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by Dorothy Noble Smith, transcribed by Mara  
Meisel and Victoria M. Edwards

Carl O. Shifflet

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Interview with Carl Shifflett

Part of the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, SdArch SNP-112  
(SC# 4030)

Interview conducted at home of Carl Shifflett  
By Dorothy Noble Smith on August 22, 1977

Transcribed by Mara Meisel, July 2007 – January 2008  
Updated by Victoria M. Edwards, November, 2009

Key

[DS:] Interviewer, Dorothy Noble Smith

[CS:] Interviewee, Carl Shifflett

[MS:] Interviewee, Mrs. Carl Shifflett

[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: 01:19:23 min.

[Begin audio file, 00:00:01]

DS: –Yes it is.

CS: That's true.

DS: That's right.

CS: Yeah.

DS: So, you were saying that one of the main resentments that the people had was the loss of their spring water?

CS: Absolutely. That's facts. I know what I'm talking about. I've talked to many of them. And they valued that water. More than gold.

DS: Of course. Well, were–

CS: Any of them, those little springs, they were always cool, and they were as pure as water could be.

DS: That's exactly true.

MS: They had no ice.

CS: No.

MS: They kept the spring, the milk and everything, by this water continuously running in through a, a little dairy, wouldn't you say?

CS: Well, you might say, yeah, instead of icebox, they'd put it in this water, spring water. Then they'd put their milk and their butter in there, and everything, you know, and kept it cool.

DS: And where they were moved to, there were the not the springs.

CS: Huh?

DS: Where they were moved to, there were not the springs.

CS: I'm telling you the fact, I know this: that was their biggest resentment. That that really got them. They didn't want to leave. That was the biggest resentment.

DS: Mm-hm.

CS: Far as that. Cool water. And it was nice. Wonderful. And they'd use it like my wife said, for milk and dairy products and things like that, you know. And they'd run in and run out, you know. See, and it was cool.

DS: Now, you say your father and uncle owned the timber rights for—?

CS: Yeah, they bought the timber rights. From uh, it was, I don't know what the uh, it's been always called, beats me (??) because it was federal grant. And at the time that my brother and uncle bought the timber rights, a gentleman by the name of Colonel Roller owned it. I think his home was in Staunton. I distinctly remember that.

DS: What did they do with the timber then?

CS: All right. The main thing was, first thing, was bark, chestnut oak bark, for the tan yards. And they shipped carloads. They used to have a side track down here within a half a mile, Norfolk & Western, and during the two months while the sap was coming up, why, everybody went to the woods and peeled bark, for a living. And they'd have bark camps. I know one man spent his life as a cook.

DS: Really?! Bark camps?!

CS: Cooking in a bark camp for about two months. And that (laughs) was his main stake of living. He'd follow these bark camps peeling bark.

DS: How many people would show up at the camp?

CS: Well, we had a camp of our own, had about thirty. Twenty-five, thirty men working every day, in one area and then maybe another area.

DS: Well, did the men stay overnight there at the camps or go home?

CS: A few did, but some of them walked five and six miles. They were men here then, I mean men, physically.

DS: That's right.

CS: And a good many of them walked. And uh—

DS: Then this is almost like a production line that they had going.

CS: And uh, then, following, after the bark peeling, it was chestnut oak wood, most of it, and they'd then cut this, what they call "extract" and drag it as corn, sell it with the corn. I hauled the whole winter, myself. And then they had a chestnut blight. Before that blight, those people, I seen them coming down this road here horseback with two bags, long bags, you don't see them hereabouts any more but they hold two bushels. And one in front of 'them and one behind on a horse. They'd sell those chestnuts.

DS: How much would they get for them, have you any idea?

CS: I don't, I just, I don't remember. But that was one way of making a living.

DS: Yes.

CS: The next thing in the meantime was cherries. Those mountains were full of cherries. And they were delicious. You can't, this improved cherry, it just doesn't go with them at all. And then, to take advantage of the cherries, the surplus cherries, they'd have their swine bred so that they'd have pigs, say eight weeks old, and they'd gather up those cherries and they'd last about a month and a half. So that saved grain went towards their liquor. I've been in a cherry tree myself and there's the pigs are cracking the nuts down there. (Laughs)

DS: Really!?

CS: Yes. Yeah.

DS: I never heard of feeding cherries to pigs!

M S: Well, his mother and he used to live right down the road here, and they would walk from here clear back up in the mountains and pick cherries. And they picked huckleberries—

CS: And then there was huckleberries, what we called huckleberries. Now, what you buy in the store today isn't the huckleberry that I'm speaking about, maybe you know that. And they'd start around the Fourth of July and pick until about the middle of August, and then the huckleberry business was just about over.

DS: Did they do any burning to make sure that they had the huckleberries?

CS: (chuckle)

DS: Because I've heard that they did.

CS: I, I don't like to answer that. (laughs) Yes.

DS: Yes. I know they did. Yeah.

CS: There hasn't been any fires. And I know today, I honest that. But I was young, then, I was picking berries, I didn't approve of it, and I didn't hardly believe it, I didn't approve of it. While I was making my living that a way. But since, there hasn't been any fires since the park took over, it's very plain to me that it was a matter of making their own production.

DS: Right.

CS: And you'd burn it over one year, and boy, there would be berries there. So I don't have no— I, I know now that it's a fact that that was done. And it was a matter of survival, almost.

DS: Sure.

CS: They'd pick these berries and take them to the store and buy groceries. And then surplus, they'd get what you'd call script or a due bill. Now, a due bill was the merchant who'd write out, due so-and-so, a dollar and a half, two dollars, three dollars, whatever amount is. Or, a few of the merchants were more progressive, they had something like aluminum. I never will forget it, ten cent, quarter, and fifty cent, like that, you know, they called that script. But the most of them, these country stores, would give the due bill. And these people would, the

due bills was used to buy their sugar and coffee until the spring of the year.

DS: Mm-hm. Well, I was wondering, what staples did they have to buy? Because they mainly lived off the land.

CS: Well, kerosene, one. That's first. They had to have a light. Didn't have no electric, but kerosene. And coffee.

MS: And sugar.

CS: And sugar. And uh (trails off).

DS: Did they raise their own seeds? Did they save seeds?

CS: Yes, yes, yes.

MS: They dried their fruits. They dried all the grapes and the apples, berries and canning and all. And they lived good only on the things that they didn't grow around here.

DS: Right. Yeah.

CS: Well, Mrs. Smith, they were the most enterprising, the most thrifty people that you've ever had.

MS: There was no relief there.

CS: I can tell you that much, and independent and what they told you today stood tomorrow. Whatever bargain you had. That's mountain people.

DS: That's right. Their honor was—

CS: It was honest.

MS: And their meat products was only pork. They had no other—

DS: They used no beef?

MS: No beef.

CS: Very little.

MS: Very little beef.

CS: Would be mostly pork.

MS: And chickens, they may have had chickens, too—

CS: And chickens, they raised chickens.

MS: —but what I meant was pork. Pork was what they put away for the winter for the meat.

DS: Then they had their own curing places, mm-hmm.

CS: Well, now, they'd bury their potatoes, the majority of them. Few would have a cellar. They'd—but I know what I'm talking about—the majority of them would bury the potatoes, they'd bury the turnips.

MS: Cabbage.

CS: They'd bury cabbage, you can bury cabbage. I've done it. And did I mention beets? And beets, all that they would bury. Then I think...

DS: Now, did they make a trench and then put the things and then straw on top of it?

CS: Well, they'd dig a shallow pit, not too deep, just say, uh, six inches deep. You put straw in there. And then you would just bring them all up sort of like a spear, a pyramid, you know, and add some dirt as you go up, you know, and see when you got finished, you'd have a nice little cone there, or whatever. And they'd keep that way.

DS: Sure, they did.

CS: And you'd be amazed how much stuff they would dry. They'd dry cherries.

DS: That I've never heard of.

CS: And huckleberries, dried huckleberries, they're delicious. My mother dried huckleberries many the time. And dried apples. We called them dried apples. They'd always dry apples. Then they'd have them the whole winter.

DS: Now, would they dry the cherries and huckleberries the way they did the apples?

CS: Similar. You could seed the cherries, you see. And then put them out, real far out, on a sheet or something in the sun. And they're very good. And dried huckleberries was delicious. Did you know there is such a thing, that if you are really poor, sometimes you don't know it. A poor person that doesn't know he's poor is the happiest person that you have. And that's something that people would laugh about, they were happy people.

DS: Yes.

CS: They didn't (chuckle). Today, we know when we're poor. And that's bad. And then, honestly, those people were happy. They were independent and happy.

DS: They worked hard, though, didn't they?

CS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

MS: Honest. They were honest.

CS: They would—it was all, uh, mostly, so much of it was hand labor. But a good portion of that mountain there was fertile land. I never could understand that, they could grow better cabbage than we can down here in the flatland. Oh, nice cabbage, and potatoes. It was cooler higher up. And the land was stony. I've seen them plant a hill of corn between two stones. I saw plenty of that. Some of that land was really stony. I've seen them plant one hill between two stones and sometimes the stones would be as big as that [he seems to indicate something silently] right there (laughter). And they'd work around and hoe it, and they'd work. They were tough.

DS: Roughly, did they have big families or not?

CS: Yes, mostly, I would have to say mostly did.

MS: They knew nothing about birth control.

DS: No.

CS: No.

DS: No. But how many, generally, were in a family?

CS: Well, I would say it ranged from anywhere from five to eight, and I know one family had sixteen in the family.

DS: Phew. Did they have doctors come up there, or—

CS: Yes.

DS: —for the babies when they were born?

CS: No, mostly housewives.

MS: Midwives.

DS: Housewives.

CS: Mostly housewives. Is that what you call, uh—

I and MS: Midwife.

MS: Midwife.

CS: Midwife. (laughs) I told you, I get mixed up on them (laughs). Midwife.

DS: Then a midwife would be somebody that was neighbor that knew how to do it, is that it?

CS: Yes. That's right. And they had lots of confidence in them. And I mean they had quite a bit of influence in the neighborhood.

MS: And the doctor would come out in case of real sickness in the family. They rode horse back or—

CS: Oh, yes. You could always get a doctor. And they've always had an outlet to Charlottesville, in emergencies.

DS: Right. How did they—do you know anything about any childhood illnesses that they had?

CS: Yes, there was quite a bit of smallpox.

DS: There was?

CS: About that big, yeah.

DS: Yeah, mm-hmm.

CS: And, uh...

MS: Diphtheria.

CS: Diphtheria was very prevalent and very dangerous.

MS: And most of them was some kind of croup. They were subject to croup sometimes.

DS: Well, now, did they use any particular herbs for these illnesses?

CS: Oh, yes. Yes, they had a little plant they call a mouse ear. It-

DS: Mouse ear?!

CS: Mouse ear. It grew like, it looked like a mouse's ear. When you pulled a leaf off, it looked like a mouse ear. That's the only way I know it got its name, but they call it mouse ear. I think that was for diarrhea and a few little side ailments. And, let's see, calamus was a superstitious thing.

MS: Calamus root.

CS: That was superstition. They'd sometimes put it on a string and wear it around their neck.

DS: Oh, to ward off illness?

CS: Yeah, something of that. You know what I mean. Like everything else, you know. You can't stress too much the vitality and energy those people had.

DS: Did they give their children milk?

MS: Oh yes, they did.

CS: Yes. Most of them had cows.

Mrs. S: They had their own cows.

CS: Very few of them was short on milk. Most everybody had a cow. Put a old bell on her and let her go, and send the kids after her in the evening.

DS: They gave milk to the babies and children.

CS: They had milk. Sure. The majority of them had milk. All they wanted.

DS: Cause there's one area in the park where the children had rickets. The milk was for the hogs.

CS: Well, that could be, that could be, that could be true, too. But most of the ones that I know of, they had, well, I can tell you what give you rickets is that they skimmed the milk so close and ate themselves a pound of butter very often. That's what causes rickets. I know that. I know that happened. They needed the butter to buy some of their groceries with or for medicine.

DS: Yeah, right. How were their houses built?

CS: Well, the most of them were log houses. Most of them.

MS: This is a log body house.

CS: This is log body, weather boarded here. But the majority of them were very poorly housed. With the exception of a few. And you could always have that. Third grade education was about the norm.

DS: Where did they go to school?

CS: They had little schools back in there. The Episcopal Church had a mission on Simmons Gap. They kept a mission there for years. They even had one over here for fifty years. That was a good help. And even though they had little school houses, that wasn't run by a mission. And you would be amazed at the arithmetic and math



that was taught then. They had the three Rs then. I'm telling you that right now. That's the only thing I've seen, I was a boy going to school then. Sometimes the teacher didn't know maybe how to work a square root, or the square of the circle, or something like that, you know, and I went to my uncle, which was born and raised in that mountain, and another friend, when I was a school kid, and they could figure anything, like that. That was, math was—or arithmetic, I ain't talking about higher math, is an important thing, to any human being, especially poor people, you've got to know how to count a dozen eggs. They had—arithmetic was stressed, but not English.

DS: Well, the important things were stressed.

CS: I got a theory for that, myself.

MS: Put that on there, then. (laughs)

CS: No. Cut that off.

[tape breaks at 00:19:13]

DS: Yeah.

CS: Well, I guess we'll speak about (trails off).

DS: You were saying further up the mountain?

CS: Yeah, about a third, a maximum, about a third grade education. But they stressed arithmetic or math. And writing and reading. But English, they just, very little, very little English. That was just thrown aside.

DS: Well, that was not important. How to write, how to read, how to barg—learn how to bargain, was the important thing.

CS: That's mostly important. It was very, very critical for those people.

DS: Mm-hmm. Right. How long was school? Did it start, like in September and end in May?

CS: Yes, mostly, yes. I know all these missions ran nine months. And I assume that the other little red house school houses was the same way.

MS: And lots of people, though they could work, they didn't get to school until the winter months, because they had to shuck corn, come out in the valley here and shuck corn, and they would shuck corn for corn and then they'd take it to mill to make cornmeal to make bread. So then they didn't get to go to school maybe until, maybe, until (trails off).

DS: October?

Mrs. S: Yeah.

CS: November, yeah.

DS: Yeah, October, November, right.

MS: Then when spring came, they went back in the valley and did the same thing

again, so they didn't get much education, even though it ran nine months.

CS: Now some of them didn't go. It wasn't because that they didn't have the system. But lots of them had to drop out, you know, in and out, to make a living.

DS: How about making sorghum and apple butter?

CS: Well, that apple butter boiling was same as going to, uh-

DS: A party.

CS: To the Kennedy Center. Now that's right. Everybody had it.

DS: Sure. Did they play music at those?

CS: Huh?

DS: Did they play music, violins-?

CS: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, yes. You'd be surprised to know how musical our mountaineers are on stringed music. Boy, I'm telling you. I'm not, nor none of my close relatives. But, yeah, they'd have a little square dancing, some of them would be square dancing. They'd take turn about stirring apple butter. And one rule was that if the stirrer hit the side of the kettle, why, the boy was due to get a kiss. That's right.

MS: Have you ever heard that?

DS: Wow! (Laugh) What fun! And I wonder how often it was done on purpose!  
(Laughter)

CS: Yeah, that's what I wonder. (Laughter) And then they made sorghum. Most everybody had a cane patch.

MS: And they grew their broom corn to make the brooms.

CS: Yeah.

DS: Make the what?

MS: Brooms.

DS: Oh, brooms!

CS: Oh, yes, all brooms. Everybody grew broom corn in the mountains, in the mountain area. Made their own brooms. And those that didn't make them, there would be somebody that was rather an expert at it, you know. They never bought a broom.

MS: And they have also made split-bottom chairs. They'd go in the mountains and make their, get these, what they make the splits out of, and they'd bottom chairs. They would, some people would bottom chairs for 'em, to earn money.

CS: And they'd make baskets. There was a whole lot of experts in making the most beautiful baskets. And you go to a sale today and you see one in good shape, you can just figure you'll pay twenty five to thirty dollars. I saw one of them on sale, sold for twenty five dollars the other day. A basket was made sixty or seventy years ago, but it's been taken care of. Well, it's antique now. And I'm telling you, they were made by a-it looked like craftsmen's work.

DS: Right. They were good at it, yes.

MS: There was one man that made furniture. What was that man's name that made the—?

CS: That man made the best furniture, out of pure walnut. Everything he made was pure walnut, shelves and cabinets and everything. And you couldn't find a piece of furniture with no more handiwork than—some of them was good craftsmen, lots of them.

DS: Yeah. And he probably did it with very few tools.

CS: Yes. Yeah, didn't have no—yeah, had very few tools. Didn't have the tools they have today to do that kind of work.

MS: These pie safes were mostly handmade. Pie safe they call them, you know? You go to these sales, they got the handmade. You ever see one?

DS: Yeah.

MS: Well, that's where they were made. That's why they're so expensive, they're handmade.

DS: Oh my gosh. Ah!

CS: And then there was quite a few looms. Wove, uh, rag carpets.

DS: Oh, yes.

MS: His mother used to weave carpets for people, just, you know, some would order that, she had a loom.

CS: What do they call, rag rugs, lots of them did. Well, they did lots of quilting. They was all the time—they were thrifty people, they was always doing something.

DS: How about visiting? Did they visit back and forth a lot?

CS: Unsteady on that. (mumbled) Not unless there was like an apple butter boiling, or sorghum. That was another big time, when the sorghum mill came in, everybody's friends was there. Oh, yeah. It was right interesting to see the different evaporators, and you have to go through about four processes, you see. And then they'd have lots of fun pulling taffy. Oh, that'd be—

DS: Oh yes!

CS: —pulling taffy, you know.

MS: And popcorn balls.

CS: And make a piece of taffy, was sometimes that long, and have a twist, you know, have you seen them? That took up—that was a sport, that took up lots of time.

DS: Yeah. You said they did square dancing, where did they do that?

CS: Well, they would, well sometimes it would be a barn dance and sometimes be in homes. There was quite a bit of square dancing. That was the only type of dancing, tap dancing and square dancing. That's the only two that I ever—until now you hear everything else.

DS: Did you ever hear that song, "The Fox Hunt," a tune that they played?

CS: I can tell you—

MS: Is that the dogs, black the dog? Oh, yes, we've heard it.

CS: Oh, yes. I'm the man that, I had one of those hounds had what you call a bugle voice. If you'll ever notice on that.

DS: I haven't heard it!

CS: Oh, it's wonderful.

DS: Where can I hear it?!

MS: (laughs)

CS: Well, I hear it on TV every now and then. Now, the pleasure in fox hunting hereabouts was to hear—they didn't ride like these here society fox hunters—and their pride was to hear these dogs.

MS: They were as loud as it goes. (?)

CS: And mostly every group of hounds will have a dog that has a superior voice, and they call it a bugle voi—a bugle mouth. It sounds like a bugle. Oh, it'll make your hairs raise on the head.

DS: I know it does, I had one.

CS: I've been back in these mountains and that dog was the leader. She'd be the first one, if the fox tricked them, she'd be the first one to straighten the fox out. And boys, when she, that bugle mouth opened up, you might as well be moving because she's going to move that fox. (chuckle) Course, if you didn't, they'd get out of hearing. I stood on top of that mountain many a night and heard them go clear out of hearing. And they wouldn't be back for a day or two. And another sport I tried to do myself (??) was possum hunting. Everybody hunted possums.

DS: Yeah. At night?

CS: Yeah, at night.

DS: Would you do me one favor? The next time you hear that "Fox Hunt" on the radio, would you write down who has recorded it?

CS: I'll try to do that. Because you hear it every now and then. And I just love to hear it, you know, because—

DS: Because I've got to get that for our records. Because I thought this tune was gone.

CS: No, once in a while—

MS: No, the TV up here, Harrisonburg, WSVB.

CS: I'll tell you who would have it is Whit Robertson, you've heard of him?

DS: Oh, I know Whit.

MS: You call him and ask him.

CS: He'll play it for anybody. He'll do anything for anybody. If you tell him to—

MS: He's an old friend.

CS: -in your own words, however you want to tell him, what you would like to have and if they ever have the record, why would he notify you, or maybe he could get one of the records. I'd call, uh, either Arnold or-

DS: Whit is better. Yeah, he's a historian.

CS: Yes, yes, yeah.

DS: Okay, let's get back to how, how did they do their courting? Have you any idea? Did they choose their wives because she was a good cook or because they loved her? (chuckle)

CS: No, I'll tell you, courtship was longer than they are today. Was very much longer, and it was far different from, oh, far different. Day and night.

MS: It was mostly in the parlor.

CS: And I would say that most of the courting was done between (trails off). She'd be sitting over there and I'd be sitting here.

DS: You'd better, or somebody'd come in and-

CS: You better not get too close or parents had something said about it.

MS: They would walk to church and, or like we'd say apple butter boiling or something like that. We had, they had no other way to go, they had no cars.

CS: Had a few buggies. A few people had buggies.

MS: Yeah, a few people had buggies.

DS: Did they have horses?

MS: Oh, yes, everybody in the mountain had horses, or mules.

DS: Or mules.

CS: They either had a horse or mule.

DS: How about weddings? Were they elaborate affairs like they are now, or were they fairly simple?

MS: No. Sometimes they had to steal the girl and leave. (Laughter)

CS: That happened often.

MS: That's the way they got married, they went to Maryland.

[tape break at 00:31:14]

CS: Steal a girl out from the window, a ladder or someways. They got her from home, they didn't just pick her up anywhere, they-

MS: Went out the window.

CS: When they stole their bride, they got her out of the house.

DS: I'll be darned!

CS: That's right, that's right. I know, I know dozens and dozens.

MS: There wasn't no church weddings and things.

CS: Not too many church weddings.

DS: No.

CS: A few now, there was an exception to everything. But it was always sort of that three of us would find out that so-and-so eloped last night, you know.

DS: Yeah. (laugh) Gee. Well, and then when they came home, their father would give them some land, is that it?

CS: Yes, they were very good about helping their children. I can give you a testament that I know quite a bit about during the Civil War, in that period. If a man had a big family, say he had six or eight boys, you stay at home until you're twenty one, you got a horse, saddle and bridle. And twenty dollars. Then he was on his own if he wanted to be. I know this. My grandmother told me about that, I think a million times and it was sixteen in that day and age. There was sixteen in that family. There were sixteen in that family that lived right up here at a place you call Beldor, or Sandy Bottom, some call it Beldor and some call it Sandy Bottom. And they had six of those boys in the Army. One was killed. One I knew well, told me he was in twelve pitched battles and he was lucky. [unintelligible] walk right out, shooting at each other, fighting with bayonets, he said he was in twelve, twelve battles. They were right, I tell you something else, they were most of 'em right patriotic people, those mountain people.

DS: Yes.

CS: They were very patriotic. I know what I'm talking about. And making jokes about those mountain people, but they joked—

DS: I have never joked about them, I think that they're

CS: Well, people do now, some people call 'em—

DS: Well, that's why we're trying to straighten the record—

CS: All rednecks and things like that, which it isn't true. They're morally very high. I know what I'm talking about, because I'm seventy five years old and I was a boy but I lived through these different periods.

MS: They did make some whiskey at that time, and now, at that time it was looked down on, but this day and time, people get by with it, people just laugh about it.

DS: It should not have been looked down on, after all they had done it for generations, why shouldn't they make it.

CS: Well, [unintelligible] that, too. But any other questions that you can remind me, maybe I can help you on.

DS: Well, what were the most frequent causes of death?

CS: Of death?

DS: They lived to be pretty old.

MS: Yeah.

CS: I would say, from what I can hear about from my grandmother and a couple of the other old ladies, was smallpox and diphtheria would appear.

MS: And the flu. You know, the 1917 flu got a whole lot of 'em.

CS: Well, lot of 'em later on. Everybody. But the mountain people had smallpox and diphtheria.

MS: [unintelligible] on the TV, they call it. [unintelligible].

CS: Was rather feared, I do know that. Sometimes the whole family would be cleaned out with smallpox. I had it before they got everybody vaccinated.

DS: How were their funerals? How did they do their funerals?

CS: Well, they have what we call a buggy hearse. And mountain people are poor people. I think are very more sentimental than the elite. The ones that built the funerals was always poor people. (??) And built the Kennedy there, elite. (??) Now that's why they're there, the reason we got so many poor people, is that they're sentimental. That's why they have so many poor people. I have thought about this, I have lived through it and there's always a saying that if a man has five or six dogs, the dogs are keeping him poor. People believe it, if you had too many dogs, you'd be criticized, don't want to be poor. The trouble is, the man was sentimental, that's all it was. The dog didn't keep him poor, the man was sentimental.

MS: The funerals, they were mostly preached in the churches, in the little chapels or wherever they had 'em. That's [unintelligible]—

DS: Did they make their own coffins?

CS: Some did, yes, quite a few. Quite a few. The man you were speaking of a while ago also made coffins. And made lots of 'em, and I mean they were made out walnut, they were real coffins. Yes indeed. And of course very few people were buried in cloth at that time, I don't remember seeing a graveyard about eight miles from here about down the mountain [unintelligible] people, that they lived here and was buried up there. And everybody did—they didn't have—they had to have an embalmer and a mortician, but people dug their graves, they never had to pay for digging the grave. (??)

MS: At that time they didn't even embalm 'em at all.

CS: Huh?

MS: They didn't embalm 'em at that time.

CS: Well some of 'em. Some did. Some did, though, I remember when I was a boy about eighteen, nineteen years old, they was doing embalming, and some didn't. But the community, the neighbors, would dig the grave. They'd be the pallbearers and they'd fill up the grave and put [unintelligible], too.

DS: And they stayed right there while they filled the grave, too.

MS: Yes, and their bodies were never moved to a funeral home, they were always in their homes.

CS: Yeah, most of 'em were brought home, even if, most of 'em—

MS: Sometimes they never left home.

CS: -just now that they quit it, most people quit it. But that's the way it was done, that body came back home if possible. I'm telling you, they were emotional and sentimental. And that's why we have a whole lotta more people.

DS: Did they believe in ghost stories? Did they tell ghost stories?

CS: Yes. Yes. Quite a bit. Too much.

DS: (laugh)

CS: I had too many told to me.

DS: (laugh) Can you remember any of 'em?

CS: Oh yes. Half a dozen places when I was afraid to travel at night when I was a boy, by somebody telling me a ghost story, you know, and I'm seeing ghosts there. Wasn't nothing to it. But it would bother a kid, you know, a child. Yeah, quite a few, they're right proud of ghost stories. And some good jokes. Decent jokes. They were all decent jokes.

DS: Oh, of course.

CS: Never heard of an indecent joke. Never did. I can tell one good one, and the man told me the truth, it has to be a myth. A group of men, several, and one of 'em was a doctor, a country doctor. We did have a country doctor. And they got hunting. Way back up in the mountain. And they found a bear den and one 'em was brave enough to say, "Well, what are we gonna do?" He said, "I got the nerve to go in there." So he goes in there. The bear wasn't in there. But here comes the bear and he starts to go in, this old doctor caught the bear by the tail and the other man grabbed him by the leg and the man down in the hole said, "What darketh the hole?" He said, "Tail hold (??) breaks, you'll see what's coming." (laughter) Now jokes like that was prevalent.

MS: Now one time I heard aunt Grace (??) say you and, her mother and you was afraid to go at one place on account of a ghost?

CS: Oh, that's prevalent all right. I know where they are right now. (chuckle) After I got older, why, I didn't pay attention, but they were a little superstitious.

DS: Yeah.

CS: And they had—they believed that if they was having bad, difficult times, that there was a witch spell, they believed in witches quite a bit, some of 'em.

DS: Oh, yes.

CS: There was one old man who claimed that he could break it for just a little sum, maybe a rooster or a chicken or something, or a dollar or two, that if you had the witch on you, he could break that spell. So one day he went out and this man said this other fellow beat him up, so he goes down to the [unintelligible] -you'll know him when you see him next time—he caught up and old rooster and cut his comb off. And this fellow, one fellow, said next time you seen him, that man had the biggest straw (??) on his head you'd ever seen. (chuckle)

MS: Well, my dad—

CS: Now tales like that was right prevalent.



MS: Well, my dad said, the ghost stories my daddy always told me, he said he worked for a man and earned fifty cents a week that he gave his father who lived here twenty five cents of that. And the man he was working for had an old house and he slept in that house away from where they were, and he stayed there all the time. So he said that he could hear stove lids rattling all night and said his brother visited and stayed all night with him one night, and the brother said to him, says, "Georgie, what's that I hear?" "Oh," he says, "that's just the, just some turkeys or roosters, that's on the top of that house." Said his brother got up out of the bed and went out there, the moon shining bright and he looked up there and says, "There's nothing up there." And he said he took off. (laughter) And my daddy always did say he heard it, he could hear anything and I also had an aunt that told me—

CS: Well, if you'll notice, there's quite a bit in the news media about ghosts and seeks (??) and this and that and the other, which I think they're bringing up some very good stuff, similar to the man cutting the [unintelligible]. They didn't know what it was, but it was similar to ESP. That man cut that there rooster's comb off, now this is a true story, it was told to me as a true story, and he said the next time, he said his head'll be as bloody (??) as that rooster's. And it was so, somebody knocked him in the head. (laughter)

DS: Well—

CS: It was a very primitive ESP, but actually it had, pertaining to that and that's getting pretty strong, about the ghosts and the seeks (??) and all of the predictions and all like that.

DS: That's right. What about their holidays, did they have any special holidays? How did they celebrate Christmas?

CS: Oh, big time. Everybody. All of 'em, everybody dressed up and all kinds of different, darker (??) clothing, call it Kris Kringle, y'know? And that went on all the time, all through the mountain.

DS: They didn't have much money for presents, so what would they do, just get together and have fun?

CS: The main point was that you could go to a man's house, you hardly every went beyond your acquaintance, or your neighborhood, and the big joke was that people were guessing who you were.

MS: Like a masquerade.

DS: Like Halloween?

CS: Hmm?

DS: Like Halloween.

CS: Stuff like Halloween, and there was no presents, no present exchange, but that was a big time, I been to many of 'em, and older men, old men was dragged along too, you know. But the main sport of it was that somebody in those tribes would know the person that was gonna stop, if it was someone you didn't know, you didn't go. Then the point was to have the hostess to guess, to pick out some of the people.

MS: And they'd serve cake, lots of people I know, they used to make four and five cakes for Christmas, all kinds of cakes and all kinds of pies, and then they'd serve cider or something like that. With the cake or something like that. Lot of people did that.

DS: How about fireworks, did they have any fireworks at Christmas?

CS: Yes, most everybody, some couldn't afford it, but most everybody got to keep firecrackers. Course, they—

DS: Did they sell 'em—

CS: There's more firecrackers then than there are now, because they kind of abandoned them. Oh yeah, the firecrackers went along with Christmas.

DS: How about Thanksgiving, did they celebrate that at all?

CS: I think that quite a few hunters would go hunting, turkey hunting. They didn't, there wasn't no commercial turkeys. And there was quite a bit of that and that was great sport. Yeah, they made more sport out of that day than by hunting.

MS: Feasting day, yes.

CS: Especially hard trying to hunt down a turkey.

DS: By the way, how many wildlife were there left here before the park took over? Much?

CS: Well, there wasn't much wildlife then as there are today. There's—good year, once in a while, got a bear. I don't know what happened to 'em, there wasn't many bears here when I was a young man, but now there's too many bears, so far as I'm concerned. (chuckle) And—

DS: Were there many deer?

CS: Then there's quite a few deer, there wasn't many deer then. No, the park is, I tell you that one thing is certain, these poachers will come down here and go up this road and kill a deer down in my field and boy you couldn't get 'em to step over that line with a black snake whip. Nobody—

MS: In the park, they won't go in the park.

CS: Nobody would ever go in that park.

MS: Nobody. Afraid of that park.

CS: No, I tell you, they got that under good control. Nobody thinks about going in the park. I dare say that I'd cut a fishing pole on the side of the park line, or any. [unintelligible] They just forgotten about it, about trespassing in the park there, because they been on it. Just here about a couple years ago a bunch of hou—bear dogs, bear hunting. And the bear went across into the boundary and some of those men had the nerve to go on and try to follow, but half of 'em stayed back, they come up in there prosecuting those that went in there, they were really making it rough on 'em. So you not—when a bear gets across that boundary, then he's safe.

DS: Great. Well I'm glad to hear that.

MS: That's right.

DS: Were there many turkeys up there?

CS: Well, there's been, there's always been, not turkeys, they've never been plentiful, they're not plentiful today. They're not plentiful. You'll see some, once in a while.

DS: Raccoons? Raccoons?

CS: Oh yes, quite a few, there's always been quite a few coons.

MS: Well, the park did do a little group this winter, when it was, oil and things was so high. I think they give people permits to go in and get some wood for to burn. They also will give you a permit to go in the mountains and pick some berries. Now I wouldn't say it was huckleberries, but mostly get some berries up in there, you get a permit. But you have to have a permit to go into that park area, whatsoever.

CS: Well, everybody honors the park line, I will say that.

DS: That's great. That really is.

MS: All around this vicinity, I don't know about other places, but right far as we know, they respect that park.

DS: Did you hear any stories from these people about where their families came from? How about your family, where did it come from?

CS: I never thought much about it until recently. I got a something that was heard recently from her nephew, his father was a doctor, and he met some professor, recently, this was about a month ago, and the story went like this, and I can believe it. The name Shifflett wasn't a name until the German settlers came here in groups, they weren't on the Mayflower, but this man explained how it was. However, he said the word shif meant ship. The word L-E-Double-T meant-F-L-E-Double-T meant fleet. They came over, he said they could have been Joneses, Smiths or most any name, and when they landed, because they came in that group on account of being the ship and the fleet, and they said that they settled, most of 'em, settled in the mountains in Virginia and they've maintained the name Shifflett from that day on. He said the-

DS: And that explains the different spellings of Shifflett.

CS: Yeah, yeah.

MS: Yeah. Everybody changed it.

CS: It's so many different ways. I kind of believe that. That this man is a professor of history, he happened to meet him in Morgan (??) recently and when the man first found out his name was Shifflett, why the discussion came up, you see. Outside of that, that's the only thing I can believe, some say that it's a German name, some say that it's French. And I don't think the name has around but too long. I believe that theory.

MS: My grandmother on my father's side was a Snow. And they tell me that my grandmother's mother met her husband rolling tobacco to Richmond. And they were Indians, related to the Indians back there. So my great-grandmother was from the mountains back in here somewhere here near Richmond somewhere.

CS: Can you imagine, people right up there used to go back on up there. (??) And no back no more. [unintelligible] This is before my time, back in the (trails off). Making a hogshead and rolling it to Richmond, pulling it to Richmond, that's been done right up here within ten miles of here.

MS: That's quite a big step out, yeah. My great-grandmother met her husband at-

CS: And my grandmother, she was a member of, well, she wasn't my grandmother, but

my foster grandmother. She was one of the sixteen in that family that I was telling you about. And she said that her father would roll a hoghead and put a lashing (??) to it and take the horses and he'd be gone about a month. And they said that had slept out on the ground and told about how it snowed on him that night, and it was the most comfortable night he ever spent. He said you can keep warm with a blanket and snow over it. And she told they'd go to get the coffee and the kerosene and groceries and things like that. All those things didn't mean a hardship to them.

DS: No.

CS: No sir. That's what the present day generation just can't, they just don't believe it, they just can't imagine it.

DS: That's right.

CS: No, you can't get 'em to even imagine these things. That's all.

DS: What sort of an adjustment did they make when they came down? Was it hard for them to adjust to the new life?

CS: Some, some. Of course, you know about the resettlement down there below Elkton, you know all about that [unintelligible]. I know a couple of 'em went to Pennsylvania. Quite a few of those people had some cash, that's another thing they want you to know. Quite a few of those people had cash. They didn't have it in the bank. But a good many of 'em did. They spent their life, they had, they spent their life, they were thrifty.

MS: They were bitter.

DS: They were bitter.

MS: They were bitter. A whole lot of 'em.

DS: Wasn't it hard to adjust to this new way?

CS: I don't think they was, I don't think that was the biggest problem.

MS: I think things to get farther (??) then, people began to get lights and things back in the mountain, I don't think it was very hard for 'em when the park took over, to adjust to it. They had more privilege out here, they had lights and they used the telephone and they could go to places different than they did. I think the younger gen—the children that they had was more likely better than they did in the mountains.

DS: I have heard that they could not adjust to living so close to each other, that that was one of the things that bothered them.

CS: Well, that could be something that I don't happen to really know about. It's very, very possible that that could have been another problem.

DS: You know why I'm asking you this question? I heard that whenever they had any problems that they couldn't solve, they came to you because they respected you beyond everybody in the community.

CS: Well, I don't, I don't know whether that, whether that you're talking about [unintelligible] and that became a handicap.

DS: But it's the truth.

CS: Yes.

DS: Now, I would not want you to mention any names, but what were some of those problems that they had? With no names.

CS: Well, it could be a good many, it could be a good many things. You know, a cause and a reason for what any of human beings, we all do, and some of them was infidelity. I didn't like that. Wasn't [unintelligible], wasn't [unintelligible]. Never did like that, I bumped into quite a bit of it. And then if they had financial troubles and didn't want anyone to know it, I'd be the one to know it. And as I said, I don't know whether that's a compliment or a handicap. To be in that position. But all my life, anybody that took me in their trust, it was done that way, as a trust. Right there. I know lots of things that I'll never tell. I wouldn't be, well I wouldn't be myself if I, after somebody telling me [unintelligible]— nothing serious, like murder, wasn't like that, I don't know nothing about [unintelligible] like that, because I wouldn't keep that. But on the other hand, anything that was so many people that they did tell me about it. (??) And in church service, for some reason, oh that's, that's one of the worst positions to get in, is to get into controversy over church. Well, I can tell you that right now, that can hurt you. You got to make, lead up a decision, you know, we had this here consolidation of those two missions. And everybody, everybody, they all put me in the middle, of course I knew was going to have to, I knew I was going to be in the middle. You know, both ways, you know. And that, I'd rarely have any other problem when they have a church squabble.

DS: You know, I'm surprised when you said that there was infidelity because I understood that they were very jealous people, very jealous of their wives, wouldn't allow anyone to really look at her closely.

CS: Well, there's a—you know, everything isn't observed that happens in this world. (chuckle)

DS: (laugh) Beautifully said. (laugh) Right.

CS: Oh yes, it's true about the husbands, feeling very, very—you're right, you could say jealous. Very concerned. Very much. Could use strong language if they wanted to, that was, that was—

[tape breaks at 01:02:13]

DS: —earned the respect that you have earned, it comes from a very good reason. Particularly among people of this—these mountain people, who had very high honor, very great integrity—

CS: Yes.

DS: —and when they considered you had the best of them all, it's, its—

CS: Well, I, uh (trails off). I really, I didn't want my name used.

DS: Your name, nobody's name is being used.

CS: Yeah.

DS: Nobody's name. It's the same as when I interviewed Deaconess Hutton, she said, "I'm not going to tell anything." I said, "But I am not going to use any name and neither are you. We are just talking about the people in general."

CS: That's right. Yeah, I go along with that. Yeah, I go along with that.

DS: Because there is no reason to bring up people's names. That (trails off).

MS: Nobody knows them, so (trails off).

DS: Why do, why, why—he names are not that important.

CS: No.

DS: It's, it's the person, the customs—

CS: Yeah. Yeah, that's it.

DS: What these people stood for, and I believe they stood for very high standards.

CS: They did. They did. Oh, they had, uh, I recall names, there was Fletcher Price. (??) Some of them was very high, very—people had very high standards. Majority of them. I guess that'd be hard for people to believe today, but it, what I'm telling you is true. What a man told you today, you could believe tomorrow. Whether what's told me today, you don't know whether it's so in ten minutes. And you can tell the truth today 'til you're blue in the face and some people will doubt you, and I resent that. If I make a statement, I don't care who it's to, if it's the best friend I got or whatever, but it's gotten to be so that people don't believe each other no more. That day wasn't back there, that we thought about it. Cause people could trust each other, they could believe each other.

DS: Well, don't you think one of the reasons they had such high standards was that they lived in a small community, and if you did any stealing or did anything of that kind, it hurt the whole community, so you knew you'd be ostracized.

CS: Yeah. Oh, yes. Yeah. Bad, bad. Yeah, that's right.

DS: I think that being in a small community, you had to conform and you had to be honorable, otherwise the whole thing was going to fall apart and you'd just have fights.

CS: I'll tell you. I guess the first forty years of my marriage, we never locked a building, never locked a house. It aggravates me every morning, I goes in and got to unlock about a dozen locks. I used to never had a lock anything and I didn't have anything stolen, neither.

MS: They up and stole that kerosene last winter. We was sitting there beside the stove and it had only been eight days, and the first thing you know, I said, "It's getting' cold in here."

CS: Used to never have that, though. Used to never have that, though.

MS: No. You never had nothing stolen.

CS: That's, that's common everywhere. What I'm talking about now—

MS: In the back days, was nothing like that. The buildings, the barns, and the feed cribs, corn cribs, and everything, wasn't a thing locked up.

CS: I'll tell you, I can sum up these people in a few words, myself and everybody else. If you're poor and don't know it, you're a happy person. I know what I'm talking about. When you find (chuckle) begin to find out you are poor, that's when your problems start.

DS: (laugh) Yes, then you begin to want more.

CS: Hmm?

DS: Then you want more.

CS: Yeah, that's when your problems start.

MS: That's what our son said the other day. He said, "We were poor and we didn't know it." (laugh) We-

DS: How would they get from the mountains into town?

CS: Hmm?

DS: How would they get from the mountains into town?

CS: Well, they got roads. They got what you call the Simmons Gap Road. I guess, I know that's on the map, Simmons Gap Road. And that went right down here, that went on clear across back over to Shifflett Hollow and all those places over in there.

MS: And into Charlottesville.

CS: And then where the road goes down today, there's a—you know there's a few people left in a little, oh, a little valley, you might say, between that mountain and the other mountain there up through a place, Beldor, that the park cut out. It was good for pasture and very productive land. And they left six or eight, I never did know who had that pull. I've often wondered how that happened. I thought it couldn't happen. But the federal government will compromise a little bit, they're not as bad as everybody believes. But there's quite a few people, I don't know whether it's six or eight people, families, in this little canyon or hollow.

MS: Yeah, right on the other side of this mountain here.

CS: They call that place a hollow, you know, instead of calling it a, well, it isn't a valley, ain't big enough to be calling it a valley hardly, and not big enough to be called a canyon, so I guess a hollow is a very good name for it.

DS: Like Bacon Hollow.

CS: Yeah, Bacon Hollow.

DS: Did you hear about the bootlegging there? Was there really the bootlegging there that—?

CS: Yes, there was quite a bit. Oh, yes, yeah. That's a fact. There was some people, a good portion of people, that would not bootleg the moonshine. They wouldn't do it, it was against the law. But there was no industry around here then, when Prohibition was here, there was no industry. The nearest plant, the first plant I ever heard of come in was DuPont here at Waynesboro. And either they had to work down on the farm for a dollar, dollar and a quarter a day, I guess. I've worked for a dollar and a quarter almost twelve, fourteen hours, a dollar and dollar and a quarter a day. I was larger then, I was big for my age. At sixteen I was [unintelligible]. And (trails off). These people back in here bordering the mountains was thin soil, but as I said, back on the mountains was fertile soil. I'm not a geologist, I'll never know why. But I do know that that's why this mission up through here was here so long. When these plants came here, everybody took over their own church, we were self supporting. It wasn't good. Went about something they should have been doing a long time before it did. But when these plants started in this little valley here, why that changed, it made a tremendous change.

MS: And another thing, you tell me, when you hear so much of it this day and time, that a child raised without two parents, that's what's wrong with him. There's one there was raised by his mother. His father left them when he was five days old.

CS: Oh, well.

MS: But I just said, he never had no father to bring him up, help bring him up, his mother brought him up.

CS: Well, I'll tell you, the first thing when a person sees that they're uh, [unintelligible] I think that most of them, the trouble today, the first time that you see that you're going to get in, put down to a lower level of living, that's the time to do something. Right then. Don't let your line of living standard be above your line of income. That's the problem in this nation right today. I think that's the big problem, is that the standard of living along that guideline is way above the income. And that's put a whole lot of people in trouble.

DS: By the way, the food up there must have been pretty good, they'd have good meals, wouldn't they? Did you ever attend, go to any of their, have dinner up there at any of those cabins?

CS: Oh, yes, yes, yeah. There were some good cooks in these mountains. Best. The best.

MS: They didn't know the fancy cooking like the people in the cities, but you just—

CS: Oh, they don't go to all this here, well I don't even know the names, I know, though, what you talking about, but I mean good food.

DS: Mm-hmm. Good cornbread, good ham, mm-hmm.

CS: Oh, yes. It's the best place. In these mountains in this area is the best place to cure hams of any place that I know of or ever will know of. I lived in Maryland a few years, and I tried to cure some hams, cure it, and I lost it all. I did like I do here, just put salt and sugar on it. Yes, and I come to find out after it was too late you had to put it in brine. All pork. Couldn't cure pork down there. Too low, sea level.

DS: Oh!

CS: But here! Boy, you talk about a place to cure hams, it's all through these mountains up And you hardly ever—no need to lose a ham. Some people—I'm a little authority on that. Some people think that the weather's got to be so cold that they can't move about, which is a complete myth. A good cool night is all you need. Comfortable days, but a cool night. And how you handle your hams and your all the like, you had a big chopping board like that. I done lots of butchering, helping my neighbors, done lots of butchering. And I never could stand much cold. And it always bothered me when some crank would say, "Well I want the water to be freezing when it drops on the ground." And I said, "Well you don't want Carl Shifflett, then."

DS: (Laugh)

CS: It don't have to be, I said, "You don't have to take that," they'd pick a day, some of them would pick the coldest day, that's because they was afraid they was going to lose the meat shed. And that's the most danger. If that meat freezes at night, and that's frozen, you got a chance of losing that.

DS: Sure, you do.



CS: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. Lots of those fellows that believe in all that low temperature, I'd never want any of my pork to freeze. Nuh-uh, no, I didn't want that, [unintelligible].

DS: Oh, you have told us so much. Anything else you can think of? Oh, you're a really-

CS: Oh, you wouldn't want to get-I've got a few theories that I wouldn't mind discussing with you.

[tape breaks at 01:15:35]

CS: Well, uh (trails off).

MS: That was back when Reverend Ellis was-

CS: When the first missionary preacher came in these mountains, he did find that there's quite a few people that had never married. Well, now this has become a big habit now, you see. However, I do know that he had quite a few grandparents to get married.

DS: I see. So, without the wedding ceremony, they still acted as though they were married.

MS: Yes.

CS: Yeah. But he married them.

DS: He married.

CS: He married a good many people back in these mountains that hadn't married. So, uh-

DS: What was Reverend Ellis's first name?

CS: Josiah.

DS: Josiah.

CS: Josiah R., I don't know about the R., Josiah R. Ellis. He was the first one that I know, I think they had a couple women, couple ladies here, lady church workers. But he was the first Episcopal minister, ordained minister, that we had. And he had a difficult time. He had been a lawyer and he was a good speaker, but I began to see the lawyer in him very often.

DS: (chuckle) Yeah.

CS: But he laughed and told me, "Boy," he said, "whenever you change your profession after you're forty, then you [unintelligible] to do just about anything." (laughter) But he'd get any little scandal, any little vandalism, anything at all or anything'd happen, he'd get a warrant. Be quick to get a warrant. And the next day he'd go around there and talk to the jailer and get the boy out.

MS: He made these people-

CS: He never, nobody never stayed in jail overnight that he put in jail, they never did stay more than one night.

DS: But he taught them the lesson they needed.

CS: Huh?

DS: He taught them the lesson they needed, is that it?

CS: Yeah. That one night was about the worst night you believe you'll spend, you'll soon get used to the others.

DS: (laugh)

CS: I guess that, uh (trails off).

DS: I think you've really covered—

CS: You've got—is that on or off now?

DS: It's on.

CS: Oh.

MS: Well, that's one thing, I wanted us to be stated, it was going on then, it's going on now. As President Carter says, "I want you people to get married."

DS: Yes.

CS: Even though, I'll say this, most of the mountain people are deeply religious.

MS: There wasn't of course, there wasn't religious, nobody never had forced them to come.

CS: They were believers, they were deeply religious. Most of them are deeply religious. And even though some of these other things happened, the majority of them, the mountain people are deeply religious. Very deeply.

DS: I don't see how you could be a good farmer and not be religious.

CS: Well, you got to be, uh, got to be, got to have some religious.

MS: It wasn't [unintelligible]. (laugh)

CS: I want to say something else.

[End audio file, 01:19:23]

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End of Interview

Carl Shifflett, 08/22/1977

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