Mecca and then I worked in a grocery store over at West Mecca there where my brother had the filling station. Then I was called down to Warren to work.

I served on the Board of Education at West Mecca for four years and then we moved to Newton Falls.

H: So you survived the 1930s with relative ease because you were employed.

B: Oh, yes. The 1930s weren't too bad after. They were at first, but most of the 1930s weren't.

H: How did Mecca, itself, survive the 1930s?

B: Mecca did pretty good.

H: Did it?

B: At that time most of them were farmers, and if they butchered, they took the neighbor's meat. Then when they butchered they took and paid it back.

H: Let's go to the 1940s then. Did you fight in World War II? Were you involved in World War II at all?

B: I was working in the tank plant. We made tanks for the Army.

H: Where at?

B: Federal, in Warren. I was in charge of materials there during the war, the Second World War.

H: What can you remember about that? Do you remember when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

B: Yes.

H: What were you doing that day?

B: A young man that worked for me in Monroe was a pilot. He had his own plane, too. He was a member of the Toledo Symphony as far as that goes, and we were living there, of course, at West Mecca. I heard an airplane circling overhead and I went out and looked and I couldn't figure what it was doing. It landed in the field right back of our place and it was a boy who worked at Monroe for me. He got out and came in and my wife got him lunch. He said he was going to lay down for a few minutes because he had to go on to Toledo and while he was laying down, I had the radio on. That's when we heard the news of Pearl Harbor. So he got up real quick

and went out and left for Toledo, and I've never heard from him since.

H: Never heard from him?

B: Never heard from Paul after that, so I don't know what happened to him.

H: So you were here all the time. Did you have any relatives that fought in the war, World War II?

B: Oh, yes. Yes, I had a nephew. He was under Patton. I had two nephews. Yes, I had two nephews fighting. My wife had a brother that died over across.

H: What was the feeling of Mecca? Everyone wanted to be involved in this war? You fought for your country, everyone was involved?

B: Yes, they did. In those days, they did. They believed in their government and it's a shame that the government pulled us in the war in Vietnam because that was so uncalled for. Well, you don't want any politics.

H: So there was no problem then with getting people from Mecca to go?

B: No, no. We had a few, of course. I registered at West Mecca and Mr. Banning was at East Mecca. We were to watch for German sympathizers. We were named by Sheriff Russ Stein but we didn't have anything to turn in.

H: How did you get that appointment?

B: I don't know. I haven't any idea.

H: To this day you don't know?

B: Of course, Sheriff Stein in Warren was a good friend of mine. He might have been the one.

H: What did they tell you to do? What was your job?

B: If we found anybody that we were suspicious of, we had to report it. And that's the way we kept track of it.

H: But you never had to report anybody?

B: Banning didn't either, no.

H: Did they pay you to do that?

B: No. (laughter) I never found a check anyhow.

H: They may get to you a few years from now, you never know.

B: (laughter) I was working at the store at that time and my brother wondered why that guy was coming up there and seeing me. They checked on us quite often. Finally, I told him and he said, "Well, what have you done?" (laughter) But I never dared tell anybody.

H: We've talked a little bit about the 1920s and 1930s and 1940s. When were you married? What was your wife's maiden name?

B: Myrna Byham. She was from Mount Hope, Pennsylvania. She had come over to teach at West Mecca, primary class and we were married in 1922. My wife started to be the organist at the Methodist Church and for 42 years she was organist at the church and for the Rebekah Lodge. I had been a member of the Odd Fellow Lodge at West Mecca for 62 years. She's been about a fifty-year member of the Methodist Church and I've been a member for about sixty years. We go to West Mecca every Sunday when it's possible, to church. That's quite a drive.

H: It is. You've had three daughters?

B: Yes.

H: One who has passed away. What was it like raising three daughters? You were the only male. Was it hard?

B: Oh, no. No, they were good kids. (laughter)

H: Were they?

B: Yes, they were. Yes, they were good.

H: What are the other two doing now?

B: Jessie lives across the street here. This is her daughter, Carol Dershaw, by her first husband who died. Of course, Marie works in the computer in

Cortland Bank; has for years. I think about twenty years.

H: How many grandchildren in total? A lot of them?

