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Interview with Vastine Fisher

Part of the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, SdArch SNP-048
(SC# 4030)

Interview conducted at Unknown Location

By Barbara Wright on April 10, 1995

Transcribed by Victoria M. Edwards, November, 2009

Key

[BW:] Interviewer, Barbara Wright

[VF:] Interviewee, Vastine Fisher

[Notes regarding transcription technique]

[unintelligible] Unable to understand more than one word

_____ (??) Transcriber's best guess

- Speaker makes abrupt change in sentence

Refer to the Baylor University Style Guide for consistency in transcription

Total interview length: 00:39:43 min.

[Begin audio file, 00:00:01]

BW: This is April the 10th and we're up at the site of Vastine Fisher's home place. And while I'm taking some pictures, he's going to talk about what the house looked like when it did stand in this, in this setting.

VF: Probably that house was about thirty feet there on the low side, about thirty feet.

[00:00:24, tape breaks]

BW: -so it'll hear.

VF: Okay, closer to it in other words.

BW: Right.

VF: Okay. The microphone's on top here, right?

BW: Yeah.

VF: See the old house, the back door of it, was right up on the back right there, of course now this has been pushed out since then, this here was just nothing but a slope, a slope and hill down this way.

BW: Oh, you mean the house sat right up there?

VF: Uh-huh, it sat right up there, yes ma'am. Of course, the lower side of it was down probably further than that bank is right now.

[00:00:57, tape seems to break; resumes with sound of camera film winding]

VF: Is that in there straight further? Is the roll of film in there straight?

[00:01:03, tape breaks; resumes with sound of wind on microphone]

VF: Well, this was a three-story house, with a basement and a main floor and then it was an attic upstairs with one big room in it. It had a sloping porch on the front of it, with hand-hewed timbers that was just cut in the mountain was put up there and then the roof was put on it.

BW: And then this, it all came toward us? It faced us?

VF: The peak of the house faced us, right, uh-huh. And of course, back in those days when they built the house, anywhere you find a spring, you'll find a house. No matter where the spring is, you'll find a house foundation aside of the spring, every time. I can show you a dozen up on the mountain here when we go around. I got a little pond here, right now, I pushed it out several years ago, and soon we'll have a spring here, and then we'll have a spring coming out of the mountain here. So it's two great springs right here, and these springs has never been known to go dry. It's water in 'em year round, all the time.

BW: Ice cold.

VF: It's about fifty-six degrees.

BW: [unintelligible] just going to go up there.

VF: You might get one from way up there across here and get the house site and everything, Barbara. Barbara? It's a foundation of an old house, right up over top of this mountain, about three hundred yards back from the tip top of this here ridge right here, and naturally there's a spring right over from here. Now we can get right up there within a hundred yards of this house by going up this ridge right here. And now, unless you have a lot of time, you don't want to do that you know. But it is about--it takes about fifteen minutes to walk from right here to the Skyline Drive up this road right here, this road that goes right through here. And we used to pick strawberries up on the Skyline Drive, about ten children would go up there and we used to pick strawberries, to sell, that's how we made our living, picking berries, picking peaches and apples, and of course in the winter time, we cut a lot of wood. And of course, in the fall we hunted a lot of ginseng, and that's the way the mountain people made their living. And they raised big monies doing it. Back in 1948, this whole mountain here burned over, the city got the blame for it, caught on fire, caught the mountain on fire, and left all burnt, almost all the way down to Front Royal, Virginia. And that year, after that and the following year, either '49 or '50, my family was nine children Mom and Dad, and we picked eight hundred gallon of huckleberries and sold 'em that year. Can you imagine what eight hundred gallons of huckleberries is?

BW: A lot of huckleberries. (laughter)

[00:04:09, tape seems to break]

BW: Now talk [unintelligible].

VF: Okay. Well, with the way it goes up to that holler is Jarman's Gap Road. And if you take the fork to the right, you go right up over Skyline Drive. And if you take the fork of the road that goes to the left, you go straight up through Cavalry's Hollow. And when the park bought, took this land, they run four or five, maybe as many as eight families out of that hollow. And those families that lived up there were just regular mountain people with their own different livestock like horses, cows and maybe a few sheep, and they had their fences, well fenced in around there, and later on, years after the park drove these people out, my dad went up there in that hollow and got enough of wire off their fences and brought it down to fence thirty one acres around here. He carried it back here on his shoulder, he'd go up there one day and maybe bring back two rolls, go up there a day later and bring back two more rolls. So it will give you an idea of how many people did live up there, it was just a small little families--

BW: A community.

VF: Uh-huh. And--

BW: Now, do you think in this particular little group of people that you're talking about, it was, where they had a church and--

VF: No, no, the church was right—I wanted to show you that on the way up here, but we passed right by the church site on the way up here. I'll show it to you on the way back down.

BW: So they came down the hollow to the church?

VF: Uh-huh. If they went to church, they came down and it was about a hundred yards on the other side where I showed you Jarman's Gap Road. [unintelligible] back there, right up there [unintelligible] there. [wind picks up over the microphone and obscures voices during this part and into BWS following line]

BW: [unintelligible] anything that these people that lived up in this Cavalry's Hollow that needed, like flour or any kind of staples like that, they had to come out?

VF: They had to come out, yes.

BW: And go to Waynesboro.

VF: Right. And most of 'em would stock up on that stuff.

BW: By the barrel.

VF: For the winter, by the barrel. Uh-huh.

BW: Now, tell me why you said it had an interesting story about why it got that name.

VF: Okay. During the First World War, the US troops was training all over the United States and the cavalry came through here on horseback and rode up that hollow and that is how that hollow got its name. And I'm fairly—

BW: Interesting.

VF: I'm fairly sure that is just a tale that's been—

BW: Passed down.

VF: —sent from one generation down to the other, but I believe that's how come people calls it the Cavalry's Hollow. It's not on the map at that or anything; it's only local people that calls it Cavalry's Hollow. If you mention Cavalry's Hollow to anybody around here, they would know exactly where it was.

BW: All right, now tell me, so we can record, what you were talking about, about the people were named MacCauley and Craig, MacCraig.

VF: Okay, all right.

BW: How they might have changed their name.

VF: All right, I kinda figured always that the MacCraigs came to the United States with the name MacCraig, I figure that after they got here that they shorten it to just Craig, but now it's old tale that people around here's been telling for many, many years that it was a bunch of MacCauleys¹ around and it was some Craigs around and the parents of the girls didn't want them to lose their name and the Craigs, they didn't want their daughters to lose their name, so when the Craigs and MacCauleys started marrying each other, they took on the name of MacCraig, including MacCauley and Craig in that. And that's the tale that came from generations down, so maybe that is the way it was.

[00:08:11, tape breaks]

VF: Barbara, now what's the way we just came through down there, out of Calf Mountain, from my place? My place is right back of this little ridge right here. In fact, up top

of that ridge there is my land, okay?

BW: That green that I see is your trees?

VF: No, no, no, those are—

BW: I mean, that little bit of brighter green.

VF: Right, that's right down that way from my trees. Okay? You can't see none of my trees because they're right behind this little ridge here.

BW: Oh, all right.

VF: But now that's where I told you my cousin's two daughters lived? In those pines there, that's where they live, okay? And of course that's right up the mountain we came up that little road right out there [unintelligible] on out. [the wind obscures his voice]

BW: Now, that's not the road that the Indian is—

VF: Yeah, right.

BW: It is?

VF: Right, right, that's it, uh-huh, that's it, uh-huh, that's—

BW: Well then, he's bought the whole top of that little small mountain.

VF: The whole top of that little small mountain, right, uh-huh, yes sir.

BW: Let me try to get one, you go on and talk about the story here and--

VF: Okay.

BW: I think the idea of an India—a person from India buying the top of the mountain then putting in a--Just, most unusual. (chuckle)

VF: Yeah. Now he's done put perc holes all over the top of that mountain, Barbara. Now, you can definitely see, you can definitely see Cavalry's Hollow, see that whole hollow is Cavalry's Hollow, okay? Going from right there where you see the last house there all the way up through yonder, that's Cavalry's Hollow. And—

BW: And all up over those mountains?

VF: Right, uh-huh.

BW: Goes all the way up?

VF: Yeah, that's what we call Cavalry's Hollow. And people used to live up there in those, down in the bottom of the hollow, just over where Flugar (??) you know. And of course, now you see these little mountains that's coming down to that hollow, they have hollows in them going up this way, okay?

BW: Yeah.

VF: Each and every one—

BW: In the other direction.

VF: Uh-huh, yeah, [unintelligible] places there [unintelligible] hollows [unintelligible] [the wind obscures his voice]

BW: Well now, were those—Cavalry, Cavalry Hollow, they were moved but the hollows that went off in the other directions, were those people moved too?

VF: Now, it wasn't too many people lives up in those hollows because the mountains is too steep coming down this way, but now Cavalry's Hollow, you can see there, it's a lot of level land in there say, and all of those level spots there, people used to live.

BW: Now you say there was, this is, this is--

VF: This is, this is McCormick's Gap right here and the Bear Den, the Bear Den, Barbara, is right over here. And it takes about five minutes to walk down to it, but it's right down over the cliff, right down, right over here.

BW: And you say Bear Den, you mean where they actually hibernate?

VF: Oh, they used to hibernate in it, uh-huh.

BW: They don't anymore?

VF: Not anymore because the rock has slipped down over the edge and you can barely see back in there now. But people used to say that it was a big cave back in there, but now the rock, big rock over the entrance, they just slacked--over the years just kept coming down.

BW: Now, then you came up here to pick berries, did you see bears?

VF: No, well yeah, I've seen bear all over this mountain, in fact I probably seen as many as fifteen or twenty bear on this mountain in my life. And of course, my sons still hunt and they see bear all the time. See this little green through the rail here?

BW: Yes.

VF: Now that's what you call Lindsey's Level, okay? And the reason it's called Lindsey's Level is because right on the other side of that hill, down on the other side of the mountain there, a fellow Lindsey came through one time up to the mountains and he stole one of my great-granddad's horses. And when he came back, Uncle Huse's (??) house, that lives right there in over there, Uncle Huse recognized the horse and he stopped him and held him until he sent word over to my great-granddad that the fellow over here had one of his horses, and he wanted to make sure it was okay. And grandpap, my great-grandpap got together with a few other people and came over there and hung Mr. Lindsey on a white oak tree right next to Uncle Huse's house down there. Now, I'm going to show you this, now, I can still show you the tree that they hung him at.

BW: Well, that was—you didn't steal horses.

VF: No, and that's what you—that's why they call it Lindsey's Level.

BW: Where you seen the green, right over there?

VF: Uh-huh, that's called Lindsey's Level, yes sir. Now that's one of the stories in the course of--it's something to it because it's been, you know, in the family for many, many years, you know. And they handled their own business in those days, they didn't--

BW: Well if they'd have had to wait for the sheriff to come.

VF: Oh, the sheriff would never get there. He didn't bother--

BW: He'd get lost. (chuckle)

VF: He didn't bother these mountain people, anyway, back in those days. In fact, say forty years ago, the sheriff didn't come out to Calf Mountain. They expected the people out there to handle their own problems. I have a deputy sheriff tell me here about, oh,

about twenty-two years ago, he said, "Vastine," he said, "I don't understand it," he said, "these people out here used to handle their own problems," says, "every now and then people now they, somebody calls the sheriff's department." And I told him, I said, "George," I said, "that's just for the younger people," I said, "the older people out here still handles their own affairs."

BW: In other words, the ones who have, who are second and third generation, from those who were moved off the mountain, you still are rather clannish?

VF: Oh, pretty much, oh yes, I mean, all of those people down there are just like a clan. And I mean, in fact, me and my family's about, just about the only ones that has moved out of that hollow. Everybody else has built in that hollow.

BW: They just stayed where they were moved to. And just brought things up to date and just stayed there.

VF: In other words, my grandpap owned that whole hollow at one time, and he gave--he had about eight kids all together and he gave each one of the eight kids a piece of land. And their daughters and sons built up on the land and now the granddaughters and grandsons are building on that land. So all of 'em is just one little clan, for sure, that's a mountain clan right there.

BW: But it is--the view up here is just beautiful.

VF: Barbara, another little story. See this mountain here? Where the pines are? Yeah, all those pines is Newt Whethers' (??). Forty years ago, you could stand down Waynesboro, down here with a camera and take a picture of that mountain right there, that whole mountain there. And it was in the--now, just was, not just in here, but it was on up on the top yonder, can you see that pasture field on top? But the whole mountain was in the picture of a calf, the pasture field looked like a calf from Waynesboro. And they, they let it grow up. But now, if you get an old newspaper from Waynesboro, they had, they run it in the paper now and again, but you look from Waynesboro up there and you see a picture of a calf.

BW: And that was sort of the shape the trees had taken?

VF: The pasture field was in the shape of a calf. Uh-huh.

BW: Oh! The pasture field itself, oh, I see.

VF: Right, they, it had the tail, the legs, the head and the eyes and everything, uh-huh. Now, that hasn't been, thirty years ago you could see the calf, thirty years ago. But now Waynesboro News Virginian, right now has the copy for that and of course some older people around here might have postcards with that calf, but now that is why that is called Calf Mountain. That is Calf Mountain right there and that's what that road down there is named after, Calf Mountain Road and that used to be a picture of a calf because when you looked at the pasture fields.

BW: Well now, who put their stock on that pasture?

VF: It was probably as many as probably ten people that owned land on that mountain, uh-huh.

BW: And they just ran the herds together?

VF: No, it was fenced in.

BW: Oh, divided?

VF: The whole thing was fenced in, uh-huh. In other words, this used to be the Harper place here, and Fretwell (??) owned that on the top, that's what's called Fretwell's Top right there on--

BW: Where that little denuded place is?

VF: Uh-huh, right. That was called Fretwell's Top. And then of course this over here, my Uncle Huse used to own, where this green pasture—

BW: Where that was Lindsey's?

VF: Yeah, uh-huh. Uncle Huse used to own that, and, but now, if you wanted to see a copy of that there calf, the Waynesboro News Virginian down here would have a copy of it down there for sure.

BW: All right.

VF: Yeah, uh-huh.

[00:16:53, tape breaks]

VF: Raleigh (??)? That's what it would have to be. S, whatever the first name, MacCraig, that's what he was.

BW: We're here in this graveyard and the date on this tombstone that we're talking about is 1838?

VF: Eighteen-thirty-eight and we see, nineteen—what does that say at the bottom?

BW: Seventy-nine, or?

VF: Seventy-nine what it looks like, but this looks like a Y here?

BW: Yes.

VF: This looks like A, don't it?

BW: Yes.

VF: And a Y. I don't know what that could be.

BW: Seventy-nine, that's--

[00:17:41, tape breaks]

BW: Vastine's grandfather [unintelligible] took care of about a thousand head of sheep for a family [unintelligible] and he had a gun that he told Vastine he'd use to shoot as many as twelve dogs in one night who were attacking the sheep. The mountaineers all had [unintelligible] they all ran loose, and if the dogs got shot, so be it, they weren't concerned, they had enough. [words obscured by wind]

VF: [unintelligible]

BW: This mountain we're on is known as Kemper's Mountain but it might be called Buck's Mountain?

VF: Buck's Elbow.

BW: Buck's Elbow Mountain.

[00:18:24, tape breaks]

VF: Barbara? Now this is where my grandpap lived and where he raised ten kids, in this little cabin right here. This cabin has been here as long as anybody around here can remember. And it used to be a kitchen built on to the back side of it, that came down

this way, and it used to be as big--the kitchen part of it was big as the cabin itself.

BW: You just go on up.

VF: Mr. Frank O'Neill put that roof up there here about fifteen, eighteen years ago. Up until that time, it was wooden shingles on it. And those wooden shingles were split here on the mountain itself, somebody took and split 'em their self and put 'em on. And the logs there, they came right out of the mountain here, real close by. And the chimney there, the rock for that chimney, came right off a place right here. And those logs there, are chestnut logs, Barbara, you won't find those logs around this area. That is Native American Chestnut logs there. This used to be the root cellar here. It wasn't very much room under there, but it done the job. They stored the potatoes and the apples and cabbage heads and stuff like that under there. That mortar, between those logs there, looks like it was made out of clay from up this way, too.

BW: [unintelligible]

VF: It wasn't many windows in this house because it was too hard to keep it warm with a lot of windows in it, so you usually didn't find a log cabin with too many windows in it.

BW: Now did this have a second floor? A-

VF: Oh. Yes, it had an attic in it, it's got an attic in it and that's where all the kids slept, ten of 'em, up in the top of that log house there. It was seven boys and three girls in the family and all of 'em were born and raised right there in that cabin.

BW: Now these here, do you think these are the original windows?

VF: I doubt that, I doubt that seriously. In fact, I doubt that they even had glass windows in there, Barbara. They probably just had shutters that they opened up and closed. [sounds of them entering the cabin] See, Barbara, you get up to the attic, look, there used to be a pair of steps right here, that went up to the attic, you want take a picture up there, maybe? Because if you don't-

BW: I don't think there's enough light.

VF: No, not enough light is it. But they used to be the steps that went up there. Don't you know this place was hard to heat? This place was hard to heat I would imagine.

BW: Now where is the door, you said, to the kitchen area that was-

VF: Now this, this was the kitchen out here.

BW: Oh, in the front.

VF: Right, in the front, now it wasn't small. No, it [unintelligible] down. It was made out of boards that they cut at the saw mill, boards just like this, Barbara. Boards made out of boards into the floors. And it-

BW: And that's where he's patched that, you think?

VF: That's what they-

BW: But see there, the log-

VF: Yeah, that's what the put on there to keep air from coming through the cracks of logs, uh-huh. [unintelligible] again? And see, the kitchen used to come out complete, about this area here Barbara. In other words, the kitchen was about as big as the whole thing combined, and that's where they spent-

BW: And that was the living quarters, was the kitchen?

VF: That was mostly the living quarters. They stayed in the kitchen, done everything in the kitchen.

BW: Well now, where was the chimney for the kitchen?

VF: It was out here, it's-

BW: It's just gone?

VF: It's long-well, they could've even--they could've even, more than likely used just a pipe, a stove pipe to go out and up. Uh-huh, just a stove pipe, more than likely, that's what you seen in all the old houses back in those days.

BW: Now tell me about this wood over here, this is a [unintelligible], like you said?

VF: Okay, this used to be the old barn over here and the logs are still there, you can see. And they used to have hog pens around here made of chestnut logs, and of course, over the many years, people has come in here and got a lot of that stuff. But now, this spring right here is where they got all the water and of course they used to have a watering trough right here that the horses and cows would drink out of. I don't believe it's here anymore. But that's the spring there, and look, what kind of stream of water is coming out of there, would you please.

BW: Vastine said his grandparents weren't actually forced to move, but they closed the road, so that they had to move because they had no access to this cabin that has been left standing.

[00:24:12, tape breaks]

BW: Vastine said this is one of the cases that, where the government is not supposed to land lock people, but they did in his grandfather's case, because once they closed the road, his grandparents had no way to get out, so they had no choice but to move.

[00:24:28, tape breaks]

VF: -somehow or another-

BW: Vastine's grandparents were literate, they read and wrote, but the children, the boys did not learn to read and write, the girls did, so therefore Vastine's father was not able to read and write.

[00:24:46, tape breaks]

BW: His father never in his lifetime learned to read and write.

VF: And neither did any of the other boys.

BW: And none of the others boys in the family did, either.

[00:24:58, tape breaks]

BW: Vastine said he thought his grandfather's reasoning was that the boys' teacher was hard work. Cutting logs, railroad ties, taking care of the livestock, and they didn't need an education to do that, they just learned to do that as they grew up. I personally thought that he would have taught the boys to learn to read and write because they maybe would leave this area whereas the girls would probably stay here and marry right into the mountain people.

[00:25:30, tape breaks]

VF: -you definitely-

BW: You'd just walk along and help [unintelligible]?

VF: You definitely want this on tape, now if you don't believe me, of course I [unintelligible] cut it off, Uncle [unintelligible] grandma went and got the camphor, the camphor and ashes and she stuck that [unintelligible] back on her foot, and one of the toes, I swear, survived. That is the story [unintelligible] telling you, and I seen her [unintelligible]. [wind obscures most of this story]

BW: (laugh)

[00:26:16, tape breaks]

BW: So you can just tell away, it's going.

VF: Barbara, one year when my grandpap wanted to butcher his hogs, you know, back in those days they just let their hogs run free over the mountains and they'd eat these American chestnuts, that was their main food at the time, of course they ate a lot of acorns and other stuff too, but the chestnuts were their main food source. And when they got ready to butcher the hogs, they just went out on a mountain there and got 'em and drove 'em in and butchered 'em. Didn't have to feed 'em no corn or anything because their meat was real good by eating all that chestnut. And one year, Grandpap sent his boys out to find the hogs and they couldn't find 'em, there had been a deep snow, about two feet of snow and of course the drifts was ten, fifteen feet deep in those hollows up there. And they looked for about two weeks for those hogs, and they finally found 'em, and the whole bunch of 'em had got up against this cliff and laid down and the snow had drifted over top of 'em and they had been laying there in this snow for several days there without coming out for water or anything, and they finally found the hogs in there, drove 'em in and butchered 'em and you would think that the hogs would be in bad shape, but those hogs was just perfect for butchering and hadn't lost any weight hardly to amount to anything. In other words, they just kinda went into hibernation there and didn't use any energy, so they didn't lose too much weight. And Dad said that was probably as good a meat as they had out of hogs on the mountain.

[00:28:00, tape breaks]

BW: -part of the last he said. But I sure don't want to lose them talking about the farm. Because see, we went down, we hiked about fifteen miles to where the side of the mountain, where the cabin is still standing.

[00:28:13, tape breaks]

BW: -spent hiking on the mountain with Vastine Fisher. I certainly can go along with learning through using your senses and experience because we sure did see some things and learn--I certainly did see some things and learn some things. A couple things that weren't on his tape, he was talking about how as children, particularly mountain children, they had to entertain themselves and one of the ways they did this was with rock fights. I asked him if he seriously meant rocks and he said, "Yes," that you teamed up and you stood a certain distance from each other and then you tried to hit each other with rocks. And a lot of times, people, the boys got hurt, he said he remembered one time that just he and his brother were having a rock fight, just the two of 'em and he ran out of rocks and the first thing he saw when he realized he had no rocks was a piece of broken saw blade, which he picked up and threw at his brother, and it hit his brother in his brother's forehead, and actually embedded, the blade embedded in his brother's head. So after they took the--of course this stopped the fight--after they took the saw blade out, they used camphor gum mixed with a little whiskey to put on the cut, which immediately stopped the bleeding, and then they just put a bandage around it and he was not seriously hurt.

Another story he told me that didn't get on his tape when he was talking was about his uncle who had decided at the--when he was a child to baptize their rooster. Now this

took place at the old cabin where we hiked this afternoon at the watering trough which has long since fallen apart and disappeared. The young boy caught the rooster and held him by his neck and proceeded to dip his head in the water and he, as he did so, he was saying, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father," then he dipped him again, "in the name of the Son," and then he pushed his head down a third time and just kept thinking and thinking and thinking and never could think of "Holy Ghost" and by the time he let the poor rooster up out of the water, the rooster had drowned.

BW: Even though Vastine's family was not actually in the forced migration, he did know a lot of stories about it and he felt like that it was not so negative a move, that the people who came down out of hollows and who actually adjusted to the resettlement communities or the places wherever they went, gained more than they lost. And he also feels like that because of the development of the drive and the national forest that the city folk, as he calls them, now have access to the natural beauty which, if there was no drive and it was all private lands, they would not have that access.

He was a delightful person to talk to and I thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.

[00:31:41, tape breaks]

BW: Comments about the graveyard that are not on his tape. The picture I took of the headstone that said "MacCraig," one of the pictures that I tried to get showed a hole in the very center of that square tombstone and Vastine said that that hole was there because when they put this tombstone in place, a three foot square piece of marble sat atop the larger piece that had the name on it and it was held together by a long bolt, it wasn't actually screwed in, but the bolt went through both pieces of marble and over the period of time since this graveyard was established, someone, a tourist or hiker or whoever, has took the top piece and of course didn't even attempt to try to take the bottom piece. The top piece was about a three foot square and it weighed probably at least a hundred pounds, so whoever took it, had a nice haul out of that mountain. He said as far as he could remember, from stories told and what he'd heard, that probably had been no burial in that little cemetery for at least sixty years or more. And most of the people in that cemetery were from Sugar Hollow, which is the area that Erlvie (??)--Elvira was from. And the people's names were Woods or MacCraig or MacCauley or Wolf or Via (??). And the only two tombstones that had any writing on them at all were with the name MacCraig and on that other tape, we were trying to decipher the year that was on one of the tombstones that had MacCraig, but we neither, neither one of us came up with an accurate date for the--what the letters of the alphabet meant either.

It's rather sad to see the little cemetery so, in such a state of disrepair. It was fenced in, the government had done that to try to keep people from bothering it or--but the place was overgrown with vines and broken limbs and of course leaves and a good many of the tombstones were only just slabs of slate with nothing written on them. And I guess if you buried your loved one there, you just had to know whereabouts in the area the person had been laid to rest, or else you'd never find it again. There was one place where the ground had actually sunk in and whoever had been buried there, the ground had just sunken in and kinda left a hole. It was nothing to see, though, as far as any kind of remnants of a coffin or anything, that was beneath the dirt. But it was--there were a number of just slate, oblong slate pieces stuck in the ground to mark where people had been buried. As I say, though, it was kind of sad to see it in such a state of disrepair. Vastine said as far as he knew, nobody, none of the generations following those people had made any effort whatsoever to go up there and maintain the graveyard and I'm sure the government would have let them do that if they had wanted to. But most of those people at Sugar Hollow, they had all been moved out and dispersed, so I guess second, third generation didn't even bother to try and come back or keep any record of who might have been buried there. As I say, there are only two, the only name we saw was MacCraig and that didn't identify anything except MacCraig, you didn't know man, woman, child or anything else.

[00:35:43, tape breaks]

BW: Correction. There were three tombstones with "MacCraig" on them and one of those

was the one that I, of which I took a picture that was just propped against a tree, it was just, we know that there was not a grave there because of the size of the tree that was right beside it.

[00:36:06, tape breaks]

BW: Here's several more things that I need to add after I listened to Vastine's tape. One thing he commented about that he knew from just stories that were told that in some of the cases where the government had come in and told the people they had to move, the people would move out temporarily and then when the agents would come back around to check, they would have advance notice somehow and go and hide and the agents would come and of course find empty dwellings and assume that the people who had lived there had gone and then as soon as the agents left, the people would come back. No doubt the federal government agents caught on to this after not too much time.

Two stories that he told that were not on the tape, partly because we were just walking along and talking, had to do with when we were coming from the cabin that we visited, where his paternal grandparents had lived. One was when, that his aunt and uncle had been out at the wood pile, chopping wood for their mother and his aunt put her bare foot up on the chopping block and dared her brother to chop her toes off. And her brother did just that, he cut off four of her toes. So of course, Vastine's grandmother came out and she took the toes and used camphor gum and ashes and she put that around, I guess around where the toes had been severed and put the toes back in place and bandaged the little girl's foot. And Arnold (??) says that one of those toes reattached itself, because he has actually, had actually seen his aunt's foot and saw that she only had three missing toes.

The other story he told while we were at the cabin, when we were talking--when we were standing there close to where the remnants of the barn were, he said his grandfather had had of course horses, and the one winter when they'd had a really heavy snow and severely cold weather, one of the horses had gotten out, evidently unknown to anybody, and the snow crust was firm enough that the horse was able to walk on the top of the snow and the horse proceeded to go up the edge of the mountain toward the top and evidently lost its footing. Now I don't remember whether, what gender horse it was, lost its footing and started sliding down the side of the mountain and evidently there were not as many trees as there were when we were there today. Anyhow the horse could get no way to stop himself, so he just kept sliding faster and faster down and went right on off the edge of the mountain and fell to his death. And I dare say that they didn't have--in those days a horse was very valuable, so that was a considerable loss. Just like when he was talking about his brother, I mean his uncle, baptizing the rooster, they might have had a whole lot of chickens, but they probably didn't have a lot of roosters, so that anything that they lost through some unfortunate occurrence such as that was a considerable loss. When these people all were living on a poverty level state of existence.

[audio ends at 00:39:43]

End of Interview

1 Mr. Fisher pronounces the name with a hard "Mac," instead of the shortened "Mc."

Vastine Fisher, 4/10/1995

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