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TRANSCRIPT

RECORDING NO.: Tape 17
INTERVIEWER: Kelly Lally
INTERVIEWEE: Gilbert Sanders
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 8/13/1987
PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Pig, KY
OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT:
EQUIPMENT USED:
AMOUNT OF RECORDING (TAPE/MINIDISK) USED: 26:48
DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS:

TRANSCRIBED BY: Christie Burns **DATE**: July, 2007
Transcribed with the support of a Transcription Grant from the Oral History Commission of the Kentucky Historical Society.

KEY: K=Kelly Lally
G=Gilbert Sanders

Italics= emphasis
// = overlapping or interrupted speech
[ ] [not part of recording]
Lapsed time represented in left column by minutes and seconds (i.e. 5:50)
? or * = transcript needs to be checked

0:00 K: This is Kelly Lally, and I'm here in Pig, Kentucky, with Mr. Gilbert Sanders. Today is August the 13th 1987. When were you born, Mr. Sanders?

G: 1909.

K: 1909?

G: August the 9th, 1909.

K: And where did you grow up?

G: Hart County.

K: [moves microphone] Let me get that a little closer. How many people were in your family?

G: Four. Two children. My parents, and I just had one brother.

K: And were you the oldest or the youngest?

G: No, I'm the youngest.

K: What did your family do for a living?

G: Farm. [unintelligible]

K: How were times for your family during the Depression? Was it real rough?

G: Well, it was rough, but people on the farm managed to live, and we raised most of the things that we eat. 'Course we didn't have any money, but we got by.

1:05 K: How did you hear about the //

G: We stayed on the farm.

K: How did you hear about the CCC?

G: I really don't know. I don't remember the first that I heard about them. We, there weren't any camps down close to the Mammoth Cave. [unintelligible] Hart County. And Mammoth Cave was the first camp that I know about. But when I signed up to go to camp, I went to Nevada first. Spent six months there, then come back to Mammoth Cave. I couldn't say just how I come to hear about them.

K: How did you sign up? Do you remember? Did you have to go into Munfordville?

G: Uh, when I went in, they was trying to get all the high school graduates they could get, and that was one of the requirements at that time. It wasn't until later, you know, you had to be on some type of relief, I think. It didn't start that way. It started with they tried to get all the high school graduates they could get. 'Cause I was just out of school [unintelligible] high school.

K: What year did you go into the CCC?

G: I think '36.

K: And uh, when you got back from Nevada and you came to Mammoth Cave, what camp were you in?

G: Number four.

K: Number four? Um, how long did you stay in?

G: I believe I just stayed one sixth-month term. I was talking with my wife about it this morning. The best I remember, I just stayed one sixth-month term.

K: Well when you, when you were in Nevada, what kind of projects did you work on?

G: I worked survey crew. We surveying the stagecoach, the old stagecoach trail from Ely, Nevada, to Reno. And I was on the survey team.

K: And when you came back and went into number four camp, what kind of work did you do there?

G: I started in with the engineering in the office, engineer's office. I had experience then. That's what I started. We were supposed to survey farms, then in the park. See, the park hadn't been officially turned over to the government then, and they were still working on the farm surveys. And we were working on that mostly.

K: What kind of experience did you have that made them put you in the engineering office?

G: I really don't know, other than it was only—the first group I went it, there was only three high school graduates in the group. Two-hundred-and-forty of us, and they wanted me to, on this, on the survey crew. And 'course, after working there six months, well then when I come back down here, why, they called for me at the engineers office down here. And we didn't work the six-hour term, but most of the boys just worked six hours. But we worked eight-hour shifts just like any other. 'Cause I was working under the ECW at that time.

K: And the ECW stands for—the Emergency Conservation //

G: Emergency.

4:36 K: You say you surveyed the farms?

G: Farms.

K: In the area?

G: Yeah, we was plotting all of the farms on the map, and some of them we had to resurvey them in order to plot them on the map. The farms.

K: So you would go out to each farm, and what would you do out there?

G: We'd survey the farm. Usually, one of the engineers would go with us, and he'd make it two of us, and sometimes three. One of the engineers. There were six engineers in all. They'd go with us.

K: So you'd measure and um //

G: I'd use transit, I was the transit man.

K: And then did //

G: That was in both places, Nevada and Mammoth Cave both.

K: And then, did you show what buildings were on the land too?

G: Uh, no. No, just the, so we could plot it on the map, the lines, corners and lines. See if the tracts joined. And they all were supposed to fit in the map. They didn't always did. They were supposed to.

K: Did people still own this land?

G: Part of it was still private owned, but very little. When I come out and started here, the, most all of it had been bought and paid for. A lot of it. Some of it hadn't, but most of it had.

6:15 K: Then you would take your measurements and stuff back and put them on, try to put them on a map? Is that //

G: Yeah, we had to plot them, put them on a map.

K: Did you do any other type of work while you were at Mammoth Cave?

G: Uh, well, no. Except we worked on the water system. We installed a water system. The park did while we was there, and I helped with it. Did survey work on the water system.

K: How were you paid? How much were you paid for—

G: Dollar, dollar a day.

K: You made thirty dollars a month for your engineering work?

G: Just thirty dollars a month. And uh, they give us—I believe we just drawed five dollars a month, and the rest of it was sent home, then wherever we wanted it sent. I believe that that happened. 'Course they had the canteen, and we really didn't need, we didn't need this money, really, unless you smoked. That's about it. That's about the only thing I needed money for. 'Cause they furnished your clothes, food, bed space.

7:30 K: What did you do with your free time?

G: Uh, [unintelligible] I didn't have much free time. I taught class through the night, with the boys. And the weekends, and I usually went home on the weekends. So, trying to teach classes every night, and going home on weekends, I didn't have much free time.

K: What class did you teach at night?

G: We taught mostly reading and math. Reading and arithmetic. Beginners.

K: Did you have many, many students?

G: Oh yeah, yeah, we had—I don't remember how many I had. I didn't have as many at number four as I had in Nevada. We had—we started out with fifty out of two-hundred-and-fifty in Nevada. They, the main thing they wanted to learn to write enough that they could write home. As soon as they got so they could write a little note home, they'd drop out of the class.

K: [chuckles] Oh really?

G: Yeah. But the ones at number four, I didn't have too many. I think about six was all I had. But they had another, they had an educational advisor, but I didn't work under him. I worked separate.

K: Did you?

G: And uh, I think he had more, the education advisor had more on his side than I did. I did it to help the boys. It wasn't my job.

K: Yeah, you weren't officially //

G: No, uh-uh.

K: Did many other guys do that? Teach, themselves?

G: No, not that I know of.

K: Do you feel like you were successful in teaching these guys to read and write?

G: Well I was with the boys in Nevada, 'cause they was away from home, away from home, they wanted to learn to write home. But the ones here, I didn't do too much to—I could help them some in math. But not too much.

9:36 K: Did you ever participate in any of the recreation programs that the camp had?

G: No.

K: So you went home most of the time on the weekends //

G: Most of the time I went home on the weekends.

K: Did you help out your family with the farming?

G: No, not really. I just fished.

K: Got yourself a break. How'd you get home?

G: I went by bus. I'd ride with the mail carrier for Mammoth Cave over to the bus line at Park City, and go home on the bus. 'Course, there's always someone from camp going out in the Army truck, or the ECW truck. One's always going to the post office, I could ride over with him, to the post office [unintelligible]

K: Was there, uh, much interaction among the different camps at Mammoth Cave? You know, let's say one, two, three, or four.

G: Well, uh, the only thing that I would know of, they had a community building, they had a name for it, but I forget what they—Group B[?] House they called it. And they'd have basketball games, and then they'd have, they showed picture reels and programs. I don't know, couple of nights of week. Two or three nights a week at what they called the Group B House. And it was for all four of the camps. See, there was four camps in the park. And then this building was for all four, could be used by all four camps. Then they played with—outside games. Playing basketball.

11:37 K: Did the guys in the different camps pretty much get along with each other?