B: (laughter) Lots of them--fourteen! And we have a great-granddaughter and we have two grandsons that live in Houston, Texas, and a grandson and granddaughter who live in Young, Arizona.

H: When I was going through this book that I'm reading, I found on October 24, 1877 there was an Austin S. Benton?

B: That was my father.

H: That was your father. Then you had four brothers and sisters.

B: Yes. Emily, Guy, Austa; she died when she was five.

H: And there was another one, Orris Merten?

B: Orris, he always went by Merten.

H: Who's the oldest?

B: My sister was.

H: Emily?

B: Emily, she was the oldest. They're all gone now. I'm the only one left.

H: What can you tell me about growing up with all of them? That's a houseful of children. What can you remember? What childhood stories?

B: My father died in 1900 and Austa--we called her Austy, Austa was her right name, of course--was born two months, I think, after his death and my mother raised us. She made carpets, wove carpets. Then, of course, when the boys got old enough, they helped, too. We had a farm and the farm was paid for and was ours. They farmed that.

H: What was it that you farmed, cattle or just crops?

B: No, no. Everything. Crops and cows, yes. Of course, I didn't do much farming. (laughter)

H: You were the scholarly one, right?

B: In 1909 in West Mecca, they formed a telephone company. They called it the Mecca Farmers' Telephone Company. My brother, Merten, went to work as a linesman for the company and my sister was the first telephone operator. In fact, she was an operator as long as it was in existence. I always remember, the first telephone call was made by Ermine Hillyer and he made the call to Middlefield and everybody stood around and wondered if we could get through.

H: And you did.

B: In those days you called Green and Bloomfield and Mespo. Then, of course, when the other telephone companies came in, it went out of business. But it was quite a thing for people in Mecca to be able to call one or another.

H: I'm sure it was.

B: When I was about eight or ten years old, I would have to go to what we call the store at the corners, and John Love was a merchant there. He was also the funeral director. He was also the postmaster.

And then I would have to go across the corners there to a family by the name of Jeffrey, where the first oil well was drilled, to get yeast. He made yeast. I can remember that. That was quite an experience to go over there because he had a greenhouse and he used to let me roam around in it and I thought that was quite a thing. Of course, William Chandler was one of the biggest merchants Mecca ever had.

H: What did he do?

B: He had a store and he had a butcher shop. In the summertime I drove the grocery wagon for him. One day I'd go up through Green and the next day I'd go down through Bristol. I did that for three summers, I think it was, while I was in high school.

H: Were you paid?

B: Oh, yes. I don't know how much it was but I was paid! (laughter)

- H: You were paid.
- B: Yes.
- H: What kind of activities did you have when you were growing up? Today, kids have baseball and football.
- B: We organized a basketball team in Mecca. I played on it and the two Finch brothers played. One of them, Oakley Finch, was on the all-star basketball State team, so we had a pretty good team. We played all-around. We played Warren and beat them two or three times. One of them said that you couldn't help but get beat when you played with animals, we were so rough. (laughter) Oh, what else was interesting in those days?
- H: I'm sure you have a lot of stories you can share with us.
- B: I have a lot of them if I can think of them.
- H: Of all of the events that probably have happened in your lifetime, what's the one that stands out the most? What is the most significant to you, of all the things that you've done. Was it teaching or was it fighting in the war or even now?
- B: I'd say the teaching, because I still have them come up to me and I don't recognize them; they're grown up. I really, really get a kick out of seeing them. Three of my students became doctors and were successful doctors. One of my students was Dr. List in Bristol, Dr. Meachem from Warren, and Dr. Meachem in Kent, who passed away. But I got a lot of good out of just seeing them. They all turned out good. We have a Mr. Smally who lives here in Kinsman and he went to school with me but a lot of them are gone.
- H: You taught in Mecca when there was no centralized building yet, right?
- B: Yes. I taught in the centralized. We had one at West Mecca and one at East Mecca because as I was saying, the people wouldn't stand to have one at the center of the township. Then, of course, when they centralized again, why, then they built the one down by where the lake is now. That's where it was when I was on the school board. Then, of course, when the lake went in,

that building was torn down and they built the big one over at East Mecca.

