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Interview with Gayle Carver Regarding His Life (FA 154)

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Folklife Archives Project 154 – A Generation Remembers, 1900-1949

Interview with Gayle Carver (CT 61)

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

JOE ADAMS: We're just really excited about this. Uh, this is Joe Adams with the Messenger-Inquirer in Owensboro. Here today at the Muhlenberg County courthouse, uh, here in the basement talking with Gayle Carver of Greenville about his life experiences and things he remembers, uh, from the years, uh, well, let's say from the early teens to about 1949. And, uh, let's see, I guess just really to start us off, oh, by the way, it is August 1st, just to start us off, I'll ask you to give me your birth date and where you grew up.

GAYLE CARVER: I was born November the 6th, 19 `n 13 here in Greenville, and lived in Greenville until 1935. Went to college in Bowling Green and over the next 30 plus years spent most of my time in Bowling Green either at work or at college.

JA: Well, let's start at the beginning. What do you remember about your early school days here?

GC: Well, the earliest school days. I started in the first grade, if I remember correctly, in 1920 with the, one of the best teachers I ever saw, Miss Maulda? Wood, and then I went through twelve years of school here, graduating in 19 `n 32 with, what was at that time the largest graduation class ever from Greenville High School. These school buildings, that we used, were, at least the first four years, uh, parts of the old Greenville Male & Female College. The lower grades were in the old College Building, and the high school was the, had been the dormitory for the college.

JA: There was an old college here?

GC: At one time Greenville had two colleges. Uh, in the 1850s Mr. W.L. Green came to Greenville and started the Greenville Female College. Five years later, the Presbyterians built a college building on North Cherry Street for boys, which in later years, somewhere about 1890, I think it was became Greenville High School. And then, around 1900 or maybe the late-1890s, they got the old Female College going at in east, bought buildings out in east Greenville and converted them into the high school and sold the building on North Cherry Street for a residence. It is still standing. The two college, the former college buildings are both gone. One burned in 1924, I think it was, and the other was torn down in the 1930s to be replaced with the present day gymnasium. Then, um, beyond that, I don't, there is nothing particularly outstanding about going to school. Except, I want, I want to say one thing: I went to school under a man, as principal who, in my opinion was the smartest man I ever met in my life. This is not something they are not going to want to hear at Western, but, uh he outshone any

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PhD I have ever known, with one possible exception and that was a biology professor at Western.

JA: What was this gentleman's name?

GC: What here? Mr. N. M. Moseley, Norris Miller Moseley, and I think that almost any student that ever went to school under him would give you the same statement that I made.

JA: What made him seem so smart?

GC: Well, because he was well read he knew a lot more than what he tried to teach and he tied things together. The average teacher, uh teaches one subject and doesn't pretend to bring in something else with it and doesn't make it as interesting as this man did. He can tie anything together and make a good lecture of it. I also know that he taught himself German and then later taught German in the school system here until World War I when the teaching of German was banned all over the United States. He never did go back to it. He taught himself Latin and then taught Latin to the students here up until after 19`n 25. I'm not sure what year, one of his former students came back here as a teacher of Latin and she obviously she also taught French.

JA: What, uh, as far as the school days back then, what kind of games did kids play in school?

GC: Well, they didn't have basketball and football when I started to school. Football came along while I was in school, about the time, in fact, it started about the time I started school. Oh, I don't remember too much about games back in then, they had marbles and kites and a few things like that. And each one had a season and there was a period for playing marbles, and a period for playing top, flying kites, and whatever else, I don't remember.

JA: Did, uh, did you go to a school that had, was it a one-room kinda school?

GC: No, no, no. Each, each, even, even by the time when I was going to school each grade had its own room and sometimes, uh, there were two rooms to a grade. I,I, I don't, maybe, at that time, I'm stretching that a little. But, while I was in school, up in the twelve years they began to have two, say two fifth grades or two third grades or something like that. But, You asked did they have in the first two or three years at least, they did not have but one grade to a classroom and one teacher for each class. And

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in high school, of course, why each teacher just taught certain subjects, but in the grades one teacher taught the entire, everything that went through the with that particular classroom or class group. Uh, I don't know what all they taught back in those days...mathematics, and English and history, whatever. But the same teacher taught all of 'em whether the third grade or fourth grade or whatever.

JA: That was probably very unusual for that time.

GC: It was, this was a city school system. Now you get out in some of the country schools, you had one teacher teaching all the grades up through possibly the eight grade. She might teach 1,3,5,and 7 one year and 2,4,6,and 8 the next year. But, uh, she had, um, had to teach all the grades. How they ever learned, I'll don't know but they seemed to have done pretty well, some of them. I know I was visiting one day and went with my cousin to school one afternoon, and I never did yet how they learned anything, but they did. Because the kids that were not actually reciting to the teacher got up and wondered all over the room or did this or did that or did the other and how the ones that were supposed to be reciting could keep putting their minds on what they were doing, I don't know, but they did.