G: Oh yeah, we did, yeah. People, people weren't any problem to get along with back in those days. Like they seem to be now. At least we didn't have any problems. They all got along just fine. See these boys that's in the CC then, they wasn't in camp because they wouldn't work or didn't know how to work. They came because they didn't have anything to do. You could get boys to do anything you wanted done. They'd be good painters, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, anything anybody want. They could do the job. Just make them able to get there.

12:24 K: Did many of the CCC boys play pranks on each other?

G: Oh yeah.

K: Do you remember any of them?

G: No, not right off, I don't. They just, all the new boys would come in, most of the boys pranks on them. They wouldn't hurt them or injure them in any way. It was fun.

K: How did the white people feel about the presence of blacks in a camp nearby? Was there any racial tension whatsoever?

G: I didn't have much dealings with the black camp. I don't think it was really very much, because they didn't push the blacks off on local people. Now when they started the Job Corps at Mammoth Cave, they tried to force them onto local—They wanted to put them in the churches and the [unintelligible], everything else. And we had quite a bit of tension there. But the CC's, they didn't push them on anybody. If you wanted to accept them and mix with them, you could. You didn't have to. After I went to work for the park service, they furnished me and my crew with CC boys that were doing maintenance work. But all of them went out except the black camp [unintelligible]. And I didn't have any problem. People didn't resent them any more than they did anybody else at that time.

14:13 K: How did the local residents feel about the CCC being in the area? Was there any tension there?

G: I didn't know of any. There probably was. You always have a few that, I don't know, cause a little trouble maybe in town, kind of give them a little bad name once in a while, but not very much. They really didn't resent them, that I know of, that I knew about.

K: I know a lot of residents who lived on what became park land were displaced from their homes.

G: Yeah, some of them were resentful, but it wasn't on account of anything that the CC's has done to them. The land buyers were causing the problems. They promised people things to get them to sign their deed or their—what they want to call it—that they couldn't carry out, and that caused their resentment. But it wasn't on account of anything that the boys did.

K: Did—I guess the interaction was when the boys went in town. Did the local residents ever come out to the camps for any reason?

G: Not really. They'd come to see their boys, like that. But what I mean, just as far as visiting the camp.

K: Did many of the guys date local girls or go out with local girls?

G: Oh yeah, yeah. All of us did, I reckon. All that could. I was still in, I was still in the CC's when I met Edna.

K: Did you all get married soon after you left?

G: Yeah. About a year, I guess [unintelligible]. I still meet boys once in a while. I met a boy about a month ago in the barber shop at Rock Hill, Rocky Hill, that I was in camp with in Nevada. And I hadn't seen or heard of him. I didn't know what become of him, where he went, anything. In the barber shop. In fact, he was one of my crew. I had five men on the, just five, on the survey crew, and he was one of my men for about three months. I hadn't seen him since then.

16:51 K: Were you in a leadership sort of position when you were in Nevada?

G: Mm-hmm. I was—No, I never would take a—You know they had the leaders, like they have there, the rangers now. They had three ratings, but I don't remember what they were. I was interested. I was taking the course, correspondence, surveying. At the time I can. And I was interested in that, but I never did take the leader's job, and I wanted to, I wanted to do that kind of work. I couldn't do it and be a leader.

17:34 K: How successful do you feel like the CCC was in relieving the effects of the Depression?

G: I think it helped quite a lot.

K: Did it make a difference for your family?

G: Uh, well, it could have. I'll put it that way. My family were, there weren't many of us. Just one brother. My mother had passed away over that, and my brother and my dad, they weren't spending my money. I sent it to them, they put it in the bank. They could've had it, but they, they were kind of independent too. They wouldn't spend it.

K: Oh, did they save it for you?

G: Yeah. They did.

K: So you had a nice little nest egg there when you got out, didn't you?

G: Yeah. And it was, a nest egg was handy those days too.

K: Do you think the CCC made a difference to the economic, or economy around the Mammoth Cave area?

G: Yeah it sure did. 'Cause then you see, there were four camps located here, and each camp had, I believe it was six, [unintelligible]. But they had quite a few, what they called "local

enrollees" and they'd just come into camp and work and go back home at night. And it helped the out an awful lot. [unintelligible] They'd give them a job. See, we had our laundry done locally. And uh, these two men come in and pick up our laundry [unintelligible] let's see there's two hundred, about two hundred fifty boys in each camp. That amounted to, oh, a couple dollars a week, something like that for each person who was in the camp. And that helped a lot of locals, anybody needed helping. They appreciated it too.