H: Which is there today, and which we use.

B: That's Maplewood, which is where you're teaching.
(laughter)

H: Right, exactly. How has Mecca changed since the days you were growing up until now?

B: As I said before, East and West Mecca--I don't know how you'd want to call it--but they didn't have too close a friendship between each other.

H: Why? What caused that?

B: I think it was on account of Mosquito Creek.
(laughter) But now it's more all one.

H: Right.

B: Yes. And then I think the immigrants that came in, like the Katchurs and the Glads, and all those, didn't know anything about that anyhow, and they all became good citizens of Mecca. When we left Mecca five years ago, I thought it was going to be hard to leave after 51 years living there at the Center. I wanted to ask you if you knew that West Mecca was once called Powers' Corners. Did you know that?

H: I had read that. Yes, I had read that.

B: Wing sold four hundred acres to Mr. Powers and they called it Powers' Corners. That was up until about the war of 1860.

H: Mostly all of Mecca then; and it still is pretty much a farm community, right?

B: Most of them work in Warren. (laughter)

H: Now today you ride into Packard in twenty minutes.

B: In those days, why, it was a farm [community].

H: Farms?

B: Yes. Everything was a farm. The creek divided the township practically and it was swampy on each side. When the Connecticut Land Company surveyed the townships, it was impossible to survey across Mecca Township, so they guessed at it. You won't find any of the townships that are exactly five miles square because in those days you had the swamps, and so on. It was real swampy.

Now the first road from Bristol came to Mosquito Creek Swamp. It was dedicated in 1823 and from Johnson to Mosquito Creek it was 1810; from Cortland to East Mecca was 1820. So you can see they were going through the woods. East Mecca to Green was in 1828. That's when the roads were started. They called them "dedicated." I don't know why they called them dedicated. I had the blueprints on all those Mr. Linville gave me but they got lost.

H: Did you leave Mecca quite a bit? Growing up there, did you travel to Warren a lot or to Cortland?

B: Oh, yes.

H: Did you?

B: Sure. We had to. When I was teaching in Vienna, my buddy, Floyd Hill, would come down to get me in the horse and buggy. (laughter) One of the first automobiles in Mecca was Mr. Chandler's and he used to take me to Youngstown where he went to sell produce, and I thought that was a wonderful thing!

H: That must have been quite a trip.

B: It was in those days. I thought that we were flying and he said we were going 25 miles an hour!

H: How did you get there? Did you go down what would be Route 193 now?

B: No, we went right into Warren and then down.

H: Did you?

B: Yes. I think he had to stop in Warren. Maybe that was why. While we were down there--he was quite a religious man--Billy Sunday came back,

and he took me to hear Billy Sunday talk at a men's club. Across the road from where I was raised when I was a kid, Dr. Booth from Youngstown, who was one of the first to have a car, came up there and I still remember seeing what it looked like, standing around and looking at that and waiting for him to start it up. (laughter)

H: What kind was it?

B: Now that would be Nora Palmer's uncle. I don't know what kind it was called in those days. He made a trip--it was in all the papers. He made a trip West. I forget just how far he went before it would break down and then he would have to . . .

H: Repair it. Who did you say it was?

B: Doctor Booth. Small things in those days when you were a kid, seemed like a big event.

H: Obviously then you'd remember the first TV?

B: I remember the first radio I heard. Floyd Hill made one--one of the old crystal sets. He brought it over to our place and we went out into the garage and we listened to the American Legion Speech. That was the first time I ever heard a radio. Of course, TV sets--everybody had them.

H: Everybody had them.

B: Yes.

H: What else did you do for entertainment or excitement?

B: We had dances every Saturday night.

H: Where were they held at?

B: Around different homes. We'd go down to Wildare and they would hold them in different homes and they'd hold them around West Mecca. You didn't go to Youngstown to see a show or anything in those days, but they had these dances which everybody enjoyed.

H: We've looked at the 1930s and 1940s. Could you keep going and go into the 1950s and the 1960s and on up? In the 1950s, you had the Korean War and toward the end of the 1950s you had the people like Elvis Presley that made a great impact. Did Mecca feel any of that?

B: I didn't. (laughter)

H: You didn't?

