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### Oral History Interview: Sesco W. Sowards

Sesco W. Sowards

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ORAL HISTORY

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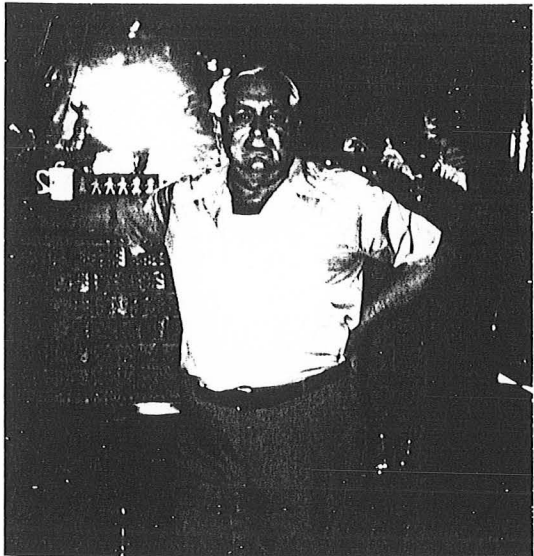
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Gregory W. Cymus  
(Signature - Witness)





AN INTERVIEW WITH:

Sesco W. Sowards

CONDUCTED BY:

Gregory W. Cyrus

PLACE:

Huntington, W. Va.

DATE:

July 8, 1974

TRANSCRIBED BY:

Brenda Perego

GWC: University, alright, uh, sir would you give your name, and uh, background about you and everything?

SWS: Yes, Sesco Sowards and I was born in the rural section of Lincoln County.

GWC: Whereabouts in Lincoln County?

SWS: South of Culloden in Lincoln County.

GWC: What was the name of the area?

SWS: Coon Creek.

GWC: Coon Creek?

SWS: Yeah, yeah, and uh, they, they speaking of the good old days I went through some of the good old days, the so called, what I'd call um because, uh, there was a family of ten of us and two hundred and eighty acre farm I was raised on. Now we had plenty to eat but money was very scarce. And our schooling what we got we had to walk a mile to get to the school.

GWC: Well how big of a school was it?

SWS: One room school, and uh, we had, uh, wood fires we had no coal out there at the time. And uh, so of the evening when we got in each one of us had a job that we had to go to do on the farm. We always had plenty to eat and had plenty of work to do.

GWC: What kind, kind of stuff did you eat back then?

SWS: Well we had all kind of vegetables, we had plenty of fruit, and uh, any kind of fruit that you could raise in this country we had it, and uh, plenty of vegetables, and uh, had our own pork and beef and we raised our own wheat and our own corn that we'd taken to mill at, uh, we had to go to Griffithsville that was about, uh, 15 miles from my home to have the wheat ground of course there's a corn mill on the creek where we was raised. And we raised cane we had our molasses and everything, and uh, but I never liked the farm, I had to do it and

then when I was sixteen I decided I'd had enough of it that I would get out on my own. And I started to work at, for a fella mixing concrete for thirty cents an hour, ten hours a day. And I kept thinking all the time well there's something better in life for me. So I got a job two years later on the railroad and transportation department and my father wouldn't sign the release for me to go to work, you had to be twenty one years old then for you could get a job so I had to go to work in the shop at two dollars and eight cents a day. And if you worked ten hours you didn't get any more there wasn't no overtime paid. Well when I got old enough to get a job in transportation I went to work as a yard switchman and I worked at that ten years was promoted to a conductor and during the time I was layed off several times that I went to the nickel plant and worked for thirty eight and a half cents an hour. And also at the West Virginia Rail what's H. K. Porter now worked there for thirty eight and a half cents an hour to go back to C&O. And then ten years later I was promoted as yard master at a salary of five hundred dollars a month I thought I was doing pretty well. So I spent forty four years and four months with the C&O from the time I was hired till I retired at the salary of a thousand and forty dollars a month. But I had alot of lean days before I got to that, and uh, can you shut it off a minute (break in tape)?

GWC: Alright, uh, getting back to when you were living on the farm, uh, what was it like, uh, living on the farm in those days?

SWS: Well there's plenty of hard work, and uh, and of course we had just like I said before we had plenty to eat, we had our own cabbage and we, we buried them out in the ground. Turn um upside down and put straw or grass over um, cover um with dirt. Then if we want cabbage through the wintertime we'd go out and get it, potatoes the same way. Uh, we'd bury potatoes and we did fix a box to reach through to get the potatoes.

GWC: How, how'd you do that?

SWS: Well just, uh, take four six inch boards and make a box

that you could run your hand back through, and uh, then we'd stuff burlap sacks or something in there to keep, uh, cold out to keep it from freezing. And we had apples the same way. In later years we got able to build a cellar that we had, uh, we'd keep stuff in all except cabbage, you couldn't keep it, we had to keep it buried in the ground that a way. And we had barrels that we'd put up pickles, pickled beans, you didn't see no glass jars back there. People didn't have um and, uh, they had stone jars that they had a wax that they made taking the honey, we kept bees, and they made what we called bees wax, that uh, sealed those stone jars with.

GWC: What all did you keep in these stone jars?

SWS: Well apple butter and sometimes pickled beans, and uh, canned apples of course we'd dry apples too back those days and sulfur um, and uh, dry beans and . . .

GWC: Did you, you didn't can beans like you do now did you?

SWS: No we didn't can um like they do now because we didn't have no glass jars back in, and when the glass jars I first remember coming out they was, uh, half a gallon jars you didn't see quarts or pints because they's all large families and it'd take about two half gallon jars to fee um (laughter). And the same way with, uh, flour now we bought flour in, uh, barrels if we, when we'd run out of wheat if you had to have flour you'd go and buy, you had a little country store out there and we'd, uh, had stuff come from Culloden and no way of getting it out there except by horse team, and uh, we raised alot of tobacco from six or seven acres of tobacco and usually we got from seven to eight cents a pound that's a good price back in those days. And I know my father had this store, and uh, we'd always speak of the people a burning their tobacco bed and after the canvas that was a balancer for the next year's grocery, he credited um from one year to 'nothering, he'd say boys go and see if Mr. so-and-so got his tobacco bed canvased. We'd come back and say, "Yeah he's got it canvased," well he said, "That's his voucher for another year's groceries

here at the store."

GWC: In otherwords if he started making a tobacco bed then you could let him, let him [SWS: Yeah.] charge and everything?

SWS: If he'd made an effort to, to farm that we could go ahead with, also, uh, I remember several times that people would have bad luck you wouldn't see that happen today. But they wouldn't have meat enough to last um through the season that they'd come and borrow ham meat or shoulder meat some of the neighbors then next year if they raised a hog they'd pay it back. And the same way with corn and wheat if they run out alot of times they'd borrow it from other people's grain but they, they was honest back then they always, uh, paid back. For churches there wasn't a church on the creek where I was raised. The creek was two miles long and in order to get to church we didn't have buggies back there we had wagons or sleighs and we'd go about three miles to Sunday school of the morning and to church at night and maybe two or three families that would go in one wagon. And that's the only means of transportation we had and the road back then it was in the creek there wasn't no school buses. I went one year to Hamlin High School, I walked from, uh, Coon Creek that was about ten mile, walked I went back to get there, and uh, we didn't have such things as buses and I remember well the first car that was on the creek was in 1913. My father bought a T Model Ford that was the first car that come out there. Well they had no fuel pumps or anything on it and the hills were, several hills were steep and you start up that hill a going forward the gas wouldn't feed up you'd have to back down and finally we learnt that we come to one of those steep hills we turned around and back up the hill so the gas would feed good, (laughter) and uh, everybody learnt to do that till, uh, finally years later they made um, with uh, fuel pumps on um that would feed up. But you could fill a tank up with gas back then held eight gallons and you could forget about it till the next month, they didn't use no gas much and if you run out of gas you could use kerosene.



GWC: Was gas hard to get back then or could you get it?

SWS: No you could get gas but that, uh, they had to crank it, uh, wasn't no electric or anything that pumped they used a crank to, to fill it, uh, car, and uh, everybody had to get out of the front seat when you filled up because the tank was under the front seat, they has to remove the front seat to get to the tank, to fill it up and they wasn't no, uh, oil lights on it, there wasn't no electric lights at the time no, uh, they run off the magneto, the automobiles did and, uh, no battery in um and they was a crank you had to get out and crank um and had to be very careful about using the, they had what they called a spark, in uh, on one side on the left side and the gas feed was on the right. But if you drop that spark down too much it'd kick and I've seen several fellas with broken thumbs over trying to crank it. And, uh, just things, that uh, they just advanced slowly, and uh, course you speaking of working on the farm, I remember well the first job that I ever had any, got any money out of, that a fella hired me to set tobacco. Worked bout twelve hours along with, uh, me men and they paid them seventy five cents a day and when he paid me that night I got a quarter. And I said I was making tobacco as the rest of um.

GWC: How'd they set their tobacco out in those days?

SWS: They had to peg it out, they had to, they'd cut a crooked, uh, stick and make, made a handle on it and pegged it out and back then they, uh, they set tobacco wide apart forty five hundred plants to a neighbor and they, uh, you'd, but uh, oh ten thousand on it, uh, you just, uh, they set it much closer together, they don't uh.

GWC: How come they did that?