19:41 K: What do you think to be the greatest contribution of the CCC in general?

G: I really, I really wouldn't know what to say about that. 'Cause they, you learned, the boys learned a lot of the, other than actually how to work. They, most of them knew how to work, but they didn't know how to get out and try to find work. And this give them, I don't know, it give them more confidence in them to find out their work force, because they could do, but people wouldn't pay them to do them. They knew more about how to find a job when they got out. And then they were better qualified, because most all of them went to some kind of a class at night, at least one or two nights a week during their term. All of them, most of them did. And they learned quite a bit there.

K: Do you think it made a difference for the military during World War II?

G: It should have. 'Course I wasn't in the military during the war. But the boys learned how to get along with each other, and they learned how to, how to hem themselves in the dorm, where they had so many—in other words, they learned to live together, as a group of people. And I think that would've helped out an awful lot in the Army, because that's what they got into to serve as a group. And they learned how to work as a group. They all worked in a group. Each foreman had [unintelligible]. And they all had to work together. And they learned that right off. I think it helped it. Most any, any way that you would take it, it helped the boys, and it helped anywhere else, in any place that they went after that, after they got out of the CC's.

21:45 K: Do you think many of the boys got some training that they used for the rest of their lives, or later in their lives?

G: I think so. I believe it give them a start.

K: Do you think there were any problems with the CCC? Did you see any problems?

G: Not really. We—the CC's didn't have problems. They just had gripes. And the person in the workplace is gonna gripe about something. Had to gripe about something. But as far as actual problems, I don't think they really had any. No serious problems.

22:38 K: What did you do after you left the CCC, in, what was it, nineteen thirty—

G: 1937. I took a job with the park service. I told you that I helped with the water system, and when they got the water system completed, they needed somebody to operate it, and the park service didn't have a maintenance crew at that time. And they, I got the job, the maintenance job, keeping the water system running. And uh, I worked, I was a temporary foreman. They just sent [unintelligible] I mean the park superintendent told me that I [unintelligible] someday, I ought to try to pull it together. So when they needed a man the next morning, he asked me how soon I could go to work for the park service, and I told him, "In the morning." So I just, the man

in the office, I told him that night, said, "Have my discharge ready the next morning." I went to work for the park service. They went ahead and furnished my transportation for, oh, six or eight months I guess. You have a car at home, [unintelligible]. They let me have a car. And I kept it, I mean, for about six months. It was a real nice one. Then at the end of that first year, temporary appointment, why, I got a permanent appointment on the ship service, electrician. And now it's been thirty-four years.

24:15 K: How did you learn all this surveying and electrician? Did you learn that on your own? Just picking it up?

G: By doing it. On the job. 'Course I took a correspondence course in surveying, but I learned more on the job, really, than I did in the correspondence course.

K: Enough to be an electrician. That's a lot.

G: The maintenance crew's where I learned my electrical work. Because we had to try to do it, nobody to do it, and I just did it. I just—Trial and error, I guess. Anyway, I got by with it. And I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the whole thirty-four years I worked hard.

K: And when did you retire?

G: '71.

K: And you've lived in this area since then?

G: I lived in here before. I've been here forty-some years. On the farm.

K: Did you have to go anywhere for the war?

G: No. No, I have a hand, I have a problem with it. They wouldn't take me. I volunteered for the CB's, but they wouldn't take me. They said my hand was paralyzed.

K: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the CCC?

G: Uh, no, not really. They done a good job. For some reason or other, I don't know how it was now, but nearly all government work seems to be more or less political, but it wasn't. CC's wasn't political in any way. Foremans, I mean, the locals, it just wasn't, well, there wasn't anything political about it. Just, you'd go in there, do your job, and if you didn't do your job, [unintelligible]. But it was a good organization, I thought.

K: And you still run into people around?

G: Yes.

K: Well, I guess that's all the questions I had. I want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

G: Okay.

[CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW]