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### Oral History Interview: Mea Davis

Mea Davis

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WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: MAE DAVIS

CONDUCTED BY: BRENDA BALL  
HONORS CLASS, SPG. '85

DATE OF INTERVIEW: APRIL 20, 1985

TRANSCRIBED & TYPED BY: GINA KEHALI KATES

Ball: Ms. Davis is a long time resident of Mingo County. This is an interview with Mae Davis, as interviewed by Brenda Ball. Ms. Davis, 72, is a life-long resident of Mingo County. The significance in this interview was in her remarks about prohibition and the Klu Klux Klan, during the 1920's. When did the Klan get started in Mingo County.

Davis: Uh, a round 1920.

Ball: Were there very many people in the klan?

Davis: Around 30 to 50.

Ball: Was it an honor to be in it?

Davis: Yes, it was. They had their own building, paid their own dues, buy their own robes.

Ball: How did they dress?

Davis: Their leader dressed in white and their uh, rest of the klan dressed in black robes.

Ball: And what did they do?

Davis: Well, they burnt crosses and then warned them that they was gonna come in on 'em. They'd uh, lay switches and then they'd lay a not at their door that they was coming back, and in ten days they'd come back to whip 'em, and straighten 'em up, and make 'em get married. And they was uh, three families that they was on to in camp. They was Hy Maynard, and Rosie Maynard and uh, Bill Davis and Jane Davis, Cory Boyce and Frank Boyce. They was one more family that I can't remember that was us switched...whipped with switches.

Ball: What camp was this?

Davis: Blockton. Blockton Coal Company.

Ball: What did they do to these people?

Davis: Uh, they'd run 'em down and whip 'em and send 'em to the Justice of the Peace, give 'em so long to get married in and they was making 'em all get married.

Ball: All the people ended up doing what the klan wanted them to?

Davis: Yes, they did. Everyone of 'em got married.

Ball: Did they do anything else besides make people get married?

Davis: Uh, just take care of children. They had...straighten their children.

[someone in background asking Brenda to speak up a little louder]

Davis: ...no, not really. Just seen 'em come in. (why?) To straighten the families out. They wasn't living right. And make 'em obey and raise their children right.

Ball: Were there any members of the camp that were members of the Klan?

Davis: Yes, there was. They was three...there was three that I knowed. They was uh, I had an uncle, Tom Davis, my uncle Tommy Shepherd, and a friend, Johnny Perry, that I knowed 11 years.

Ball: Wasn't the people in the camp once scared of them?

Davis: No, not really scared. They was glad to see 'em come, and straighten the families out, and raise their children right.

Ball: What did you think about the Klan?

Davis: I was so pleased to see 'em I wanted to take out after 'em. Run 'em down. If they run, I wanted to run, too, to see what was going on.

Ball: Was this the way all the kids felt?

Davis: Oh, yeah, all of 'em that was big enough took right after 'em.

Ball: Were there ever any killings?

Davis: No, not \_\_\_\_\_ just whippin'.

Ball: And they didn't bother anybody?

Davis: There was no Black in the camp at that time.

Ball: How about anywhere else in Mingo County?

Davis: Uh, I don't remember. But I know they had klans everywhere.

Ball: Was it just one klan in Mingo County?

Davis: They formed in groups. And went in groups. And uh, like uh, the upper end of Mingo County, or the lower end, they'd all come in together and form a group to do their uh, make them obey and do what they should do.

Ball: About how many groups were there in Mingo County?

Davis: Well, I'd say anywhere from 45 at least, to come together.

Ball: Do you know how many there were in a group?

Ball: Where were the stills usually located?

Davis: Uh, Miller's Creek, in the....

Ball: Did anyone beside outsiders...did anyone in the government ever raid 'em?

Davis: No...not that I know of.

Ball: Were there ever any arrests made?

Davis: Oh, sure. They...I had an uncle that was arrested, the one that was in the klan; he spent 12 months in jail a being a watchman for a moonshine still.

Ball: Did people get arrested often?

Davis: Not too often, 'cause they uh, that was just like uh, whiskey they have now. That was what they had to have their parties and their good times on. And uh, it usually, if somebody got a grudge against you and reported you, that you got caught.

Ball: But usually the people themselves didn't get caught?

Davis: No, no.

Ball: How did they manage to get away?

Davis: Well, they was always warned whenever somebody was coming in anyway. But this time my uncle didn't make it. He was about a mile away and he couldn't...he couldn't get to 'em and they got him and got them, too.

Ball: How did they get their warning?

Davis: Uh...there would uh, well, your neighbors would let you know if they was gonna come in. And you'd go from there, to protect your still and uh [inaudible]....

Ball: Was there much of a problem with alcoholism?

Davis: No, not back then. They uh, they just done their usual drinking and there wasn't no problem. They'd uh, drink social and go on about their business, and no arrests or nothing. No alcohol problems; just social drinkers.

Ball: Did the people who didn't make whiskey look down on the people who did?

Davis: No, that was a way to live. That was the biggest way to live back then. Nowhere and what they was didn't pay anything. And they made their...finished their livins' by moonshine...take care of their families.

Ball: It was looked at as just like any other trade?

Davis: Just like labor. Just like labor. Uh, selling it for a livin', selling it for...to keep their family going and keep their children in school.

END OF INTERVIEW