

1978

(SNP028) Mary Early and George A. Conyer,
interviewed by Amanda Moody, transcribed by
Allie Giroux and Victoria M. Edwards

Mary Early

George A. Conyer

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Interview with Mrs. Early and George Koiner
Part of the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, SdArch SNP-031
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Interview conducted at home of Mrs. Early, New Hope, Virginia
By Amanda Moody
c.1978

Transcribed by Allie Giroux and Victoria M. Edwards, 2009

Key

[AM:] Interviewer, Amanda Moody
[I2:] Interviewer #2, Alice
[ME:] Interviewee, Mrs. Early
[GK:] Interviewee, George Koiner (Mrs. Early's grandson)

{*} Unable to understand word
{**} Unable to understand more than one word
{-} Speaker is cut off or makes abrupt change in sentence

Interview corresponds to 031EarlyKoiner

Total interview length: min.

[Begin audio file, 00:00:01]

ME: Read about it in the paper. I don't believe we did today, **. I can't read the newspaper anymore, I can't even read news print. My glasses hurt my eyes or something.

AM: Do you enjoy reading?

ME: Yes I get books from the Library in Waynesboro.

AM: How about the large print, do you do pretty well-

ME: Yes I get large print. ** And our church.

AM: Now I'm at the home of Mrs. Early and we're in New Hope and also present is Mr. Koiner.

GK: George Koiner.

AM: George Koiner. And were going to talk a little bit about the mountain area, and now Mrs. Early, did you, you've always lived down here but did you travel in the mountains, or did you live near there?

ME: Blackrock. (chuckle) That's as far in the mountains I guess as I ever got. (chuckle)

AM: You'd go up to Blackrock.

ME: Blackrock.

AM: And you'd travel up in a buggy?

ME: Yes, a buggy, I don't believe we ever, I don't think cars were in existence when, last trip I made up there. I can't tell. We used to go on picnics when they'd have company in the summer, you know, young people, we'd go up to Blackrock for the day, they had bowling and then there was all spaces to have your lunch and so on so.

AM: So you'd go up for the day, a group of young people would go up?

ME: Mm-hmm. Yes.

AM: And you'd go bowling while you were up there?

ME: Yes, bowling, went bowling, Mister—Oh, what was his name, Mister. (makes humming noises) Now what was his name that run the bowling alley?

AM: Was it a Miller maybe?

ME: No. What did I say, George do you remember?

GK: It was. (trails off)

ME: Blackwell.

GK: Blackwell, I was going to say it wasn't Black but a Blackwell, a while ago you were talking.

ME: He stayed up there all year round and took care of the grounds and so on. So that's as far as I got with. (trails off)

AM: And Mr. Blackwell was sort of a caretaker then?

ME: Yes, he was the caretaker.

AM: Did he live right there where the bowling alley was?

ME: Yes he did, lived up on the mountain there a little further.

AM: A little higher up?

ME: And a little higher up and he stayed there all year round but these other people, some of your people had some of the—oh your mothers.

I2: Shaffer?

ME: They, no your father's people.

I2: That would be Shaffer or Wampler.

ME: Uh-huh. They had cottages up there, didn't they?

I2: Yes, yes it was Uncle Milt, I guess. Mr. Riverscline (?) said it was Uncle Milt and the Wampers, I know that's where my grandmother stayed.

ME: They had cottages and they would stay all summer, somebody would be there if it wasn't them it would be their relatives or somebody you know would stay there.

AM: You said you stayed there part of one summer.

ME: Yes.

AM: Who did you stay with?

ME: Well I stayed with a cousin. Mr. Elkton Barger, and I, and we, my uncle had a cottage up there, a half of a cottage, somebody else owned the other half so we stayed in that half and had a good time. (chuckle)

AM: What did you do?

ME: Well we, we would bowl as I say in the mornings and we'd take walks along one of the mountains and around and in the evenings we'd go down to the hotel to whatever they had, sometimes they had dances sometimes they had other entertainment there.

AM: You say you'd watch the dances?

ME: Yes, we watched them.

AM: That was in the hotel building?

ME: Yes in the hotel building, yeah, the ballroom.

AM: Oh, a ballroom, what was that building like was it a big building?

ME: Yes it was pretty big, a frame building and the fire. After some years after that, oh a good many years after that I guess, fire broke out and burnt the whole thing up.

AM: Do you remember when that was that it burnt up?

ME: No I don't know the year, my, my, my no. But I do know that it, you both know that.

I2: Well, Mr. Barnhart said 1908 and I think that there might've been another fire in 1914.

GK: Yeah, they had a lot of those fires in the mountain there.

I2: Right, there were several.

AM: Sure was more than one. What about these dances, what kind of music was that?

ME: Oh, mercy, I've forgotten about the music, I don't know what they had.

AM: Did they have fiddles or--?

ME: They had, they had people that would, guests at the hotel I reckon, I don't know who they were, they had fiddles and banjos and guitars they were all people, it wasn't piped in music or I mean any kind of artificial music.

AM: Square dancing, that kind of thing?

ME: Yes, that's what it was, mostly. Yeah, the day has gone by.

AM: Yeah, it really has.

ME: Miss Elsie Barger, you know, you've heard of the Barger family?

I2: Yes, oh yes, I knew Miss Hallie Barger, or Mrs. Barger over at Crimora. Of course she would be a sister in law I guess or something.

ME: Yes. She went with me up there. My father was up there and we went on account of him. He wanted to go and I don't know what was the matter with him yet, some ailment that he thought the Blackrock spring water would help him, so he went for that.

AM: He went for the water. Did it help?

ME: I don't know that it did but anyway, (chuckle) I don't remember whether that much or not but that Blackrock spring water, a lot of people drove up there and would bring the water back, you know, with them.

AM: Do you know how long ago that was that people were using the water for ailments?

ME: Oh, mercy no.

GK: If I might begin to remember, that was freestone water.

ME: Was it?

GK: You see when you get on this side of the river you've got limestone slate and all of that and on that side of the river anything in the mountain is freestone. That Jollett Spring, you know where that is now, well the doctors recommend that because its freestone.

AM: Still do.

GK: So with Blackrock.

I2: Cure anything.

GK: It was good if you had any trouble at all with drinking water and people still bottle it and take it. Same as Seawright, Seawright Spring is a lithia spring and there was a lithia spring in Waynesboro where DuPont is. They had an artificial, that's the one that they drilled when they were--wait, don't put that on--that was the one they drilled when they were hunting for oil back in the '90s you know when they had the boom. And they walked out and all they got left from that was that lithia spring. (laughter)

I2: Well, that's not so bad. (chuckle)

AM: Yeah. That's not oil, though.

GK: But no oil.

AM: Was there one big spring there or were there different springs?

ME: No, there were different springs but they were the big spring that everybody got this water from though was a great big--it was well kept up, I mean it was, I think it had maybe a curbing around it, you know and so on.

AM: Like a wall almost maybe?

ME: Yes, something like that. And then there were other springs there but they were different quality, they weren't the same as--I think they had a sulfur spring there, too.

GK: They did have one.

ME: And it was different qualities of water that they had there.

AM: Did they use that sulfur spring for any kind of sickness?

ME: Well, I think they did some people did you know, but I don't care for sulfur water myself. (laughter)

AM: I think the spring is still up there.

I2: Still making sulfur water. At least it was a couple weeks ago.

ME: Were you all up there?

I2: Uh-huh, we were up there just several weeks ago

ME: Well for heaven's sake both, what is there now?

AM: Just the springs that's really all there is.

ME: Is that all?

AM: It's all grown up in bushes and trees, it's hard to even get around now.

ME: Well, of course it would be it was, there were a row of cabins up on the top and a row down below. Mrs. Mowry, the Mowrys had one there, you know. And my uncle had half of one up on the top and that's where we stayed.

I2: Where was the big spring in relation to the—?

ME: Well it was, east, east of these, these cabins it all road way you know went up to the spring then they had a walk and. (trails off)

AM: A walk to the spring?

ME: A walk to the spring.

AM: Were there any steps along that walk?

ME: What?

AM: Were there any steps along the walk?

ME: I can't remember, I guess there were certainly there had to be, because it was on the side, the mountainside, you know.

AM: Was the springs higher up than the hotel and the cabins?

ME: Uh-huh. Yes, it seemed to be higher on the mountain, mountainside these were cabins and this hotel was the first thing you'd come to along the road going there was the hotel you'd come to first. And then these cabins, one out from either side of that leads up on the upper side of the mountain I reckon and these were on the lower side down here. I think that some people stayed there all summer, I know they did, some people would go and. (trails off)

AM: Where was the bowling alley, was that near the hotel?

ME: Well, it was further up now, you'd go from the spring it was like over here and you'd go kinda down this way to the bowling alley down the mountain to the—

AM: So on the outside the rows of cabins?

ME: Yes.

AM: And the hotel was that the other end?

ME: Mm-hmm.

I2: When you would go from the hotel to the spring did you go up the mountain or straight ahead?

ME: Well you, the road went—I don't know. The road went by both of these cabins, you know, this lower road and this upper road. And you could go to the bowling alley from either side and then the spring was in the middle up here (chuckle) between the upper road cabins and the lower ones and the spring was in there.

AM: In the middle?

ME: When you went to the spring, uh-huh.

AM: It was inside in between the upper and lower?

ME: It was—

AM: Or was it above the upper?

ME: Above the upper, some distance from them.

GK: Grandma, was that Browns Gap that, did that road cross the mountain there?

ME: No, don't ask me George, I don't know.

AM: Blackrock Gap.

GK: Blackrock Gap, that's just what I was. (trails off) I know they had all kinds of towns after Blackrock Gap, all of those coming up the mountain.

AM: Was there one bowling alley or two bowling alleys?

ME: Just one, had but one there.

AM: Let's see you say that Blackwell, was there was that the Blackrock Springs Company running that bowling alley?

ME: I don't know who run the bowling alley, I can't remember at all who run that bowling alley.

AM: Did you pay money to go bowling?

ME: Yes you had to pay so much every game. Oh, it wasn't much, five cents or something you know, in them days it was quite economical. But a lot of lot of young people would take a picnic and go up there, you know.

AM: Have a picnic there at the springs?

ME: Yes, a picnic at the springs. They had between these rows of cabins there was a wall on like in there you know, close to the side of the mountain. They always kept that well kept and would have their picnics in there.

AM: Oh, in the middle of the cabins there.

ME: Yes.

AM: Was there a roundhouse in the middle?

ME: I kind of believe there was. I can't remember but I kind of think there's something in there. Oh my, it's been so long ago.

AM: Do you know about when that was that you were going up there?

ME: No, I haven't any idea.

AM: Long time ago.

ME: Before I went to school, went away to school I know.

I2: When did you go to school?

ME: I don't know that now anymore. The year I went to Richmond school. But I don't know the year to that.

AM: Did you go up to Blackrocks when you went to visit the springs? Did you go up to the rocks too?

ME: Yes, we'd go to the rocks, that was an expedition, you'd go up to the rock because

it was a lot further up, you know, on the mountain. And we'd have to go up there, look over the country.

AM: Did you take the horses up there to the rocks?

ME: No, you just walked. I don't believe they ever took horses up there.

GK: You were lucky to walk. (chuckle)

AM: It's a long walk, isn't it? Did you have to climb over rocks to get up there?

ME: I imagine. I don't remember how far, how far do you reckon Blackrock springs is from when we lived over on that river?

GK: I don't know just exactly.

ME: I don't know, either.

GK: I know approximately, I mean you know, I know where it is that where it's located but that's flat country and the estimation of a mile in that flat country is hard to do.

AM: So you lived down in this area when you used to go up?

GK: On this side of the river

ME: I lived straight across here five miles, across Meadow Road.

GK: Just across the river there from Crimora.

AM: You don't remember any kind of, sort of arguments up there between somebody that had one hotel and somebody that had another hotel, over the water?

ME: No, that was after my time, if there was any. No, seemed everybody had a good time, I don't know. (chuckle)

AM: Most of the people that you knew were involved in this Blackrock Springs Company, weren't they that sold lots and they built cabins.

ME: Yes, but I don't know anything about the business part of the thing.

AM: You were pretty young then. (chuckle)

ME: Yes, I was and we didn't have any cabin, my uncle had the cabin so he'd loan it to anybody in the family that wanted it, so. (trails off)

AM: What was your uncle's name?

ME: Ben, Benjamin Koiner.

GK: Well that's a new one on me.

ME: Is that right?

GK: That was Hugh's grandfather. Was it Hugh's grandfather or Hugh's father?

ME: Yes.

GK: Little Ben was, Hugh's father.

ME: Uncle Ben, Uncle Ben Koiner. Aunt Molly used to, she had asthma you know and she used to go up there and stay a lot. Seemed to help.

AM: Did the water help asthma?

ME: Well the air or something, you know, seemed to help it.

GK: The mountain air is good for you. It's no pollution or anything like that, so.

AM: Yeah. Now, was there a stable up there?

ME: A what?

AM: A stable.

ME: I expect there was because they had horses. We travelled on horse and buggy in those days. Certainly they had stables somewhere, I can't remember that though. Old stable down there next to the hotel, was one.

AM: Next to the hotel?

ME: Somewhere close in that vicinity. It was kind of flat down there, and I think they had a stable there. Course we drove horse and buggy up there, horse and some kind of conveyance.

AM: Did the road up the mountain, up to Blackrock Gap, now I can see two roads there now there's one that comes out from way up above where the spring is and then there's one that sort of goes, goes below you know out from the lower loop, was there more than one road back then?

ME: I don't think there was but one road up there, I don't know.

AM: I mean from there on up.

ME: I guess they had roads went from this lower track and this upper one that met somewhere and went, went on, on across the mountain, I believe. That's been so long ago.

AM: What did you do when you went up to Blackrock? Did you go up there for a picnic or to write your initials?

ME: No, we just go up there to look around a little while, I don't think we ever drug our picnics up there.

AM: Did you have to crawl over rocks to get up there?

ME: I don't remember that, I can't remember that, I guess we walked. They had a path, people been going up there so often there was a path that went up there, that's all I know. Long, long ago. Miss Elsie Barger, you know the Bargers? You know some of the Bargers, they, she remembers when I went up there. She was a little bit of a person.

AM: That was your cousin?

ME: Hmm?

AM: That was your cousin?

ME: Yes, my cousin.

AM: How long did it take you to get up to the hotel?

ME: I don't know that, indeed I don't. From the main road down below to up there, to Blackrock, I just don't know.

AM: Did anybody go up when it wasn't summertime?

ME: Yes, always went in the summer.

AM: Only in the summer?

ME: It was all shut up in the winter.

AM: Except the Blackwells were up in the winter.

ME: Yes, except the Blackwells, they stayed up there. But everybody else that was really something (?) outlet.

AM: What kind of people were the Blackwells?

ME: Well, they were, I don't know, I never got acquainted with them very much I don't know, they were just the caretakers, that's all I know.

AM: They must've kept a garden up there if they were going to live up there all year round.

ME: They must've had. They had a right good house, I remember that.

AM: Where was their house in relation to the spring?

ME: It was above the spring was, like here and their house was up above.

AM: Up above the springs, quite a way away from the hotel.

ME: Yes, yes I believe. Mrs. Mowry used to go up there and stay all summer, join the Mowrys.

I2: Was the Mowry house on the upper row or the lower row?

ME: Lower row, lower row.

AM: Where was your uncle's cabin?

ME: It was the upper row.

I2: Did you go down the mountain to the spring or up the mountain from the cabin?

ME: We'd go along the mountain (chuckle) out here and go down a little bit to the spring.

AM: Oh, you'd go down.

ME: We'd go down off of that the spring was—it seemed to me like the mountain kind of went around this way you know, and the spring was down in this section and this, my uncle's cabin was up here and then this lower road down here.

AM: The spring was sort of at the end of the lower row maybe?

ME: No, it was the end of both roads they stopped at the spring. (chuckle)

AM: Oh I see. Was there some steps going from the lower row round to the upper row on the side of that spring or anything?

ME: There were steps at the spring I know and then the bowling alley was down from the spring, down that way.

AM: Pretty near the spring?

ME: It wasn't too far from the spring.

AM: On the other side of the spring from the cabins?

ME: Yes.

AM: Is there anything else besides bowling over there, any other games?

ME: No, I don't know of anything. It's been so long ago. My, my.

AM: People, you said some of the people stayed all summer?

ME: Yes.

AM: Who brought them their food and so on?

ME: Well, they'd come out every, their people at home would come out every week or every so often and bring them things to eat.

AM: Was it mostly older people that would stay for the whole summer?

ME: Yes, there were people that had some kind of an ailment, you know that would stay.

AM: For that water?

ME: Mm-hmm.

AM: Was it that main spring, was that the one that they got the water from-

ME: Yes.

AM: Or did they go to some of the other ones like the sulfur spring?

ME: No, the main spring was the one that furnished the water. And it wasn't piped anywhere either you had to go and take your bucket and go there and get it. (laugh) Yessir.

AM: What else? Now we were going to talk also about the Jarman's Gap area?

GK: I don't know much about farther down in Jarman's Gap area because my father and I, my father owned a place, towards Waynesboro on the main route which joined the Calf Mountain. You remember the Calf Mountain? It's just about disappeared now, but that was cleared off just the natural lay of the land made that calf through to Timberville.

I2: Is that right? It really looked like a calf? Oh, I didn't realize that.

GK: My father owned the old cherry orchard it had hundreds of trees with the little beetle (?) cherries on it at that time.

AM: Well, that's still outside the park.

GK: That's outside the park. The park came up to the Jarman Gap Road and the Jarman Gap Road from Dooms Station clear over to Blair Park that's on the eastern side there back of Crozet. That was a park line. Then from there up is the parkway and the parkway went through our place.

AM: Oh right, right because of Blueridge. Now we have that section now but it was sort of given to the park later on because the Blueridge Parkway didn't want to administer, we now have from Jarman's Gap to Rockfish but just the road, not the land. But back then it would've been on the parkway, the parkway came through later than the drive.

GK: Yeah. I used to ride horse back across from Dooms Station over to eastern Virginia and come out down at Crozet and on into that fox hunting country. The old Ortman (?) place, they used to have these horse shows over there, jumping and field trials for the

dogs and so on. That was back in the twenties.

I2: Could you tell us about any of the churches that were in this area?

GK: Now there was a little church but it had disappeared up on the top of the mountain. As I remember, as you went over the mountain—you've been up there Alice?

I2: Yes.

GK: Alright, well where the Jarman Gap road goes into Sugar Hollow, you know where that—just on your last climb as you wind up, just your last climb before you go over the hump of the gap, this road turned off to the left and dropped right straight down into Sugar Hollow.

I2: I've never been into Sugar Hollow.

GK: And the old Ballards, they had their still house down there made brandy. And that's where we younger boys at that time were interested in that brandy down in the hollow. (laughter) I shouldn't be talking about this in front of poor Mamaw. (laugh)

ME: No. (laugh)

GK: But we'd ride horses back over there and get this. Now he furnished moonshine into Waynesboro. Doctors and lawyers and what not and we boys would go around Sunday afternoon because this apple brandy, it was good.

I2: He did, he had an apple orchard.

GK: And to break colts, we would start there with a raw colt that didn't know anything about traveling at all and we knew it got back home that colt was broken as far as riding was concerned you had no more problems. Best way in the world, because you had him good and tired and we often would go over there in these Woods.

AM: Okay, Louise Wood, Austin that was one that John Doods talked to.

GK: That's correct, her mother was one of the best cooks you ever set your foot under the table, I've eaten many a supper there with Miss Austin's mother. And then we would come back. But that hollow was wild, I mean it was wild. Along the spring of the year you had your bobcats and what not.

AM: Even back then?

GK: Oh yes, and even now, bobcats are in the hollow now, but they were there then.

AM: There's bobcats.

GK: You cut that off now and I'll tell you a funny one. (laughter) Stop that coming over the mountain and get a meal.