JA: Well, what, back then, something I've always wondered about, is, is what, how kids, you know, what was a good, what was a good kid, you know, and what was a mean boy? You know what were the standards back then?

GC: Naw, now I'm afraid you're going to put me out to where I can't answer you, because that's dealing with individuals whether the kids good or bad. Depends on who's looking at 'em. Your next door neighbor may think you're the meanest kid in the world just because you picked flowers out of his yard.

JA: That's true.

GC: The next fellow thinks you're a little angel, because you, uh, do something for him. It's all a matter of who's doing the thinking and what the action is. But, uh, most kids are pretty good. There are a few exceptions, always. (laughing)

JA: What, what kind of chores did you have to do when you were a kid?

GC: Bring in coal, mow the lawn, uh, things of that sort. Just about what you do today. Well, of course, kids today don't have to bring in any coal. That's long past, thank goodness. But, uh, they, those are the two basic things I would say for somebody

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in town, now out on a farm you had other, you had other chores to do, helping around the barn, things of that sort, actual farming. If you had a, had a garden plot, you might have to help raise a garden in the summer time. You might have to shovel snow off the walks in the winter time. Uh, nothing as set as unless there was an emergency of some type which they couldn't anticipate.

JA: What, uh, you mention mowing the lawn. I guess lawn mowers back then were...

GC: Mowed with rotary type and you worked. They were not self powered. You also got down with that little hand sickle sometimes and cut grass with that, which can be quite a task. But, I remember, uh, a lady, an elderly lady who lived across the street from us. I don't know what kind of grass she had in her yard, but it was the meanest stuff I ever saw in my life to cut, and she had a big yard. One summer I got roped into mowing her grass over there. If I was lucky I got ten cents for doing it, and if I wasn't so lucky I got a sugar cookie. (laughing) But, uh, the going wage in work in those days was not much more proportionate for a grown man, so I guess I was very well paid in proportion to what a grown person would be for what I did. I hate to think of kids going back to that today. But the time could come.

JA: It's always a possibility.

GC: It's always a possibility.

JA: Something too, uh, I know World War I was probably, was very prominent during the time probably of your very early years. What do you remember...?

GC: Very little about World War I. I can remember going somewhere, and I don't have no idea where and watching some women roll bandages. And I remember distinctly the day they celebrated the Armistice here in town, because I never did like noises and that was one of the nosiest times I ever saw. It had some kind of, thing that, uh, large shell so it sounded like cannon to me. And that thing, well they had several of them, in fact. They were making noises all over town with that. And there was a crowd in town. People came in from the country. In fact, I think somewhere at home, I have a picture of the crowd in town, around in front of the courthouse here and carrying flags and carrying on for the, uh, celebration. And that would have been a celebration.

JA: Were they also yelling and...

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GC: Oh yeah, that was part of it. That's why I say I didn't like it. The firing of the little toy cannons, or whatever they were, was just a part of the total overall noise. There was a mob in town for that day, sorta like what they used to have called School Fair Days. People would come in from all over the county and so for Armistice Day, and then for years after that they, uh, big celebrations here on Armistice Day. But that's played out just about now. I don't, they don't even call it Armistice Day anymore. Now they call it, I can't even think of what they call it, but they changed it. It used to always be on November 11th. Now they've set a standard date for it. I'm kind of a program mind. As I said, I don't remember the name of it, but it doesn't amount to much anymore. The VFW will have a celebration out at the VFW Club House and that's about it.

JA: That's interesting, I, I can see why, back then, that would have been a really big...

GC: It was a really big thing.

JA: Yeah.

GC: It went on, uh, at least into the 30s.

JA: Does that bother you there?

GC: No.

JA: That's real interesting. I wondered how long that lasted.

GC: Even World War II celebrations didn't last as long as the one after World War I. But, uh, I would say they didn't really have any celebrations to amount to anything after World War II, after the first year or two. Of course everybody went crazy when the war was over. But, uh, I remember very distinctly when the people gathering downtown to some extent when the war with Germany was over and then later on in August when the Japanese surrendered, but they didn't make a big to-do much out after that through the years. Of course we were glad it was over.

JA: Do you remember years after that what Armistice Day was like?

GC: It was, it was, not quite as rowdy, I would, well I don't think rowdy maybe is a good word there, but not quite as noisy but at least they, they had parades and

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things of that sort in connection with it. On the other ones, I was sorta young and I don't remember a great deal about them except the noisy part of them. (laughing) See I was only about five years old when the war ended and your memory's usually not too good at five years old.

JA: Really, really. Looking ahead to the 20s. When you were a boy, let me ask you this, were cars on the street back then.

GC: No, no, no, no. The first car in Greenville was about, I'm going to have to guess on this, 1910, 1912, something like that. That was before my day. I've heard the story many times about the man who bought it and some of the reaction here in town to the car. But, oh, there weren't very many cars for years until after World War II really that the situation began to get anywhere close to what we have now. Mr. Bluen Martin had the first car in Greenville. I have no idea, of course, what kind it was, but I have heard them say that some of the ladies in town would call his mother to see if he was going to be out in his car on such-and-such a day. If he wasn't they were going to go calling on somebody but they didn't want to get their horse and buggy out and have the horse scared by his car. And so they would stay at home if the car was out.

JA: Very interesting.

GC: I tell you, this Mr. Moseley, um, there's one comment I remember him making in classes that he could remember the time when if a car, if a horse or a mules met a car on the road it scared them to death then they might run off and have a wreck. And says, at the time he was talking, if a horse meets another horse he's liable to run off and have a wreck because it's so uncommon anymore on the roads. The cars have taken over. However, even until late, as late as 1935, there were a good many people still coming into town in wagons, mule drawn, or buggies with horses. They had hitching posts at one time around the courthouse here for horses and buggies or over behind the stores there were open areas. Some of the areas are still there and cars park in em. They would take their wagons back there and unhook the mules or horses and tie them to the wagon so they could put feed in the wagon and let them feed right out from the back of the wagon.

JA: Wow. That', that's interesting. Gosh. A lot of changes there.

GC: Great big change.

JA: Do you remember the first airplane you saw?

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GC: I don't know about the first one. The first one I remember seeing or being around. They used to do what we called barnstorming. You probably never heard that term, but, uh, bi-plane, double two wing and mono-plane would go into an area and charge so much to take passengers up. The first I remember of that a plane came in here and landed on what's called the Dish farm and people would go down there and pay \$5, I think it was, for so many minutes ride around over Greenville and then he'd come in and another person or two, you could only take one person or two at a time, would get in. And then when he got through at Greenville he would go on to some other town and go through the same procedure again and the whole thing was called barnstorming. And I never have known where the term originated but I think if you look in the dictionary you'll get the idea probably of some word in there.

JA: (chuckles) Did you ever ride?

GC: No sir.

JA: (chuckles) Why not?

GC: I prefer terra firma. (laughing) Somebody said the more firma the less terra. (laughing) I never had any desire to be in an airplane.

JA: Well, let's take a look at the 1920s. Uh, what you remember here. Of course that's when you had prohibition, uh, was.

GC: Greenville has had prohibition since long before my day officially. It's illegal, but that doesn't mean there's not liquor here. Now the liquor was voted out of Greenville long before 19n20. I don't know what year, I've got a picture of the people who led the, I don't know what you call it back then, anyhow the vote to get it out. And, um, it might have a date on the back of it, but I don't have any idea of what it was. But anyhow, uh, prohibition went out what in 1918 or 19, and voted out in 1919 I guess it was and went out a year or so later. Something like that—the Volstead Act. Then it came in with Roosevelt or shortly after Roosevelt was elected, in 1933. I remember when it came back in. But it was soon voted out of Greenville again. When it first came in, they never did sell hard liquor here, even after prohibition was repealed. But they did sell beer here for a period of time and then that was put out again. There's still plenty of it here but it's brought in.

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JA: Something too, you know during that time, were there any, what were some of the major local events that were happening in the 20s that you witnessed.

GC: Well possibly, and I don't remember a great deal about it, but one of the big coal strikes was in the early 20s in this county. And then over a period of time there were several smaller ones, then it was in 1923 or 4, 24 I think that the high school building burned here. That was quite a blow to the town, because they had just finished, uh, hadn't quite finished a new grade, paying, building a new grade school building. In fact, they didn't get into the new grade school building. The high school building burned in November and they didn't get into the new grade school building until after Christmas. And in the meantime they had double classes for the grades in the old grade school building, part of the classes would meet of the morning, start earlier, at a earlier time than normal and then at noon they would leave and the other classes would come in. The high school students had their classes here in the courthouse and in churches in town until they could get a new building put up. So, it, that was one of the things that would have been. Beyond that I don't know of anything in particular that happened in the 20s here. I'm sure there were things if someone was talking to me it would bring it back to me. I'm, just out of the clear blue sky, you just don't do that.

JA: What do you remember, in other, the 20s were know as the "Roaring 20s." How did that apply in Greenville? As you remember it?

GC: No, I don't remember that, but of course, uh, that was about the time tel-, radio began to come in. And, uh, there were no long-playing records; they used old 78 records and there were two or three places in town that sold records and they did some dancing around her
e. But as far as what they call the "Roaring 20s", I don't think it apply too much to Greenville. Uh, Proctor Langley was probably the best known person around here involved with radio. He taught himself radio and grew up with it after years did repair work for people on radios and televisions as they came in later on and was probably considered the best such person for that kind of thing around here. But in the late 20s, I guess is was '28 or '29 somewhere along there, he rigged up a little broadcasting station in one of the store buildings here in town. Over a period of two or three weeks he would publish, no broadcast, recordings and people here in town would get on the telephone and call in and say please play so-an-so and he would go next door to the record shop and if they had the record he would borrow it and take it back and play it and then take it back to the shop. (laughing) I can remember that happening, but, uh, oh Mr. Roark had the biggest collection of records for sale here. McDonald's had records and possibly one or two others. Well, Hale's, they made a record back then

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with just one side on paper rather than, uh. It was intended for a very brief time, then throw it away.

JA: You mean a paper record?

GC: Yeah, it was a, uh, oh it was more of a flexible cardboard. They didn't have plastic in the sense that we have it today, but it would have been sorta like a plastic, I guess, in a way or varnished cardboard. I don't know just what you'd call it. I've seen a few of them out at the flea market from time to time. But, um, they would have those records because they sold 15 or 20 cents a piece, where a normal type record would have cost you, ah, 75 cents, so you could afford to buy these and throw them away.

JA: How old were you when you, when you started to noticing records and so forth?

GC: Well, now that I don't know. We had a record player at home, so I have always like to hear records. We got that, I think, when my sister graduated. That was in '25, so we had a record player in the family for years. And at the time I have over 10,000 phonograph records. Not all of them 78s though.

JA: Wow. What was your reaction, uh, you know to, the record player? Was that something, I guess that caught on big here. It sounds like it would be something that a lot of families would have though.

GC: Well, many people had, had phonographs back in those days, and, as I said, Mr. Roark had probably the biggest stock in Greenville. There were two types of records: the Hillendale variety and the, let's see what did they call it, later, the Victor records were lateral cut records and the old Edison phonograph records were Hillendale records and they were not interchangeable so people who had an Edison phonograph had to buy Edison or half-A, I believe they were, they were vertical cut records and the others Columbia, and Victor and Brunswick, some of the other were lateral cut and so you had a pretty good choice here for records. But, as I said, one machine, if you went to this house over here and they had an Edison phonograph you couldn't take your records if you had a lateral machine and use them on that playback. You could find that in Owensboro, I imagine. I don't know whether Joe, uh, Fort's both kinds out at the museum there, or not, but you might check with him sometime. In most Edison records were either cylinder type or they were, if they were, flat records like you are familiar with there would be ¼ inch thick as compared to Victor's which would be maybe 3/16th of an inch thick. The Edison method of,

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incidentally your modern LP record combines the two methods. Part of the music, one side of the music on an L, on a stereo set, comes out of the bottom of the groove and the other side of the stereo set comes out of the side groove. Your needle plays back and forth and up and down at the same time.

JA: What uh, what kind of records did you listen to back then?

GC: Oh, they had some very good musicians on both pop and classical. Up until 1920 you had one of the most famous singers of all time making records, Enrico Caruso.

JA: Who?

GC: Caruso.

JA: Oh.

GC: And , um, his records were very popular here in town. But then you had pop dance records, um.

JA: What were some of those.

GC: Oh, Paul Whiteman and his orchestra would be one of them and then, about, the late, early 20s you began to get, well, late teens and early 20s you picked up, um, New Orleans jazz and that became very popular and all. Henry Bussey's Orchestra, and, off hand I can't thank of some of them. Uh, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was one, and by the way those records, some of those records are been re-recorded RP and you can still buy them today. Makes it right interesting.

JA: What were some fads that happened when you were a teenager?

GC: Well, one of the dance fads was called The Charleston. I was never a dancer, so that didn't effect me very much. But it, uh, through the years you've had other dance fads too, uh, but since I don't dance I can't call there names. The Charleston was a very popular one in the mid- to late-20s I would say and the early-. There were any number of pieces of music written particularly for that in mind; one of them was called the Charlestonette. Uh, I can't think of any of the other ones, but several had the word Charleston in the title. No, uh, sorta fast type music but not, at least you could find a tune in them. Note I said tune in them. Today you gotta a reel in them but no tune, or I guess that what I want to say. (Chuckles)

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JA: How did parents look upon, uh, look upon, these fads? Were they in agreement with them.

GC: Well, we were, that was something I never really had to contend with home myself. I really don't know about that. About that time there was, uh, a toy invented that became....(tape ends)

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE 1

TAPE 1 SIDE 2

GC: ...there was a grocery store and restaurant combined. And uh, the restaurant was divided in two sections, of course the blacks did not eat with the whites but the whites went into the lunch section of that restaurant and ate and the blacks, of course on the other side of the wall, had their section. And, the man specialized in roast beef, corn bread, and slaw, and you could get a meal for fifteen cents. And you could not find a better meal anywhere then you got at B. Mathis's restaurant. Plenty, and there were lots of white people who wouldn't have gone in there to eat, but they thought nothing in the world about sending a bucket down and buying a bucket full of the roast beef and eating it at their home. And, uh, I've seen it happened and been involved with that many times in my life. The Mathis's were very fine people; they lived on Cherry Street, in fact it was the only black family that lived on Cherry Street, right in the middle of some of the most wealthiest white families here in Greenville. But, you never saw them around their house, at least, they were so seldom as to be out. The back of their house faced the back of the store where the restaurant was over there on Main Street, so they could go out the back door, down through the alley, and up into their store. They were just not out on the street over there much. Now B. Mathis had two brothers who were, ran a barber shop here in town. All of their customers were white. And then, uh, there was another black barber here whose customers were white. His name was Collin Stuart, and, uh.

JA: That surprises me.

GC: Why?

JA: Well, I don't know. You know, you think looking at it as someone who's removed, you know, from that time period. It seems like basically when I've heard

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things like they were black and they were white, you know but you, never the twain shall meet sometimes.

GC: We've still got a black barber here in town all of whose customers are white. He's down at what I call the depot section, um, near the, there's a long white building by the traffic light as you come in from Owensboro. Ah, it was built as a motel, but it's been used for offices and so on for a long time. And his barber shop is in that building, now he was in the old hotel but it was torn down a couple of years ago until he was forced out of it by the problems with that building. So, he opened up down near the depot, and he's still in business down there cutting hair for white people.

JA: That's interesting.

GC: And his father cut hair before him in originally for John and Jack Mathis and then when John and Jack died why he bought out the shop and ran it until he died and now his son has taken over.

JA: What was the gentleman's name that ran the good roast beef place?

GC: His name was B. Mathis.

JA: B. Mathis.

GC: I don't really know what the B. stands for but he was always just called B. Mathis.

JA: B. Mathis.

GC: Whether that's an initial or Bee or Bea or how I'm not sure, but he was a brother to the two barbers. And then, um, as I say Claude Stuart was a barber here. And I think Claude's, this was before my day long time, but I think Claude's father, Uncle, we called him Uncle Green Shirt. I remember him; he was living but he was blind when I was a kid, so I don't remember him in business. But I think he was a barber ahead of Claude. And, now, then um, Jack, the father of John and Jack and B. Mathis was a blacksmith and of course he worked for blacks or whites either one. But, uh, he was called Uncle Noah, Noah Mathis. And Uncle Noah is supposed to have put horseshoes on a horse for Jesse James, and, well this brings it back. Claude's Stuart's father is supposed to have shaved Jesse James one time when he was in town and nobody was supposed to have known who he was, and they didn't know him until after

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the store in Doby was robbed and then they realized who had been in town. I have a newspaper clipping about Uncle Green Stuart shoeing the horse for Jesse James about 18n70 something. I'd have to look that up.

JA: Wow. Speaking of that, that brings me to something else I wanted to ask you about. Celebrity folks here in the Greenville area. Were there any people, who not just, oh I don't know, not just singers or perhaps entertainment types or anybody of that nature but maybe even a bank robber or anybody like that. Were there any celebrity types, uh, of course this was a small town.

GC: Well, at one time we, we've had two or three people in Congress from here and James Edward Rumsey was in Congress in the 1830s from here and could have been there longer but about 1839, if I remember correctly, his two children died here while he was in Congress and he refused to run again. It kinda upset him on that. Then later on, a man, uh, I believe he was originally from Central City, but he's buried out here in Greenville, so I don't know where he lived in between time. Uh, in the early 1900s was a member of Congress from here. Um, I'll have to think about what his name was. Well that will have to come back to me later. Right now I can't think of it. Anyhow, he, he always, among the things he would promise, I know, was that he would have a new bridge built, or try, to have a new bridge built across the Mudd River at Rochester. And just as regular as they opened a session of Congress, he introduced a bill for a new bridge across that river. It was never built, but at least he kept his promise and introduced the bill. It has been built since his death. Um, but um, the old bridge there, I remember, you went up and across and down and you didn't know whether something was going to meet you on that little ole narrow bridge or not. Um, because the, um, the floor part was higher than where you started up on it, so much that you couldn't see the other side. Now then, if you are familiar with the road from uh, Browder to Rochester, I mean to, to Morgantown, you go over the modern day bridge that crosses there at the mouth of Mudd River. But the old one was something else.

JA: When do you remember going on that?

GC: Oh, that was, Lord I have no idea what years that was. It was years and years and years ago, because the present bridge has been built there since, uh, since 1935 but I don't know have any idea what year. It's a modern bridge up there. Of course at one time Rochester was a very prominent little place, but with the loss of river traffic it doesn't rise quite as high as it did then.

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JA: What, what about, what do you remember about the depression era when it first hit? And how did that effect, how do you recall it effecting you and the people around you?

GC: It effected everybody here, because , uh, the business, the coal mines closed down. There was no money. I, I got out of high school. Well, the depression, of course, started officially in October 19n29 with the collapse of the stock market and gradually got worse over a period of years. I got out of high school in 19n32. I was a lucky one; I got a job almost immediately with a local grocery store where I made the big sum of a dollar a day working from seven in the morning til six at night except on Saturday when I worked til 8:30. But, there were many men with families who didn't even have that kind of a job and a whole house full of kids to feed. And, over, at about that time, I don't know just when they started they had a program called Civil Works Administration, later it became WPA. But, um, even ahead of Civil Works Administration, the government passed out checks to people who were out of work to buy groceries with. They were allowed two dollars a week for groceries for a family. But, you could get an awful lot of groceries in those days for two dollars. Today, they don't make a 24 pound sack of flour. You'll start with 5, 10, 25 and beyond that I don't know what the, uh. But in those days you had a 24 pound sack of flour and then you had a hundred pound sack of flour and so on. A 24 pound sack of flour at that grocery where I was working was 39 cents for 24 pounds. That's a pretty good price.

JA: Pretty fair.

GC: Uh, a better grade was 39 cents and the best grade was 49 cents. That was the best grade; it was Gold Medal flour. It was the best grade, I remember that much. There was one of them that was called Snow White or White Mountain. I remember it had a picture of a mountain with snow on it, on the top of it. You could buy ten pounds of navy beans for 29 cents. Today, when I came back here in '73, one pound of navy beans was 99 cents.

JA: How much could you get `em for, 10 pounds?

GC: Ten pounds was 29. I know I was working at the warehouse there when I came back here. Something came up about prices one day, and when I told some of the people that worked there that I had sold many a navy bean at ten pounds 29 they didn't believe me. But later on I was able to take a 1943 or 4 newspaper down and their prices were still less. (chuckles) They were convinced. A pound of cheese was ten cents. You pay, what, two dollars for a pound of cheese today. And the merchant

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that I worked for bought cheese in a half-railroad car loads at a time and it came in five-pound blocks in little ole wooden boxes. And six boxes baled together, and we would stack that in the back of the store. About the time we got down to the last two or three rows of the cheese, it was nice and ripe and he lost money because everybody in the store would go around gnawing on cheese as we waited on customers. It was good. I haven't tasted any cheese like that in a long time. But other things were in proportion. A loaf of bread was a nickel. And that was, um we, we had bread, a bakery right over, not directly across the street here but in the block across the street and you could buy a loaf of bread there for a nickel a loaf.

JA: About what time, about what year would this have been, all these prices?

GC: In the 30's.

JA: The 30's.

GC: In the 30's. And some of them went on up to the war, til after or to the end of World War II, because, uh, the depression really didn't end until about, um, until about 194-, well it didn't begin to end until about 19n40. And, then the war came along in '41 and they had, um, what did they call that, the Office of Price Administration which froze prices at the previous, whatever the level was when the office was opened why that's what they went on all during the war. So that's why beans happened to still be ten pounds for 29 cents in 1943 or 44. That was during the war years and the OPA had held the price down on them.

JA: Were you...? (Interrupted) Oh, I'm sorry....

GC: No that's alright. Go ahead.

JA: No, there's something I wanted to ask you about. It's probably way before your time. But, do you recall as a boy, or as even as a teenager, any Civil War veterans that were still around?

GC: My granddaddy was a Civil War veteran.

JA: Was he?

GC: Oh yeah. He died when I was five years old and, of course, I don't remember much about hearing him talk about it except one thing: he frequently

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talked about the Battle Above the Clouds which I never could, as a kid, visualize. Now then I know what he was talking about because he was at the Battle of Lookout Mountain which was above the clouds in Tennessee. But, he was at Shiloh, which was one of the big battles in the South, and then I don't know what else besides that and Lookout Mountain. Now I have pictures of him and a group, people from here going to some kind of, uh, reunion, or something, at Shiloh in 1909. And, uh, then I've got other pictures of some of the old soldiers who from Greenville and this area. Some, not all of them are identified. I don't know who some of them are, but I do know some.

JA: That would have been about sixty years, or more.

GC: Yeah, the war ended in '65 and 1909 would be, well it would be fifty, fiftieth anniversary or something like that, fifty-fifth, or something like that. They went down there. Of course by that time the old battle grounds had been made into more or less of a park area. And one of the people who went, who was down there at some time or other, was a local druggist, who was what somebody called a camera bug. And, he made lots of pictures around in through the eln(?). Years ago I borrowed his negatives and got pictures where this one fell and that one fell. Where this group was and that group was, so I got a very interesting collection on Shiloh. But, uh, most, as you say, an awful lot of the, by the time I could remember much, most of the Civil War soldiers were dead. Or, or, past being around where I would be with them.

JA: What did you father do?

GC: He was a carpenter.

JA: Carpenter.

GC: Well, carpenter, painter, and paper hanger. He was a general, he did all sorts of stuff like that.

JA: Hmm. What, what, let's get into the 30's. What, uh, of course at that time you had Roosevelt who came in.

GC: He came in in '33, elected in '32.

JA: You had, uh, let's see, big flood in '37. Of course that was a big time for you personally, because I'm sure you went to college.

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GC: I was not in college the year the flood came on. I was back at home. I remember very distinctly the problems we had here. Greenville was totally surrounded by water. You could go to Central City on the north; you could not get to South Carrollton. We could go about 2 ½ miles east. We could not get to Drakesboro because Pond Creek was a ½ a mile wide out there. We could south as far as Pond Creek, um, on what's now 181. We could west from here to Pond River and then, uh, you could look across the water there, for what looked like about 3 or 4 miles wide. So, we were isolated for at least two weeks here, totally. No mail, no trains, no nothing coming in here. And, the store shelves were pretty well cleaned off by the time the flood was over.

JA: That sounds scary.

GC: The first train that came in was an IC train coming from the west. And while I didn't see it, I heard them talk about it, there was somebody on the cowcatcher in front. The water was still over the tracks and they had somebody feeling ahead to see if the track had been washed out down at Pond River. I wouldn't have been on that train for anything. (chuckles) But, uh, they didn't have that kind of a problem at least. But some of the mail that came in on that train, or from some other source, I don't know where it happened, but some of the mail was water soaked. It had been in water, in a car where water had gotten into it somewhere along the way. Or, it was a weird time. My mother was in bed sick at the time. Of course there was no television at the time; you had radio going constantly, particularly in rural stations and all you would hear was "Send the boat," "Send the boat," "Send the boat." So and so's on top of a roof or trying to get out a window. Go.

JA: Were you worried?

GC: Hmm?

JA: Were you worried?

GC: Sure everybody was worried! (chuckles) Sure. Are you familiar with Louisville?

KA: A little bit.

GC: You know where Fourth and Broadway is, and the Brown Hotel building. I don't know whether it's still there or not, but when I used to go to Louisville for years

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there was a mark about as high as I could reach on the side, on the side, the corner of the Brown Hotel, where the water level was. And, they were going up and down Broadway during the flood in boats. And, then later, I worked in Louisville for a period of time during the war. I lived out on South Third Street at, near Fourth and Oak. And, the water didn't get into the houses there, but it got up into the yards. There was a little rise for the houses and the water was out in the streets but it didn't get into the houses except to the extent that it backed into the basements, through, uh, uh, drain lines. But the upper floors, the main floors were alright. But if you wanted to get out of there, you had to go in a boat. And across the street was Norton's Infirmary or Norton's Hospital, and I don't know what happened on their ground level. They were lower than the houses across the street and maybe water got into the, uh, I'm not going to say it did or didn't. But, I would think it was a possibility that it could have happened.

JA: What, uh, what do, do you remember any other, what significant local events in the 30's you, that you can think of?

GC: No, again, we had some coal strikes which got to be fairly common. Um, off hand I don't remember. Now, later, something will pop up that I will remember, but right now I don't.

JA: What, uh, what were you doing when Pearl Harbor happened? When you first heard about it?

GC: I was working at Western, um, and I was, I heard a student. I say a student, a male newspaper boy coming up the street yelling, J, uh, now wait a minute. What was it he was saying? "Japs Attack Pearl Harbor!" Something like that. I don't remember what it was. But, anyhow when I went down and got a newspaper to see what it was all about. However, the attack had come on Sat., on the day before. But, uh, I hadn't had a radio on and didn't realize it until Monday. But, uh, then that began to change everything at Western, very shortly. While a lot of them had to go into the service and for a period of time there, there were very few regular students on Western's campus. But, the Air Force commandeered what was the only two dormitories they had at that time and moved in an Air Force unit there for training program on the campus. So we had, they had more of us on the campus but they were not too many regular enrolled students. The ones that were there were usually somebody there who failed to pass their service. But, uh, I think that Air Force group was there just about a year or year and a half and then they pulled out and used 'em somewhere else. I don't know where.

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JA: What was it you did at Western, again?

GC: I worked for the Kentucky Building, which is the museum and library of Kentucky materials.

JA: Oh boy. What, what do you remember about the war ending? What was that like?

GC: (chuckles) I was in Greenville when the war ended and working here with the Health Department but had gone, well wait a minute. When, when the war with Germany ended, it was in May, if I remember correctly.

JA: I think so.

GC: No, wait a minute. It must have, anyhow my brother had been in Europe and had come home on what they called rotation, or whatever, and he was scheduled to go back and had gone to Camp Attlebury in Indiana for re-assignment and the notice came through that the war in Europe was over. He had enough points that he was discharged right then and came back. Then when the war with Japan was over in August I had gone with some friends of mine, or a friend, I don't remember who, but somebody. We had driven to Bowling Green and, um, somewhere along the way I heard that the war was over and that gasoline rationing had immediately been lifted, and I pulled into a service station and I said, "Is this report on the gasoline correct?" And he said, "You can buy all you want." So, I said, "Fill it up." And that's the first time I had been able to say that since 1941. That was in '45, four years, so that's my main recollection of the war ending in Europe.

JA: Gas rationing.

GC: Gas rationing was over.

JA: How did that work?

GC: Depending on what kind of work you did, or what you did, you were given a book of coupons, and, um, with one coupon say, if you didn't have war work of some kind, you're coupon was an A book and you were allowed three gallons of gas a week which probably wouldn't get you any further than from here to Drakesboro and back in the cars that they had there. But then somebody was in a certain type of work was given a B book and that gave them more gasoline, or a C book was more. And if you

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were a trucker hauling vital foods or something like that, they were given T stamps, and with a T stamp you just practically had unlimited. Actually there was never, from what I've been told, a shortage of gasoline, but there was a shortage of rubber for tires and so on and they just didn't want people driving so they cut it down as best they could by rationing the gasoline and tires both. Um, in fact, if you, when we got into war, if you had more than five tires, you had to turn in all but five. And, um, I had, as it happened, a couple of extra ones. They weren't very good ones, but I had to turn them in anyhow supposedly to get, they were going to pay you whatever they were worth but I never saw anything out of that. And then, uh, at one time, I had started back to Bowling Green from here, while I was working over here. And, the tire that I thought was the very best one I had blew out all over the highway up near Penrod, Kentucky, so I put my spare on and came back home. I didn't make the trip to Bowling Green. I went down and put in an application for a new tire, and since I was working for the Health Department I was eligible for tires so I got two new ones at one time. I thought I was really sailing then.

JA: What, uh, what was, were you still listening to the radio then? Was radio still...?

GC: Yeah. Well, I, I never was a real radio fan because, ah, most of them, it's just like it is today, there was too much advertising and not enough of anything else.

JA: Even then?

GC: Oh, even then. They broke in for this, that, and the other. Not, not quite as bad as they do today on television. I don't think. But, and there were some good programs on, on radio, even I would say better ones in the long run than, uh, what you get on television but you didn't see the characters. You had to work your imagination for what was going on then and maybe it was a little better in that sense. But, um...a good music program I enjoyed and there were some good music programs. As a matter of fact I wouldn't be a bit surprised if I had the, uh, New York Philharmonic on Sunday afternoon when Pearl Harbor was hit. But, probably stepped out when they broke in to say that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, because I don't remember hearing it.

JA: Hmm.

GC: But I, I usually tried to get that on Sunday, so chances are I probably had the thing going then.

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JA: What, uh, what was the reaction to nuclear age, uh, you know when the bomb dropped on Hiroshima and so forth, what was the reaction of (to) that? What did people think about that back then? That must have seemed almost incredible.

GC: Well it was, but I don't remember a great deal about it. I do remember some of the comments I heard later on when they were talking about keeping it a secret from other countries. I remember talking to somebody, and I said "Well, if people over here know how to make it, they've got just as smart people in these other countries and it won't be long until the others will figure out how it was done. And, that is what has happened. Um, as a matter of fact the atomic bomb over here was created primarily by Germans. (chuckles) And when the war ended, Russia picked up all the German scientists and took them to Russia that were in the eastern half of the German section. So the same scientists could be working that created the buzz bomb that made London so unhappy, the same scientists that did that could have gone right to work for Russia, under pressure of course, but even so. It ended, and they got the bomb very shortly, as you well know.

JA: Were there saloons here in Greenville in the '40s?

GC: No, never, we haven't had saloons here since I can remember. There have been saloons in time of course, but, no. When beer came back in '33, off hand I can't tell you what places in town sold it except there was a poolroom here in town that had a lunch counter with it and Tony Barger was on the lunch counter and he sold beer there and I remember that in particular but I'm sure there were other places that handled beer until it went out of business here.

JA: Let me ask you, are there any things I haven't asked you about that you think are significant, and that you need to mention. Things you experienced...

GC: Well, I told you when we started this business. That kind of thing I cannot do.

JA: Yeah.

GC: I'm sure that would be a whole lot of things that could be brought up, but, um,

JA: What about motion pictures? Do you remember the first one you saw?

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GC: No. I remember the old theater, but I don't remember the first motion picture that I ever saw. As a kid, we went to the movies I guess at least once a week. But, I don't, uh, well don't change them much more than that. They didn't have that many going around. And, uh, so you see one, one week. Now when they changed them, they did have a different show on Saturday from what they would have through the week because Saturday was the day that the farmers all came to town and they nearly always had Westerns on Saturday. And, um...