SWS: Well the ground wasn't as good, well they didn't have commercial fertilizer and, uh, it wouldn't grow tobacco like, uh, people does today, they'd fertilizer heavy and they could set tobacco closer and then they, and back then they wanted a courser grade of tobacco cause they wasn't cigarettes like they was and they wanted, uh,

a wrapper for cigars that was a high price tobacco and then they made, uh, this old cud tobacco like Brown Mule that would knock your hat off if you'd taken a chew of it (laughs) and, and uh, they didn't make cigarettes and later on they wanted a thinner grade of tobacco for, to make cigarettes out of, and uh, so just, uh, (break in tape).

GWC: Alright, uh, said you didn't, what kind of fertilizer did you all use back then, uh, mainly?

SWS: Well we only had, uh, barn fertilizer, and uh, we didn't have anything sowed back then for cover crops like they do now and the people didn't, uh, till uh, agricultural program come along people didn't know too much about farming they worked right at it but the, they didn't have much knowledge of how to farm. They, they wouldn't turn anything under if there was any trash or anything on the ground they raked it and burn it, well it would have been a good thing to turn it under and, and help build up the soil but they didn't do it back then, and uh, it just taking a awful hard, lot of hard work, now for us we kept, uh, five cows all the time and we kept a pair of mules and a pair of mules and a pair of horses, and it taken an awful lot of feed to, to feed those through the winter months. It wasn't too much hay on, uh, why we had two hundred and eighty acre farm, but uh, it was a rough farm. There wasn't very many hay fields and back then you didn't have no way, uh, you didn't bale hay, you uh, had a mowing machine you mowed it down then you, uh, what we call shocking it in the field and let the cattle get to it you didn't have, uh, big a part of the barn room we had was to house tobacco when you raise seven or eight acres of tobacco it takes, uh, right smart a room to house it and we just didn't have a place to put hay, and uh, that, that made alot more work on it and keeping two teams. I think now it was a mistake that we could have done all we done with, uh, one team but my father didn't shit that away, and uh, I well remember after I got, uh, where I got out of the night that, uh, later I got in of the morning the earlier he got me up (laughs). It, uh, regardless whether there was any work to do he'd find a job for me to break me

from being out too late of the night and he soon learnt me to get in pretty early and maybe it was better for me and.

GWC: Was, uh, was tobacco the only cash crop you all raised?

SWS: That was the only cash crop because there wasn't anything else that you could, uh, sell to get anything, uh, out of back them days.

GWC: Nobody sold produce or anything?

SWS: Nobody sold no produce and it was years, several years after I remember before we even had sweet corn. We, uh, ate corn right out of the field that, uh, wasn't no sweet corn back then, and uh, but tobacco was the only cash crop really all we, uh, needed, uh, cash for back then was, uh, you'd have to buy sugar and coffee and some spices that you had to have and, but uh, I remember mother use to sweeten apple butter with, uh, molasses. I've ate it that a way, and uh, and I also remember making, uh, taking and we raised watermelons just for home use and I remember taking, uh, watermelon rinds and making watermelon preserves out of um and sweeten um like, you don't see anything like that anymore. And then getting back to the store, I remember father he'd get cheese with great big wooden bands around um well you, somebody come in and want cheese you'd give um a nickel worth of cheese and furnish the crackers be all you could eat. And he kept salt fish and sold them for five cents a pound I noticed at the store the other day they're ninety nine now. And uh, well there was two, uh, white silk flour they called it, and uh, our book of coffee that was about all you see, and uh, he kept all the stuff like that and he bought salt by the barrel. You didn't see no salt in packages or boxes back then.

GWC: Now how'd he sell it, did he sell it by the barrel or, uh?

SWS: No he'd weigh it out we had a little old scales that he'd weigh it out you come get a nickel's worth of salt you had to have a big sack to get it in, and uh, and the same way with bout anything you bought that you could, uh, but people, uh, very little cash you seen that he'd, uh,

they'd bring eggs to the store and we'd give eight cents a dozen for eggs if they was nice ones and, well if they didn't trade all that out he wouldn't give um the money for the eggs he'd give um a due bill. A piece of paper with his name on it that they'd bring it back to the store and get, uh, groceries later on with it. And they finally got to forging his name and he had more due bills out than he could pay off there (laughter), but he had to quit that that he just, uh, they'd have to trade all the eggs out when they come in. And uh, back then of course, uh, some people would come in from town and you could sell a pound of butter they had their own molds for ten cents a pound. They mold butter, and uh, but there wasn't too many, wasn't no way of getting out in the country back then, and maybe some hunter come through and take a notice he wanted a pound of butter to take back to town with him and they'd give ten cents for it and a dozen eggs you could sell um for cash if you happened to have eight cents, wasn't too many people had it back them days. And uh, I got ahead of my story I married young I was nineteen years old and I remember when I paid the preacher I had, uh, couple of dollars left in my pocket. Well I begin to study now how am I going to support a woman, no job or nothing. Well there was a pipeline came through the country there and I got a job on that pipeline and worked for ten hours a day for three dollars a day, was the first real money I'd made and then I finally decided to get out and get, leave the farm all together, but sometime I think I made a mistake (laughter) I spent an awful lot of rough nights out on the railroad they, you didn't have cabooses here in the yard to ride you, uh, what we called bobtailed it. You rode the top of the cars and it would rain and then maybe turn cold for you finished that tour of duty and your clothes would freeze on you. I rode a top the cars from west Huntington or to the nickel plant back into the yard be so cold I couldn't hardly get offin' top of the car. But they don't have to do that today they don't have to ride top of the cars because they've got these spring drawheads to take the shock offin' the, keep from tying so much merchandise that the cars was so wide apart that you can't jump from one car to another today like we did back when I first started. And it's not as hazardous as

it use to be, it use to be a very dangerous job but they've got so anymore they slow down for you to catch a car or get off. Back when I started if you didn't catch um bout as fast as they'd run you, wasn't no brakeman you didn't last too long and you had to, if you clumb the top of a car and sit down they got ready right then you had to stand up and be on the lookout for something ahead of you if they's shoving a car you couldn't sit down but today I, you couldn't get a man to stand on top of a car and go like we did. And they had these tow companies today they've got um over here that they'll, uh, pull the cars up and they've got a place to run around and back when I was a breaking you had to shove um up. We had a air hose they would put on there and I, lot of times it would work and alot of times it wouldn't. If water got in the train line maybe ice would freeze in that hose for you got up to the coal docks, I went over the end of it a many times when, a car coal jump off for it turned over, and they don't have to do that today because, uh, they found out it was very unsafe and they's several fellas hurt, uh, a riding those cars and they's, was a paying out too much. Of course back when I started if a man lost a arm or a leg you didn't get anything out of it but today it cost um some money if, uh, a man's injured on the railroad (break in tape).

GWC: Allright, uh, when you lived on a farm, uh, what type of house did you all live in, uh?

SWS: Well we had, uh, we had a nine room frame house that, uh, we'd cut the timber off the place and my father'd hauled it out to Culloden there's a planing mill out there and they'd plane the lumber, and uh. . .

GWC: Did you all cut the lumber yourself?

SWS: Cut the lumber outself [ GWC: Haul it out your. . . ] haul it out with the mules and the horses and then take the wagon out there to have it, uh, they was a sawmill that own the place that sawed the lumber for us, we had a man there to saw it.

GWC: What, what'd it run off of, elect, I mean gas?

SWS: Uh, steam they had, they had a boiler there and they, uh, made their own steam there and that's the way it run. They had to wait to get up steam and then turn it through and it'd start to saw the lumber then, uh, I remember it was, uh, I've heard my father say that from the time he start and got the house built he's about three year a getting the timber out and sawing that, course finally we had to quit, uh, and work in the crop, but uh, and the house that they lived in when he was first married he said it was a, a huge loghouse, and uh, the floor was made out of chestnuts what he called, they called back then a country floor. They split those, uh, trees and flatten one side of um and they made a floor out, put a floor in there that you could, uh, well you could let a horse cross it and / GWC: (laughs).\_/ it wouldn't broke in. But that, he said that was the first, uh, house that he lived in and up until the time I just can remember when he moved in to the new house that he build and he also had lumber cut that he made, uh, the store building next to the house there and, and you didn't have, uh, back then we didn't have no locks you didn't lock nothing up I remember just pulling the door together on the store and leave it that a way they didn't have no locks to lock up anything and there wasn't anything bothered. And uh, it was a, it was a rough time in a way course there was, uh, we always enjoyed ourselves as a big family and there's a lot of people on the creek there we'd have little get togethers. Our biggest event would be apple peeling or a bean stringing or something like that and, course it's bad to talk about that, uh, if somebody passed away on the creek you didn't take um to an undertaker they kept um at home and they had what they called a wake. You sat up with them and the boys and girls get there they was kindly hard to control they, they didn't realize that they's at, uh, sitting up with a corpse but they had a big time. They just, uh, enjoyed that's the only time they could get out and have, uh, get together that away and then if you had a bean stringing they'd, uh, have to correct us there we'd start, see some girl we'd want to flirt with we thought if we throwed a bean at her we'd a getting along pretty fine (laughter). Pick up a apple and throw at um and they'd,

uh, they'd call us down and it was just, uh, they wasn't no entertainment and when Christmas come along you pretty well knowed what you was going to get you just wondered whether it'd be peppermint or cream [GWC: (Laughs).] they'd be a stick of peppermint. And we'd, we'd cut a pine tree and we'd decorate with, uh, string popcorn for the decorations that was about the only thing you see back then and you'd hang your sock up on the mantel and, well up till I was, uh, around ten years old they burnt wood there and finally they, we got the first gas well on the creek there and that was a big thing, everybody came in to, they was afraid of the gas they just didn't, we had it for commercial use. We'd fix a place on the outside that we could, uh, make apple butter with gas and it wasn't no, uh, limit to what you could burn then. People wasted more gas than the company got to sale. So they finally cut it down that you was limited, they put a meter in that you only allowed a hundred and fifty thousand feet a year. Well that's enough for any family if they'd take care of it but people's was a wasting it and they had to put a limit to it. And that was, that was money coming in then I remember well that we got seventy five dollars every three months from a gas bill. Well that was more money than we was making on the whole tobacco crop, at uh, it don't sound reasonable today that a man go out here and work three or four days make three hundred dollars but that three hundred dollars a year was, done things for us. We just got in to the money there with that three hundred dollars a year and today if people's getting that they wouldn't think a thing about it, it uh, course you can go out today and make forty five or fifty dollars a day but, up to last, speaking of getting married when I got married it was years that I couldn't, uh, wouldn't get over three or four dollars would be a big price and I'd have to go work almost day and night to do that. You didn't have no, uh, unions they worked you for what they wanted to and if you didn't like it you could quit there's another man ready to take your job, it uh, wasn't no use to quit it, because you just get something worst if you with one job. And uh, it was just things like that that you had to contend with and still people enjoyed theirself.

I know that, uh, we'd been married, uh, couple of year when the first daughter came along and then twenty seven months later there's a nother un. And uh, when time come for um to go to school it was, we put, uh, seen that they had the best that we could afford so that they'd go to school and I'd be ashame to go like we did back, cause there wasn't anything back then to, to have like later on after I was raising my family. And it was years that, uh, we did the best we could but I always from the time that I was married, I always managed to keep an automobile that I could take um places and, and we's both young and we grew up with the children. If there was, uh, something at school and even high school after they started to school that they went and we'd usually be along and we had just as much fun in it as they did and they enjoyed us a being with um. And it was that a way up till the time they was married and, so I don't have, I don't have no regrets of course I didn't do for the family like I liked to done but I just couldn't make the money to do it with. And later years when I got to where I could make money I started to make it and then when I come to town we had to rent for while. We rented and it was a nice house we paid twenty five dollars a month for it and we thought that was an awful price [GWC: (Laughs).] to pay and the gas bill, if the gas bill went three or four dollars that was, uh, that was an awful high bill. And the electric was from three to four dollars, and uh, course it was a year or two before we got a telephone but when we got the telephone it only cost two dollars and something for a private line course after I went to work and working steady on the railroad I had to have a phone for um to call me when they need me. And just different things that, uh, you can think about that, uh, how we had to do back them days we all survived and done good (break in tape).

GWC: Alright, uh, can you remember when you were living on the farm young what kind of furniture you had in the house and how it was furnished and everything?

SWS: Yeah we had, uh, I remember the biggest piece of furniture we had was a, a organ I had a sister played the organ and



course we didn't have no, uh, radios back then, we finally got a victrola. One that you wound up that, uh, crank it around and the furniture was homemade furniture. A fella that lived there on the creek was (inaudible) that made the beds and, and uh, bed covering my mother made, they had quilting and she also, uh, we had geese and duck on the farm. We had what we call feather beds. They would fill it up with feathers but underneath what we'd call a, for a mattresses today we had straw ticks. When they thrashed the wheat you, you uh, got this straw and fill it full, the tick full of straw and, and in order to sleep of the night to keep from the straw sticking you too bad you had to use a pretty heavy quilt or the, a feather bed over it and we all had feather beds all the time.

GWC: How thick were these feather beds?

SWS: Well they'd, uh, possibly three or four inches thick, they'd fill um as full as they could get um but they'd slide around I never [GWC: (Laughs).] did particular like um (laughter). You had to lay pretty still or you slid off of the bed with um, and uh, but everybody had um that was, wasn't no mattresses or anything like that. No blankets and, uh, another thing at, uh, up the time we got gas that you, uh, when you went to bed the fire went out. That, uh, wasn't no fires in the house and there wasn't no lights in the house, and uh, no refrigeration at all they, uh, if of course we always kept our, enough meat to last from one year to the next.

GWC: How'd you, what makes, mostly pork [SWS: Mostly . . .] and salt it down, I suppose?

SWS: We had to salt it down and have to use what you were going to use the next day, you soaked it in water over night to get the salt out of it you had to have the salt, uh, that you couldn't eat it to keep till you soak the salt out of it. And uh, alot of times, uh, my mother would find sausage that we made, we had an old sausage mill we ground our own sausage. She would, uh, put it down these self sealing jars and seal it up. And uh, she'd keep that a way for a while, and uh, the

ham meat and the shoulders that, uh, my father would built a fire and smoke that and hang it up and smoke it and that, that helped keep it some, but it, uh, it wasn't, it was salty at that. You had to salt it, it had to take the salt before you could smoke it. And uh, it wasn't they talk about, now I did I liked the way they put up pickles they, what they call salt brine and put it in barrels and get um out and rinse um off and I liked um that a way and also I remember mother putting up kraut in barrels that was good. And uh, why we had uh, we had plenty to eat but, uh, still I don't want to go back to the good old days (laughter) that we had.

GWC: Uh, what'd they do about beef back then, how'd you keep it?

SWS: Well you, uh, hung it up, you didn't kill a beef till it got cold and then you hung it up, and uh, what we had, what we call smokehouses we kept the meat in and you just let it dry out. You hung it up on a hook or that you, a homemade hook that you made in the blacksmith shop. Which every farmer had, he uh, had, uh, a shop of some kind that he had to sharpen his, uh, mattocks and, and any tool that he worked with he had to keep um sharp that a way by heating um and then hammering um out on an anvil that you had no other way, uh, no place to go you didn't have no emery stones then to sharpen things and they wouldn't have done it if you had because it'd taken too much offin' a particular tool that they probably been a waste. They, uh, wanted to hammer um down and, uh, save all that steel they could save. Well a mattock back then you'd get a good mattock for fifty or seventy five cents that was, uh, big price and today you'll give seven or eight dollars for the same kind and not as good as material in it as that one had in it. And plows they, uh, wasn't no tractors or nothing they had what they call hillside plows that they, uh, had mow boards on um you plow one way and then you'd flip, uh, the latch and turn it over and plow back the other way. It, uh, and uh, same way with, uh, going to school now you just, uh, getting back to that. You got what we call a tablet back there that was a thick piece of notebook paper that, with lines

on it and a nickel you got, you got it for a nickel and that lasted you all that year and you also got a penny pencil that had to last you. Because they just wasn't money to buy stuff like there is today and for as taking money to school with you you didn't, wasn't anything like that back then you didn't, they uh, didn't take no money to school, and uh, the way the teachers was hired was they had what they called trustees in the neighborhood. They picked what they thought was, uh, leading man couple of um or three and, and they went around and talked to the teachers and they'd, uh, they'd be hiring theirselves, and uh, you didn't, uh, you went through, uh, high school, and uh, if you made a good grade you got a teachers job you didn't have to, no college education the teachers back then. And uh, they had six months of school and of course we all didn't get to attend school, uh, the full six months because alot of times you got busy in the crop and tobacco cutting time come and corn or wheat to thrash you had to drop off from school and maybe be off a month and then go back and try to catch up and of course I never . . .

GWC: They didn't, they didn't mind you missing though, did they?

SWS: No, no you didn't have to have no excuse only that, uh, tell um that you had to be off for the, didn't have to have no written excuse just tell um that you had to be off to help in the crop and. And they had back then a truanting officer who would come around but, uh, he served without any salary he was just, he come around to see if you was a working in the crop and make sure that you, uh, was on the level that you just wasn't [GWC: (Laughs).] playing what we called hooky, and uh, if you started doing that you'd of course your parents punished you, uh, and if you got a whipping when you went to school, and uh, they found it out you got one when you got home. The teachers back then they wasn't like it is today. They had a paddle and they used, really used it and you knowed they'd use it and they was felt like they was responsible for you from the time you left your home till you got to

school and return. And I've known um to follow children and see there'd be a report that they had, uh, got into somebody's apple tree and knocking apples off the tree or something this particular teacher would follow um and if they caught you the next day you just as well figure on that paddle a being used in a rough way, because they didn't fool with you but today it's different and, uh, while they've got a hard job today they've got, uh, a whole lot more grades then we had back then and, it, but still they ain't, uh, they ain't got the authority over the children that they had over us back when I went to school. But they was allowed to whip and no parents didn't say a thing about it they wanted um, they wanted um whipped. They, uh, I think they kindly liked to see us punished (laughter) once in a while.

GWC: Uh, to get back to beef there and everything, uh, you say you did, how, how long did it stay, how long did it stay fresh like that [SWS: Well.], did you have to have it quick or. . .

SWS: Yeah you couldn't keep it too long, you could, uh, well long as it stayed cold weather now it would just freeze dry and it'd keep till the spring of the year and then you had to, you had to use it.

GWC: Well you, you didn't make any hamburger, any sausages our of it [SWS: No.] or anything?

SWS: No we didn't, back then now we did make out of pork we always, uh, made pork sausage, but uh, back then you didn't do anything wasn't anything, nobody knowed anything about hamburger then didn't, uh, wasn't anything like that they'd have a beef roast or something like that of course, uh, hamburgers they didn't have it and, but it was pure beef back them days you corn fed it you, you's going to kill a beef you didn't, uh, let it run out on the grass or anything you put it up and fed it corn and clear water and the same applied to pork. You didn't let it eat anything but just corn and clear water and at, uh, well they always said and I think there was alot to it that it made the meat more firmer and it tasted a whole lot better. They all said, uh, hog running out on the, where it got grass and everything that the meat

wasn't firm and I found out that that was right. But uh, of course what they learnt back then they didn't have no books like we've got today they had to learn it the hard way just from experience.

GWC: How long did you corn feed these animals like that, a month?

SWS: Well usually about a, from month to six weeks that you just feed um the corn and back then I don't know why they did it but before they killed a hog it had to be so fat that, uh, it couldn't stand up and they'd render out maybe a twenty five pound can of lard and people bought lard back then in twenty five pound cans.

GWC: You used lard quite a bit back then, uh?

SWS: They used quite a bit and they'll tell you today that if you go to a doctor the first thing he says you got to get off of salt. You just can't get on salt. But back then they ate stuff so salty you couldn't hardly eat it and people lived till a ripe old age back then [GWC: (Laughs).] and was healthy you never knowed one a going to the, to a doctor it, uh, of course, uh, older women back then my mother and my grandmother they had remedies that, uh, you taking a cold they, uh, they knowed how to doctor you.

GWC: What kind of remedies did you use then?

SWS: Well they'd take, uh, lot of times we'd take onions and cook um and make, uh, cook them onions and put on you, on your chest for chest cold. And maybe, uh, put hot cloths on the bottom of ya feet, and they had what, I don't know what it did any good but they's always afraid you'd get some kind of disease. They had what they called asafetida that they'd put a, a string around your neck with a bag of that stuff in it that I'd rather had mostly any kind of disease you could get than smell the stuff.

GWC: Wha-what'd they have in there?

SWS: Well it was, uh, I never did know what it was, and uh,

of course, uh, for us knowing anything about medicine we didn't know there was any med-kind of medicine but that stuff but black drought and castrol oil that's all you seen that, uh, something got wrong with you said, "Give him a big dose of castrol oil he'll be allright in a few days," and they did that and, of course they had, uh, all kind of teas they made out of, uh, they'd peel cherry bark and make tea out of it for something. And then they had a mountain tea that they'd get it, and uh, peppermint they, every family had a patch of peppermint grew along the creek and if you had a upset stomach they got that made a tea out of that and give ya, and uh. . .

GWC: Did it help?

SWS: It'd help ya, so uh, and then they had what they call a catnip. That stuff was, uh, big story to that, that uh, they claimed, that uh, cats, uh, for they'd make love that they'd, uh, wallow in that catnip to get the scent on um, uh, draw the other [GWC: Tom cat.]sics attention to um, and uh, it's just things there that people believed it and they got along, uh, by pra-practicing stuff like that.

GWC: Well did most of the people grow their own herbs and stuff like that?

SWS: Yeah they growed their own herbs there'd be some old fella in the country with, know what to get for anything that, uh, was wrong with ya, say something was wrong so and so you go and get this and if they didn't, you didn't know what it was he'd go and get it for you. And I wonder sometimes why that everybody didn't die back then that they hadn't got something that'd poison them, but uh, seemed like that they know what they was a doing and, and if a doctor had to come I remember my, my brother, uh, had rocked over in a rocking chair and got burnt very bad. They had to get a doctor from Griffithsville down there and he come and stayed all night and before he got there my mother had made, uh, taken apple butter and put on his face and covered it, and uh, to draw the heat out. When the doctor got there he said, "You've done as much as I can do." But he was in a bad shape

so he stayed all night and ate breakfast the next morning when he started my father asked him how much he owed him, he'd rode a horse from the seventeen miles down there and back and, "Oh," he said, "I reckon three dollars will be a plenty." And that was, uh, what he charged and he left medicine you didn't go to the drugstore back then they issued their own medicine. They brought, uh, everything with um that they thought anybody would need, and uh, when that was all in the price of, uh, the housecalls, your medicine and everything would last you a month and three dollars and you couldn't get two pills today for that (laughter).

GWC: Uh, get back to, you was talking about no refrigeration and everything, what'd you all do for ice and everything, how did you keep it.

SWS: Well the, back then, uh, the river and creeks would freeze over they I think maybe there wasn't no detergent, uh, people didn't have automatic washers and dryers what, uh, washing they did they did with lye soap and, and there wasn't no heat stayed on all night like electric lights and the furnace was a burning like they are today and people get their own ice and they put it in big boxes with sawdust, cover with sawdust. And about all we used that for back then would be we'd make homemade ice cream bout every weekend we'd have ice cream and, uh, but for as refrigeration we didn't have any, now we had a spring there it came out of the hill that, uh, right close to the house and we fixed a place around that to keep dogs and stuff out and we'd take the milk and butter and set it in that, uh, spring and, uh, and maybe we'd take a jug of water to the field with us and we'd, uh, put it in that spring to keep it cold, and uh, we thought then of course today people wouldn't drink water like that they wouldn't think it was cold enough but we thought back then that was real, if we'd get a drink of water that been sitting in that spring we was, uh, we's doing good then.

GWC: Now where'd you keep this ice, boxes of ice, they'd have a special building for it?

SWS: Yeah we'd have, uh, usually in one end of the blacksmith

shop that they'd fix a big box, take rough lumber and fix a big box and that would hold sawdust then you'd put a layer of sawdust then you'd put a layer of, uh, ice on top of it and cover that with sawdust, maybe somethings we'd have it, uh, four or five blocks high the ice would freeze back then that I've see it fourteen or fifteen inches would be cut out of the creek after it'd been froze several weeks there. And you take, uh, chunk of ice like that you'd have it till spring. You'd uh, you could dig down in there and you'd find a piece of ice that you'd miss in that sawdust it, it kept it good, it uh, but back then there wasn't any, uh, it was years before they got, uh, even ice boxes that you could put ice in that would keep anytime and, and uh, it was after I was married before, that uh, refrigerators they had what they called a isolater that was made something on the terms of a refrigerator that helt the ice better than the old time ice boxes, and uh, people use them. And then when the refrigerator come along it wasn't too many people that was able to buy one for a few years because they, they thought they was too expensive and which they was for the salary they was making. They didn't have any convenience it was the same way when, uh, radios come out they was a small price but people just didn't have the money to buy um. And uh, when television come out they's a lot of people able to buy a television, and uh, they was, uh, you could get a television, a fairly good television for a hundred dollars but people just didn't have that hundred dollars you didn't make that kind of money. That, uh, you just couldn't buy that stuff and, and then when people did get it, when people got to getting the big wages if they'd of lived like they did back when I was a boy well they'd been, why they'd been millionaires today people that'd worked thirty years they could of, they could really had the money, but of course I don't blame um they wanted the convenience and they got it, they, they wasn't anything like a washing machine. I remember when mother washed on a washboard for ten children. Got the water out of the creek and then they's a fella came through that was a selling washers that he had a crank he put it in there and a homemade paddle that, uh, it was all, taking all the strength you had to turn that thing, you put them



clothes in there and stand there and turn that pedal around there for hours at a time it'd, and get the clothes fairly clean. But she said she preferred the washboard and for years that's what she used till the automatic washer come along and, and uh, I think that she enjoyed work. I remember they'd always be a crowd in there on the weekends and she'd start on Friday evening baking and getting ready for a bunch to come in and eat and they, they enjoyed it and if somebody come along that, uh, maybe they knowed um and maybe they didn't they'd be riding by and dinner be ready he'd hollared and, "Yeah we's cooking come on in and eat." And they'd just stop and eat whether you knew um or not they, uh, and if you, dad say one of you go out and get some feed and feed that horse for him. And he'd, he'd sit and talk a while and, uh, off he'd go and then, speaking of the luxuries the first luxury I remember seeing something that was very uncommon to us, was pack peddlers come through the country. They'd carry a load of stuff that had an old time trunk that they had straps on the trunk and put it across their back and they'd have french harps and fine combs and silk scarves and things. They'd come through the country a selling, well they, uh, maybe old Joe or somebody and a, maybe a week or two somebody say, uh, come by the house and, and dad's name was Paris, "Say Paris, you know they found old Joe killed out there on nine mile." "Oh no." "Yeah somebody must have found out he had some money on him and they got him," and they just finally quit coming through the country on account of that they got afraid they'd, uh, they'd come up a missing every now and then if they, somebody got a french harp and a fine comb and ten dollars off of him he was rich then [ GWC: (Laughs). ] he was doing good.

GWC: Was it pretty rough back then, uh?

SWS: Well it was rough if people knowed you had money but for as stealing anything in your home now just like I said about the store dad left it unlocked and we'd never miss nothing. But they's always somebody through the country that if they found out anybody was a carrying any amount of money which you, twenty five or thirty dollars was big back then, that you wasn't safe if they knowed you

had it because somebody was looking after a quick dollar that they wanted to get out of the country and go somewhere and they'd, uh, they'd take the money if they knowed you had it and people had to be very careful if they had a dollar let anybody know that they had it because that was the only thing that they would bother, they wouldn't, uh, people that didn't work then wouldn't bother anything that you worked with for sure they, they wasn't wanting anything like that.

GWC: Well thank you Mr. Sowards.

SWS: Yes sir glad to help.