AM: Anna Rogers?

GK: Anna Rogers. She would serve fried chicken and she always had a glass of wine for you. That went with the meal. And fifty cents was all you paid for the meal, believe that in mind.

AM: So it was almost like a restaurant that she had there?

GK: Yes, she'd get up, make you biscuits most anytime you'd come by, she'd have you hot biscuits and what not. Ham, chicken whatever you want.

AM: Now the Ballard house, that was a great big house wasn't it?

GK: Yeah, it was in the, when you left the Jarman Gap Road, the Jarman Gap Road went right over the gap and then you went back in on the hillside and the mountain was like this, and this Ballard house was long. You ever go up there Mamaw?

ME: No.

GK: It was long with a long veranda, a porch or whatever you want to call it. The whole length of it and people went there and boarded with her and would stay there. The Treples. (?) Miss Barger used to go there in the summer and stay a couple weeks with her. And then these fox hunters would come up there, they'd make their arrangements, maybe for breakfast-.

[tape break 00:31:52-00:31:57]

AM: Was there a lot of moonshining going on up in the mountains?

GK: Oh lord yeah. Down on the place I owned. A man moonshined over there.

AM: But what did they make? Was it brandy?

GK: Whiskey.

AM: Or was this corn liquor?

GK: This was corn whiskey. They didn't have any-

AM: They ever make apple brandy?

GK: Now over at the old Ballard place, years and years back, that had always been a still house. And they made whiskey and that's Louise Wood's people, old man Woods. They raised whiskey and it was handled under government inspection and all. And then when Prohibition came in they shut up. Old man Woods went on and distilled on the side. But over in these other hollows, they had just portable stills they could tear down and move. Now the man that was on my place distilled, and I knew that he was distilling. And I told him, if they ever catch you, now it's you, I didn't have anything to do with it. But you walk through the mountains, you find this mash in barrels, fermenting. And they always had it ** in brush, covered over. And I walk upon many of what they call a batch, getting ready to distill.

AM: They didn't make cherry brandy or apple brandy too often?

GK: No, they only made this corn whiskey, because it was easier to handle. And that stuff would kill you.

AM: Powerful stuff. Did people buy it, from all around?

GK: Oh sure, now I'm in the early '20s. From say '23 to '30, I say early, from '23 to '30 is when I knew of it. I never handled any of it, don't get me wrong, but I mean, I knew it was going on, I knew the people.

AM: Your family had land there?

GK: My father did. He bought this track of land in 1917. Two hundred and seventy acres.

AM: Was that for pasture?

GK: That was for pasture, yes.

AM: And, you talked about people living on it, were they just kind of squatters?

GK: No, no. We had old family, he was—an old man that lived on it the time we bought it. He was a veteran of the Indian Wars. He was Reno's (?) men when he went in and took

up Custer's men after the massacre. And it was quite interesting to talk to that old man, Old Man Whitback. (?) Mamaw, you remember him?

UF: Yeah.

GK: He stayed there until he died of his old age. He didn't die there, but he stayed there until he got too old.

AM: Working for your father?

GK: No, he just had the use of the house and he would do whatever we paid him for, whatever we wanted him to do. He had a garden, a cow, a horse and whatnot, and he just lived as though he owned it, and if he did any work for us, well we paid him for it. But he lived there, he had those cherries, this was the old cherry orchard, and he sold those cherries and they picked blackberries and they picked huckleberries and they made a living.

AM: Chestnuts too, I imagine.

GK: Uh-huh. You'll find a lot of those Fishers (?) and all, they made a living that way. And that goes back to why you had those fires. To keep a huckleberry growing, you have to burn that timber off.

AM: Yeah.

AM: Because huckleberries are low, and whenever that got so high, you'll see those mountains burn. They'd set them on fire.

AM: Yes. We still find that at Big Meadows. Burn that when the berries come right up.

GK: And they'll burn yet today. We can't keep them burning because they got to have this, in order to have this stuff.

UF: Listen, George is here ready to take you--(tape cuts sentence short).

[End audio file, 00:35:44 min.]

End of Interview

Koiner, George and Mrs. Early, c.1978

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