B: No.

H: You never felt any of that?

B: No, I don't think they did too much. Of course, now they do--the kids go for that. But when you get to be 83, you're not too much interested in disco. (laughter)

H: Then you had the 1960s and President Kennedy was shot.

B: Yes.

H: I'm sure you remember all that.

B: Yes. I was in Florida when they announced on the radio that Martin Luther King was shot.

H: What do you think the biggest change is between Mecca today and Mecca when you were growing up? Has it changed drastically?

B: Oh, yes.

H: How?

B: The people have more interest outside of Mecca. In those days, everybody was neighbors and friends and it was all Mecca. Now today, only a fifteen-minute ride from Mecca up here to Kinsman, in those days, took quite a while. And they've got friends and so on, like that where they go.

H: Do you think that's good or bad?

B: I think that's good, that's good. And then there's more people that travel. We'd go to Florida. We did every year for about sixteen years on our vacation and we went to Jamaica and all-around.

Then in my history, we made two trips to Connecticut on genealogy of the Bentons and Meachems and a couple of trips up to Canandaigua, New York where I was tracing out this great-great-grandmother. She died on the trail coming from East Hartland and nobody knew where she was buried. They said she was buried along the trail. So, the first time we were up there, I was talking to a lady over there at Canandaigua and she told me, "She was buried over in the old cemetery. There were 21 of them buried there, but nobody knows who they were." But she said she would have been buried there.

So, the second time I was up there, I was talking to the secretary of the cemetery association and she got real excited. She said, "You've told us the name of the first person of the 21 that was buried there along the trail." Did you ever stop to think what it takes to, in those days, to leave Connecticut to come to Kinsman?

I stood there at East Hartland Cemetery Connecticut, looked West, because my forefathers had left there in a sled, by oxen and a sled in the wintertime, and I just wondered who would have the guts nowadays to attempt something like that.

H: Why did they settle in Mecca?

B: The Meachems settled first in Kinsman but the Bentons settled down at Canfield, one of them settled in Canfield, and the other one settled, I think, in Poland. I'd have to look it up. I've got it all, of course, in the History of Meachems and Bentons. But the Meachems, as I was telling you, the first blacksmith was Jehial Meachem and Mr. Cone, who owned the biggest share of Gustavus went to East Hartland and told him if he'd come, he would build him a blacksmith's shop. That hatchet I showed you was made by him, handed down; I don't know why they would. (laughter) But you find most of Kinsman if you've been in the East. You know the homes there. After seeing them and taking pictures of them, we came back to Kinsman and we thought we were still in Connecticut.

H: Right.

B: We would take these churches, and so on. Some of these old homes are just replicas of the ones you found in the East.

There was not so many come direct from Connecticut to Mecca; a lot of them come from Pennsylvania and that way, of course. The first family to move into Mecca was Joe Dawson. He had seven boys. His wife was pregnant and after they got here and built a log cabin, she had a daughter, Nancy. So Nancy was the first white child to be born in Mecca.

Then a little girl named Almira Reynolds was eating popcorn and she choked to death. She was, we think, the first person to die in Mecca, and to be buried in Mecca. She's buried over at East Mecca and in those days, they just buried them on the home places, a lot of them, right on the farms. They were taking them up and putting them in the cemetery after they had a cemetery. But she was buried under, I think it was, a chestnut tree and they couldn't find her. So she's still there today.

H: Very interesting. So, just talking with you, then you have roots in Canfield and Poland. I'm sure if we would go there we would find your name some place.

B: You'd find the Bentons there.

H: Right.

B: On the Benton's side, Herman Benton, the first one up to West Mecca, his mother died when he was born. And two uncles raised him and they'd come down to Canfield and down through there and that's how he came west. He was only ten years old when they came down. He was the first justice of the peace in West Mecca for twenty years. Then Lathrop Palmer was the next one for twenty years.

H: Now he's related then to Nora?

B: Yes. And in those days, the justice of the peace held the court. You didn't go to Warren on minor misdemeanors. (laughter)

H: What were some of the offenses that occurred?

B: One that I had to laugh about was over at East Mecca. A fellow from Johnson was buying potash off of this fellow at East Mecca and he was a big church man. Instead of making the potash the way he should, he went out in the woods and scraped

up ashes from bonfires so they had him arrested, took him before the justice of the peace, and he fined him. (laughter) That one always tickled me.

H: Were there any other crimes that were major?

B: Yes. My father was in one.

H: What did he do?

B: Over at East Mecca on the Buck Farm, who was the wealthiest farmer over there, he put in for the first time, a pool--manure. They put the manure in and let it rot and then used it. So he invited all the farmers to come over to look at it, explain it. My mother used to tell me this. My dad was there and he got into an argument with another man. He called my father a foul name and my father hit him and he happened to fall backwards into this tank. (laughter) So he had my father arrested and called up before the justice of the peace, and he got fined. I think it was ten dollars. That's another one that I always have to laugh about.

I'll tell you another interesting thing about West Mecca. I have a history on it. It was written by my grandson for the school paper: The witch of Hell's Hollow. One mile north of West Mecca, there's a creek that goes down through into the Mosquito Lake, or it used to go into Mosquito Creek, of course. In fact, there were two beaver dams on it and the one that was on my father's place. In those days, it would have been my grandfather's place. He had to build a sawmill. They did on the one on the Palmer place, too. They were the first two mills in West Mecca. But the creek that goes through there, at that time was quite a hollow. You had to go down the hill and cross it--no bridge, I don't suppose in those days--and they called it Hell's Hollow.

North of my folk's place lived some people by the name of Wilburs. In fact, the descendants of them at one time were the Secretary of Labor and the other one was the Secretary of, I forget which. They had a daughter, these Wilburs did. She foretells things, and they kicked her out. Nobody else would have her. So my grandfather and grandmother took her in. And she would fore-

tell the future. But one night, my father was going with my mother and they were coming up from the dance from West Mecca. As they were coming by the cemetery, a ghost rose up, white sheet, scared the horse and the horse started running! But he got it quieted down and as quick as he got my mother home, he come back and he come in and wanted to know where Miss Wilbur was. They said, "We don't know. I suppose she's in her room in bed." So my grandmother went up to see, and she was. But her wet clothes were on the floor. (laughter) She asked her where she had been and she said she had to go over and wade the beaver dam to take the curse off of, I don't want to name his name, who had violated one of the neighbor girls. So she waded that, but on her way back she stopped at the cemetery. She admitted that. But she would tell all kinds of tales about different people. Most of them were true. Yes, things that they did. So, she was called the witch of Hell's Hollow.

H: What ever happened to her?

B: She disappeared. She left my grandfather's and disappeared. They don't know what became of her.

H: They never heard of her?

B: No, never. My grandson wrote that up for me. It was quite a story, too.

Now I was going to tell you that Mecca once was going to have a railroad, Clinton Airlines from Chicago to New York. So they came to West Mecca. They built a building for their tools and so on, and they started to grade across the Mosquito Creek. In fact, the mounds over there--they called it the gravel pits--that was graded there. Then they went across, up through Gustavus and Kinsman. In fact, I was taken out by an old fellow and he showed me where they graded up there. My grandfather took out a twenty-five hundred dollar stock. I've got the note. Twenty-five hundred dollars in those days was a lot of money. The thing went under and I've never been able to find out how much he paid on that note because there was nothing written on it. It's just a plain note. That's something that most people nowadays in Mecca don't know anything about.

- H: Why do you think it went under? Don't you know?
- B: Too big. In those days, yes. Of course, this grandfather was always taking out stocks. In fact, in the Mecca Oil Company he took out a five hundred dollar one. (laughter)
- H: He was a speculator!
- B: Stockholder, yes!
- H: Right. He was ready to make a killing there.
- B: Yes. Now let's see; what else.
- H: Did he make good in the oil then when he took out that loan on the oil?
- B: No. It went under.
- H: It went under?
- B: There was a lot of them that went in on that oil stock.
- H: I know when I was reading some information about it, it said so many people moved in and eventually it just lost.
- B: Oh, yes. They just came in, in droves from the East. We have maps--Tom and I do--showing all the little pieces of land they leased or bought. They never had any oil. The first oil that these old fellows ever could tell me, was first found down on the Parks' place and they kept it quiet because they said they couldn't sell their place. It killed the crops; it came to the surface. It came to the surface down there. In fact, I have papers on that farm.

Then Mr. Jeffrey wanted a water well drilled. Now, he lived right across from the Methodist Church there at West Mecca. So he had Mr. Hickocks help him drill and they drilled down and 55 feet down he hit oil. On my place there at West Mecca the water pump just pumped pure oil most of the time. They gave it out and before people could realize, they were just coming in from all over, prospectors were, who never made a fortune.

H: Never made it?

B: No. The Mecca oil was used for medicinal purposes at first. I know Mr. Parks always took it for colds, so many spoonfuls of that Mecca oil. Then they got to making it into machine oil, sewing machine oil. It was made in Canton.

But as far as lubricating, it never turned out to be a good lubricating oil. Mr. Clemens thought he'd try it and put it in his old Ford. Before he got to Cortland the engine had burned up. (laughter) It was all right on machinery, on wagon wheels and stuff like that but it wasn't a regular good lubricating oil.

H: That was probably the one and only time that industry had a chance to come to Mecca.

B: This happened right after over at Titusville. So many of them came over here. We were over there studying that once.

H: It's amazing you say Titusville. One of the books that I used talks specifically about that.

B: You never were there?

H: No.

B: They have the museum and so on, there. I was there a good many years ago, too.

Is there anything else that you'd like to know about West Mecca?

H: Is there anything you'd like to share with us? The history is there and it's just amazing.

B: There's so much of it that you just can't cover it, of course.

H: Right. You can't do it in an hour. Are there any other names that you can help us with that we can look up as part of this project?

B: I'd like to talk about John Love.

H: Go ahead.

B: As I told you, he was a funeral director and he had a grocery and notions store, and he was postmaster at West Mecca. I have letters that have been postmarked there.

He used to tell me stories. They had to bury a man in Farmington. In those days it was in what they called a spring wagon--the casket was. And they had to go down a ditch like to get into the cemetery over at Farmington. As they went down in the ditch, the tail gate came open and the old guy went out! (laughter)

And then up in Green there was a lady that had a terrible scar--I don't know what it was--on her face. She was terrible-looking and they called her Effy. She died and her husband walked clear to West Mecca to get Mr. Love to come up and lay her out. So, John went up and he decided he was going to see what he could do. So he told her husband to take the wagon and go back to the store and get him something just to get him out, and he fixed her face up. When the old fellow came back and walked in and looked at her, he said, "Oh, my God! She looks just like she did when I married her!"

H: He was quite a man to do something like that.

B: John was good.

H: He's no longer living?

B: Oh, no. Neil, his son, took over the funeral home.

H: Isn't that in Cortland then?

B: Yes. He died too, Neil did.

H: I see. Very interesting.

B: I used to get my history from Mr. Love. And I used to get it from Ermine Hillyer. They were old men to me and I'd sit and listen for hours to them tell history. Then over to Cortland, Uncle Billy Meeks was another one. He told me a lot of the history. That's one reason I think I got started in history.

H: Is that right?

- B: Yes, I think it is, because I really enjoy it.
- H: Are there any other names that you can leave with us that can help us with this history of Mecca?
- B: Nobody else. No, they're all young in Mecca anymore! (laughter)
- H: Bill, Mr. Falkner, is about in his seventies, right?
- B: Yes. There is another one but he's in terrible shape. Stanley Brown--he is very ill. That's about all. I'm the oldest one in Mecca. No, I can't think of any. I can't even think of any over at East Mecca; only Tom.
- H: Tom, who I will talk to shortly.
- B: He'll give you the same stuff that I did! (laughter)
- H: That's okay. You'd be surprised at how many different things that they can tell us. He grew up, and since he was younger than you are, his stories are a little bit different.
- Mr. Benton, you've been very enlightening. I want to thank you for taking part in our Oral History Program and I appreciate the time that you spent with us.
- B: I want to thank you for including me in your work because I'm very much interested in history and would like to know more about this oral history.
- H: If you'd like any information feel free to get in contact with me and I'll set you right up.
- B: I'd like to have you come back and I can give you more history.
- H: Will do. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW