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Interview with Rec Childress at his home just west of Cub Run on H'way 88, September 14, 1977. Jim Brown and Judith Schottenfeld. Comments: we missed a few minutes in flipping the tape, but got him to go back over the same topics. Tape also includes what might ought to be pre-interview preparation.

J. Brown: ...what we want to do is just to, maybe, for 45 minutes or so, if you had that much time, was just...

Rec Childress: ...well...

J. Brown: ...ask you some questions about it. And some of the stuff that we want to get on the tape is stuff you told us last time.

Rec Childress: Yeah.

J. Brown: So if I ask you a question or two that, that I asked you last time, you wouldn't mind answering that again, would you?

Red Childress: Why no, no. I don't know--now this is something that I don't know nothing about. Youall will have to...

Mrs. Childress: This is new, now, to him. But he didn't mind it, you know, when we made it to send ti to the girls--and he said yesterday, he says, well I wish they'd ask me what questions they wanted to and let me answer them the best I could.

J. Brown: Yeah. Well the purpose, the main purpose of it is, our project is, to learn all we can about the basket making of the region, from making the baskets to giving them to the merchant, to making that big trip.

Rec Childress: Yeah.

J. Brown: And that's the main purpose of it.

Rec Childress: And you don't, you're not interested in nothing else besides the baskets?

J. Brown: Well, we're interested, but for the purpose of the project, that's about all we've got time to do.

Rec Childress: Yeah.

J. Brown: We stopped...ah...

Rec Childress: Well, the reason I asked is this: I never got to tell you the other day--before that, ah, people around here... Now my father and my uncles, I've heard them talk about it--before, before they started this basket business, they, they made grindstones, and hauled them out and sell them.

Mrs. Childress: Well, they're not interested in that.

J. Brown: Yeah, well I...

J. Schottenfeld: We are...

Rec Childress: They was heavy, you know, and you couldn't haul very many.

J. Brown: I'm interested that they used to have a long distance trade going on before the baskets...

Rec Childress: Yeah...

J. Brown: ...and then they got into baskets from that.

Rec Childress: Yeah, that....

Mrs. Childress: The grindstones...

Rec Childress: People got to making the baskets, and they took that up, you know...

J. Schottenfeld: Did they ever sell them, when they went on the trip, did they sell grindstones and baskets together?

I. A.
II. A.

Rec Childress: No, no, they didn't take them then. That was, that was done over with. They'd done qit that. But that was before the basket business really started.

Mrs. Childress: (unintelligible)

J. Brown: Could you estimate how long...when that would have been?

Rec Childress: Ah, no, I, I couldn't, because that must have been, ah... that must have been 75 years ago or longer.

J. Brown: I see. Well.

Mrs. Childress: That was your daddy's time, Rec.

Rec Childress: When my daddy was young, before he even started out I guess with baskets.

J. Brown: Let me ask you first off, what people around, ah, what kind of people made baskets, and what they made them out of...?

Rec Childress: Well, they made them out of...I don't know if I told you the other day or not, but they made them out of white oak. Ah--do you know what kind of a tree a white oak is?

J. Brown: Yeah.

Rec Childress: Well, they made them out of white oak. And, ah, cut this, to cut this tree to make splits, they needed to be about as big around, they liked to have them about as big around as that stovepipe there, or probably a little bit larger: 6 inches through or 7. Something like that. And they needed to be smooth--and some of that would rive good. They called it riving the splits out. They'd, they would split it in two, half and half...

J. Brown: Longways...

Rec Childress: Yeah, the long way. And then they'd, then they would split that half in two and each half, that made four pieces. That's the way, that's the way they started, working it out. And then they'd take the heart of it out, they'd rive the heart of it out. They'd have a free and a, and a--some kind of a maul made out of wood. And they'd take that heart out and then they'd get these down, you know, to, wide enough to make splits out of.

Mrs. Childress: To narrow strips.

Rec Childress: And they would have them, ah, I, they, they would have them, I'd say, splits 5 or 6 foot long.

Mrs. Childress: Umm hmmm.

Rec Childress: But for the hoops--there had to be 2 main hoops, you know, for the, for the basket. And that was, ah--they got bigger timber for that, and lots of times they used hickory for that because it made, it would, good smooth hickory would make good hoops.

J. Brown: What made a good basket and what made a bad one? Just the finness of the work, or...?

Rec Childress: Well, the way it was made, the way it was made.

Mrs. Childress: ...and your timber.

Rec Childress: If you had a good hoop--of course part of this hoop made your handle, you see. And, ah, if you had a good hoop...and then they had to be wrapped where they...well, I don't know. If I had two round things I could show you. One hoop went inside the other one...

J. Brown: We've seen them made, so we kind of have...

Rec Childress: Yeah, they cut them, they knowed how to cut them a certain length if they wanted a bushel basket. If they wanted a half a bushel, well it had to be shorter. And, if they wrapped them good and made good ribs--they called ribs to go in them--and put them in these good--if

IA.

II.A.

III.A.I.

Rec Childress: (cont) they, ah, if they was trying to make a good basket and knowed how to make it, and was trying to they could make a good basket. But some of them, well, it's like people would be about farming or something, they was a little shoddy about it. They'd, they'd weave them splits in there kind of loose, you know. And, ah...

J. Schottenfeld: Can I ask you, did some of the baskets that were taken on the route--when people bought them--do you think the people that bought them knew, would they, a good basket from a bad basket?

Rec Childress: Well, ah, most usually, most usually they did, they could tell you. You didn't fool people too much on them.

J. Schottenfeld: But would you say that you knew that you could tell differences better than the people that were buying them?

Rec Childress: Oh yes, yes. I could tell a good basket...(unintelligible).. as quick as I looked at it.

J. Brown: On our last..., on our last visit, you told about a family that made the best baskets around.

Rec Childress: Yeah, that was Beeler, now, that lived down close to a little place called Roseburg (?), down below Cub Run.

J. Brown: They just spent more time on them, or were better at it...?

Rec Childress: It took him longer to make a basket. Now I told you, you know, that he got more for it, then, about 75 cents, a good full bushel. And some of them would be a little skimpy on the bushel size, they'd make them just a little smaller. But he made a good full bushel, and he took pains with it, and it was a nice basket and a good basket.

Mrs. Childress: Each, each maker, Rec--you forgot this--shaped its own basket.

Rec Childress: Yeah, and there wasn't very many people who would shape that basket just exactly alike. Some of, some of them, for the sides of the basket, they'd let it flare out a little bit more; some of them would draw them in a little. They made them, they made them a little bit of difference in them.

J. Brown: Was that for, for prettiness?

Rec Childress: ...and whenever you was a-weaving these splits in there, why you needed to, well, you started and you see you go under one rib and over another one. Start under here and go over here and, and, like that, like putting a bottom in a chair.

J. Schottenfeld: Mr. Childress, were the names of the individual basket makers known to the people that bought the baskets? Did they have a reputation, you know...?

Rec Childress: Ah, the names that made the baskets?

J. Schottenfeld: They--you knew, you knew?

Rec Childress: They, they didn't know. We knew most of the people around because we lived here where they made them. But the people that bought the baskets...

J. Schottenfeld: They never knew...

Rec Childress: Now they knew my dad, because he'd, he'd, ah, hauled these baskets out and sold them so long, that they knew him. But they didn't know the basket's...why some of them thought they was made in factories, some people did. And they was just made in the little poor country homes.

J. Schottenfeld: So, so you would say they just wanted the basket, they didn't care where it came from...

Rec Childress: They just wanted a basket. And a farmer wanted a basket to carry corn in, to his horses, hogs. And women folks wanted baskets for, smaller baskets for egg baskets.

IV.A.1.

IV.A.2.

IV.D.

IV.C.

A. J. Brown: Around here, could you pretty well tell who'd made a basket by looking at them?

Rec Childress: Well...

J. Brown: Was the shapes that different?

Rec Childress: Well, ah, no, not too much, other than this particular man that I was speaking about. It was no trouble to tell his baskets, 'cause there was nobody else in the country made one like it.

J. Brown: Did everybody, did every family pretty much make baskets, or was it just certain...

Rec Childress: No, no, they didn't (unintelligible)..they was a lot of families didn't make, wasn't there? (turning to wife)

Mrs. Childress: My parents made them.

Rec Childress: She can make baskets.

Mrs. Childress: I can make them.

Rec Childress: I never made one in my life. I never made them. And my dad never did, as many as he sold. He sold thousands.

Mrs. Childress: Is that on? (pointing to recorder)

J. Schottenfeld: Yeah. Don't be afraid.

J. Brown: You want to check it? (in a worried tone, to Judith)

J. Schottenfeld: Don't be afraid...

D. Mrs. Childress: I had four older sisters, and I was real little. And one of my sisters could shape her basket like Mr. Beeler, he's talking about. And she made the prettiest basket of the four sisters. Somehow the way they pull their ribs up. See, one hoop was round and the other one goes through this one. And then you put your ribs down here.

Rec Childress: Your side ribs was round, you know.

Mrs. Childress: Somehow she shaped it prettier...

Rec Childress: ...and the ones that went through the center of the basket in the bottom...

J. Brown: ...was flat.

Rec Childress: They was about that wide (approx 3/4") and flat. But they had to all be sharp on the end.

Mrs. Childress: Real sharp.

C. Rec Childress: Because where these 2 hoops went together...they left one, ah, one hoop, you see, would stick up about that far (approx 6"), that was your handle. Where they went together, they was wrapped with splits around there. And, well they got them the way they wanted them. And then they, ah, would take a...what was it they called them, a awl?

Mrs. Childress: My daddy called it a pegging awl.

Rec Childress: A pegging awl. A piece of wood with something like, like, if you had a nail drove in it, you know, and the end of it filed off sharp.

J. Schottenfeld: To make the hole.

Rec Childress: And they'd punch a hole in there, to punch it, to stick this, the end of this split in. And that's the way they was started. And then, you see, as you went to weaving your splits in, every split you put in there made that solider, you see.

J. Brown: Would you say you...the families were poorer in the community that made baskets?

Rec Childress: Well, most all of them were, yeah.

J. Brown: Yeah?

Rec Childress: People that was, ah...

J. Brown: That was a cash crop?

Rec Childress: If they was, if they was, if it was a person that, you know, made a pretty good living, they didn't fool with it.

J. Schottenfeld: Do you think that the basket makers, ummm, were just regular members of the community, or were they...

Rec Childress: Oh yes, they was just people that lived here, just...

J. Schottenfeld: They weren't no better or any worse than anybody else?

Rec Childress: No, I wouldn't think so, would you? (turning to wife)

Mrs. Childress: oh no, unh-uh. Some of the best families...

Rec Childress: They asked me the day they was down here, and I said some of them was kind of looked down on a little bit by, by people...

Mrs. Childress: Some of the best families made baskets. Now these Reelers that he was talking about...(unintelligible)... But most of the people then raised what they eat. They canned it, fried it, raised their potatoes at home...

J. Schottenfeld: Yeah, we heard that there were no bugs in those days. That's why we remember. (referring to conversation the week before with Rec Childress that wasn't taped, our initial meeting when Liz Harzoff was with us).

Mrs. Childress: And, ah, so what these, ah... They didn't have very much money crop, see, when they do today. And then their, the baskets that they made, well, they could buy something out of the store like cloth, see, and my mother sewed for all her girls. And they could buy their cloth, sugar, coffee, something they didn't, couldn't raise. So that away they lived well.

Rec Childress: And a good, ah, people that was used to working on baskets-- now I had two, I had 3 brothers that made them, older than me. And they could make, if they started tolerable early of a morning, and worked on to night, and their children, they'd learn to put those splits in, or weave them, they called it, in. Why they could if they tried, they could make 3 bushel baskets in a day. Well, that's 35 cents apiece, and that was a little over a dollar, you see. And a dollar--if you made a dollar then, you couldn't have got out and got a day's work for over fifty cents, for it. And, ah...

Mrs. Childress: Just wasn't any work.

Rec Childress: They would, they's start maybe making these baskets on Monday, and by the weekend, Friday or Saturday, they'd haul them off to the store and, and...sometimes they'd have maybe two dozen baskets. And...

J. Brown: Was there one store that a family would trade with? Was...

Rec Childress: Well no, different stores bought them. Different stores.

J. Brown: If you were a family selling them, would you shop around and find the best price, or would you go to the one you shopped?

Rec Childress: Yes, oh yes, that's what my dad done. Of course then, I just went with him. I didn't buy them. 'Course later on, I got to where that, after I was grown, I got to where I'd go and buy some and sell, haul them out and sell them. Whenever I first started he's the one that done the buying. And I've seen him go to places, ah, stores--they was two stores in Grayson County, what was called Pierman (?), up to the right of Wax. And one of them was A. J. Clemens, and A. J. Higdon, that run the 2 stores. They bought lots of baskets. They, they made them over there, too. And he went to buy the basket, and if they was a little high on them, he wouldn't buy them. If he thought they was worth 35 cents apiece and they asked 40, why, he didn't buy them.

J. Brown: A family that made baskets, did they ordinarily trade these baskets to the local store?

A. 1.

A. 4.

B. 1.

A. 1.

6
Rec Childress: Yeah. They had to. You didn't sell them to people around through the country, because, ah--oh, there might be somebody once in a while that didn't make them that would need a basket that would buy one. That would happen...

J. Schottenfeld: Like a neighbor...?

Rec Childress: A neighbor once in a while, that didn't make them, you know, and needed a basket. And practically everybody used baskets then. To carry stuff in.

J. Brown: The grocer took them in exchange for food, or...

Rec Childress: Yeah, yeah, he wouldn't pay much money on them, no, he wouldn't pay much. Sometimes, if they told him they needed a little change awful bad, he may have paid him a little; but he made them mostly take it in trade. See, he made a profit on his goods, and, ah--no, I've knowed of, I knowed of, ah, A. J. Clemens at Piermont (?) just having a... he had a longstorehouse, and a loft in it. And I've seen him have it full, and a side room built all along the side of it.

J. Brown: Just hundreds of baskets?

Rec Childress: ...and, and he didn't want to fool with them. He didn't know how to take them out and sell them. But he had money tied up in them, and my dad would go there. He'd sometimes send him word, he wanted him to come over, he wanted to sell him his baskets. And they wouldn't get together on the price, maybe. And finally, why, he'd come down a little bit, and they'd finally get together on them, you know, and buy the baskets.

J. Brown: Would every store around here accept baskets in trade for goods?

Rec Childress: Yeah, yeah, all that I've heard of...well, no, no, I don't believe old man Gerald's, I don't believe, bought baskets.

Mrs. Childress: No, he didn't buy any.

Rec Childress: There was one store in Cub Run, an old man owned it, I don't think he bought them. And Jeff _____ (?), did he buy them?

Mrs. Childress: No, he didn't either.

Rec Childress: No, no, all the stores didn't buy them. Didn't want to fool with them.

Mrs. Childress: Most of the places did.

Rec Childress: It took room for them, you see. No, they all didn't buy them. But some of them would buy all that they could get, because they felt like that my dad, or somebody else, would buy them.

J. Brown: Was there a season your dad bought them, or all through the year?

Rec Childress: Oh, they made them all through the year.

J. Brown: Did your dad buy them just before a trip, or did your dad accumulate baskets all year?

Rec Childress: No, he would, ah, somewhere, whenever he got ready to go off on a trip, which that was mostly what he followed--he would farm a little bit, but the farming didn't amount to much. He'd go off and leave a cornfield and let it grow up, you know, and take off a load of baskets. But there was, as I said, there was stores in Grayson county that bought them, and some here in Hart county, and some of them would have baskets all the time. They was never without. If one place didn't have them, another one would.

J. Brown: I see.

Rec Childress: Because they was buying them all the time, you see.

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J. Brown: Aside from your father, ah, how many other people in the community hauled these baskets and sold them out of the area?

I.B.1.
Rec Childress: Well, I had, let's see, I had Uncle Sim and Uncle Felix and Uncle Bob, that was three. Each one of them, each one of them would haul these baskets out and sell them. But as I told you that day down here, they didn't usually make long trips. A week or ten days; most of the time they just took one load. Sometimes, one, one of my uncles, he would... he made baskets all the time; and sometimes he'd go to making them and he wouldn't take them to the store. He'd make them 'till he got a load, then he took them out and sold them himself. He got, of course, more out of it, you see, that way.

J. Brown: Outside the family, were there anybody that was, ah...

Rec Childress: Yeah, they was, ah, I told you of one man, Webb. Once in a while he'd go. He didn't go too much. He didn't make too many trips. But whenever he went, he had a big pair of mules, and he'd have the longest basket frame on his wagon of anybody I ever seen go out of this country with.

J. Schottenfeld: He didn't have one of those spring wagons?

Rec Childress: He didn't have the spring wagon, he had a road wagon. And he'd make a frame I guess 20 foot long, and he'd take a load of them out when he went, you see...

J. Schottenfeld: Could you help me out a little and explain the road wagon again, I really have no idea...

Rec Childress: A road wagon? Well, ah, a road wagon was wooden axles with, I don't know if it was cast or iron thimbles on each end of it. Course they was made in factories, you see. They was a factory in Owensboro, made the Owensboro wagon. And, ah, they would make them, and they was all bolted together and fixed, you know, and ah...

Mrs. Childress: Had spokes in them.

I.B.3.
Red Childress: And then a rim...and then a hub. To make the wheel, there was first a hub made. And they could make them different sizes. They'd have what you call a three inch hub and some of them two and three-quarters. And the 3 inch was a bigger heavier wagon. And ah, and ah they would have places in these hubs for spokes, and they would then...ah, at the end of these spokes they had to be the same all the way around and then they was--the end of the spoke was cut down about that long and about, something like an inch around. And a rim fastened on to that. And then after that rim was put on there, why then there was a steel tire put on there about a half inch thick. And they would carry, oh, 3000 pounds or more.

J. Brown: This was the common wagon for jauling heavy goods?

Rec Childress: Yeah, yeah, this was the common wagon for hauling heavy goods. That was, that was the farm wagon that you hauled off young tobacco on, or hauled up wood, or gathered corn, or all that stuff. But this spring wagon, the spring wagon, where it started at was in the cities where, where milk wagons and bread wagons and even freight wagons...I've been in Louisville over 50 years ago when the street cars was there and a lot of merchandise would come in on boats. And they'd have these spring wagons that was, oh, they was big and heavy. A team we had couldn't have pulled one, hardly. And they'd have these big, we called them Percheron horses, and that's the way their freight was jauled into the city. And, but... why my dad liked a spring wagon, they was springs made, put on axles, and then a bed made on that, and it was more...did you ever see a buggy?

J. Schottenfeld: Yeah.

Rec Childress: Well, they had springs under them, you see.

J. Schottenfeld: So it was more comfortable to sit on.

Rec Childress: ...and they was much easier to ride in. And that's what my dad--a road wagon was rough. If you went over a rough road, which you had plenty of them of, then, and jolty, it was rough.

J. Brown: Was there anybody that made a trip as long as your dad that you heard of?

Rec Childress: Nobody that I ever knowed of, nobody that I ever knowed of. Nothing but my dad. Some way or another, I don't know, the others didn't like to be away from home that long or something. I don't know what. But that was his life. He liked it, and, ah, he followed it just like a man... whenever he was out on a trip, his mind was on that, and in fact, his mind was on selling baskets even when he was home, he was studying about fixing up and going on a trip. They was an old man down here used to be, to live close to Cub Run, that made the remark one time, he said, "well Elijah Tom Childress," he says, "knows every hog path in the state of Kentucky." And it was a life that suited him. And he didn't care--course he'd have these wagons, and, I guess we was made fun of lots of times, no doubt about that, by people. A covered wagon and a pair of mules, and they wasn't in too good of shape. Course he fed them good enough, but you take mules out on a trip like that, and drive them, you know, for a month and it's pretty hard on them.

J. Brown: What age...

Rec Childress: The longest two trips...we made two trips south, I told you about them. As far down as we ever went was Brownsville, Tennessee--that's 40 miles this side of Memphis. It took us 42 days to make them trips, each trip.

J. Brown: What age man was your father when he started making those trips, would you guess? *(Elijah Tom, or E.T. Childress)*

Rec Childress: I would guess that he was about, around 20 years old, or something like that, because I've heard him tell...he said when he was 18 years old, his dad and mother wasn't able to work, and he went to trying to support them. And, the summer that he was eighteen, or spring that he was 18 years old--his birthday was in March, wasn't it, 8th March?

Mrs. Childress: Believe it was in April. No, it was in March.

Rec Childress: 8th March.

J. Brown: You remember what year he was born?

Rec Childress: He went to Illinois and got a job to work. Went to Beardstown, Illinois. And, I know after we got to hauling these baskets out and, and ah, with... I told you, we finally got to hauling them on the last with T-model trucks, after cars got here, you know, it got a little bit dangerous to get out with wagons. And we went by the place where he worked when he was 18 years old. And then he was about, ah, oh, 65 or 70 I guess.

J. Brown: What year would he have been born in?

Rec Childress: Well--I don't remember what year he was born in...

Mrs. Childress: Wait a minute and I, I can tell you. He was 75 when he passed away, wasn't he?

Rec Childress: I've heard him tell this much--I've heard him say that, that his mother told him after he got big enough to know...that, ah--all little babies back them times wore long, they'd put long dresses on them. Boy baby or girl baby, they'd put long dresses on them. And he said that, ah, his mother said that he was a baby whenever the Civil War broke, because, said that her brother was in the war, and he come home one day, and come whenever he was baby with long dresses on.

I.C. J. Brown: So he made these trips several years before you went with him.
Rec Childress: Oh, oh yes, he'd been going for years and years before I ever went with him.

J. Brown: What--how old were you when you made your first trip, and what was it like?

Rec Childress: Best I remember I was 15 or 16 years old. Well, I enjoyed it. It was new to me, because I'd never been no farther than Munfordville or Bonnieville.

J. Brown: What would it have been like from start to finish, when you loaded up, and how you went?

Rec Childress: Well, we, ah, we had the spring wagons, and we took, he took a buggy and put me and my uncle in a wagon, spring wagon. And we started out, and, ah, we went up through... We lived over here on what you call Cane Run Creek, then. And went up through by Priceville and Bonnieville, and up to where the road--you know where Sonora's at?

J. Brown: Seen the name...

Rec Childress: Yeah, he turned right there and went up through Hodgenville. So the first night that I ever camped out was about 3-4 miles the other side of Hodgenville, and camped on the left hand side of the road. And the woman said--the house is still standing, we once in a while are up in there, and the place still looks as natural as it did then--and the woman, whenever dad asked her about us camping in the lot--it was on Saturday night--and she said, "well, I'm a widow woman," and said, "my, I have 2 grown sons, but," says "they're gone out running around, you know, on Saturday night, and," she says, "I guess it would be alright." She says, "I hate to turn you down." Says, "you all go ahead." And of course there was plenty of water there and hay and things. And some time in the night they come in. And they was drunk. Because at that time whiskey never had been voted out of Kentucky. And they was open saloons anywhere you went, and even country stores handled whiskey. Two dollars a gallon, 25 or 30 cents for a half a pint. And they'd been to New Haven, and they come in drunk. And they kind of fussed around a little bit, you know, and rared around a little, because the wagons were there and they didn't know it. But they finally went on in and went to bed, and that, there wasn't no more to that. So the next morning we got up, was Sunday morning, and course after we felt like they didn't care about us being around, dad said, "Well, we'll, we'll hook up and we'll drive down to the foot of Mulrose (?) hill." And we did that. I don't know if you was ever around that road, or not, and, ah--so we started down that hill and we met some tourists in a great old big long car, I don't know what kind it was now--and, we started down that hill and they stopped us. And, ah, I don't know really what they stopped us for--maybe they might have bought some baskets--and they wanted to take a picture of us. And, so we let them take a picture of us, standing by the side of the wagon. And some, somebody around, some of my relations around the country's got that picture now, but I don't remember where it's at. And we drove on down to the foot of this hill, and its, ah, right down a deep hollow. And there was a man by the name of Bradley, old man, lived there. And my dad had been stopping there for years with him. So he pulled in there and stayed over till Monday morning. And then, the next morning, we left out, and went through New Haven and up through Lebanon, Kentucky. And I believe from Lebanon, we went through, on through Danville, and, ah, to Richmond. And then we went from Richmond

III B 5

B.5

Rec Childress: (cont.) across to Lexington. And that's where I told you about staying in the livery stable. But we stayed in livery stables every once in a while, if it was bad weather, we'd pull in livery stables. And the difference, then and now, why these livery stables, I noticed you had a whole string of buggies sitting up and down the side of the street, you know. Just like cars parked. And they kept several horses, and, ah... So we drove in there on Saturday night and laid over on Sunday, stayed over there on Sunday all day. Well, I found out what the buggies was for. Boys and girls on Sunday evening went to coming in there about dinner, and a boy would hire a rig--they called it a rig--to take his girl friend out in the country. And course the man that worked at the stable--all the boy and girl had to do was sit down in the office. The horse was harnessed up and put to the buggy and drove up to the office door and all they had to do was step out and get in the buggy. And they was charged, I think, according to the time they kept the horse and buggy out. And, that was the difference. I...that's not concerning baskets (laughs)...

J. Schottenfeld: Did you ever get to go on one of these buggy rides? (to Mrs. Childress)

Mrs. Childress: Huh-unh. That was before my time. (laughter)

J. Brown: In these towns that you all went through, how'd you go about selling the baskets?

B.4

Rec Childress: Well, we would, ah, usual thing then, we would pull up on the square and park. And

(End first half tape)

J. Schottenfeld: Yeah, it's working.

Mrs. Childress: Is it working?

J. Schottenfeld: Yeah, yeah.

Mrs. Childress: Now go ahead.

B.4

Rec Childress: And we would pull up there, you know. And then you was allowed. Of course now, you wouldn't dare do that, if you had a wagon. They wouldn't let you park there. But then you had a right to, had a public... ah, set there all day. And we would. And, ah, so we'd sell quite a few baskets that away. Sometimes--I, I pulled into Bowling Green one time, whenever--after I was grown, and just a while before me and my wife was married. I had another fellow with me. And we pulled in on the square there, it was one Saturday. We was starting out on a trip. I was just going with, just one load of baskets that time, myself. Dad wasn't with me. I wasn't starting on a long trip. And I guess I sold 12 or 13 baskets there, just to farmers, you know, for a dollar apiece. Well I gave 35 cents apiece for the baskets, and I sold some to some hardwares, and, ah--so I had a pretty good day. I think I made maybe 15 or 20 dollars profit with them things. Which was more than you'd have made around here in a month. And, so that's the way we'd do about pulling in there. And sometimes we would, we'd make the county court days--that was on Monday. If they was, if we was in the Bluegrass country, why, if we was going into a town like Harrodsburg or Lawrenceburg or Frankfurt or someplace like that, if it, if we was close to it on Sunday, why Monday morning we got in there, and that was jockey day for people to swap horses, you see, and other kind of business.

J. Brown: There was lots of people around, hunh?

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Rec Childress: A nd court day--and, they'd be a lot of people and you'd see a lot of farmers. A nd we'd sometimes sit there all day, we figured we'd make more that way than we would driving. And did. But sometimes it'd be kind of dull, you wouldn't sell very many.

J. Brown: How'd you sell them wholesale, as compared to that?

Rec Childress: Ah--the baskets besides the Beeler basket, all the rest of the baskets, why nine dollars a dozen was the regular price on it, that's 75 cents apiece, you see.

J. Brown: Let me ask you again what stores you went to to sell them wholesale.

Rec Childress: What stores? Hardware stores, mostly. Now we made a trip-- we made trips pretty often to Indiana. And we'd go through Evansville. And there was two wholesale places there that dad sold to. One of them was, ah--let's see if I can think of it. It might not be there now. Beement(?) and Sites (?) was one of them. A nd Parsons and Stovall was the other one. They was wholesale houses. And they was one place at Owensboro when we'd go in there--Clark Implement Company--and we have drove in there, and drive up to his door with a whole load of baskets, 200 on it. And if he'd had pretty good luck with selling what we'd sold him the year before, why, he'd ask dad to make him a price on the whole load. And, I've unloaded the whole load. Just pull in there and unload a whole load there.

J. Brown: You mentioned a minute ago--you already told us this and we let the tape run out--you mentioned that you took some things in trade to bring back here and sell. Would you mind telling that again?

Rec Childress: No--I said that...

Mrs. Childress: Rec, their tape stopped.

Rec Childress: Yeah, we would, we would take, ah, we would trade for groceries that we eat. And then we would take, for things to bring home, we'd trade for these check lines, maybe, ah, a set or two of trace chains, and sometimes we'd trade for harness, to go on horses, you know--collars, horse collars--and we would trade for maybe a few pair of overhauls, new overall pants, because my dad knew that he could sell them to his boys whenever--they, they all wore them, you see--whenever he got home. And... what else, can you think of? (to his wife)

Mrs. Childress: Blankets, and bed spreads and children's shoes.

Rec Childress: Sometimes shoes, trade for shoes.

J. Brown: Were goods a lot cheaper in the northern part than they were here?

Rec Childress: No, they wasn't so much cheaper than they were here, but that would, ah, that would cause him to make a sale, you see, where otherwise they wouldn't of maybe bought the baskets and give cash for them.

J. Schottenfeld: He would trade you at his wholesale price or at his retail price?

Rec Childress: Trade?

J. Schottenfeld: When you traded the baskets for goods, would the man...

Rec Childress: For goods...oh, traded them wholesale price.

J. Schottenfeld: Wholesale. So you could make a profit on them when you came back?

Rec Childress: Yeah, oh yes. He figured the merchant was making a profit on what he had, you see, and course we had to make a profit on what we had. If we hadn't, we wouldn't have made nothing.

J. Brown: True. (pause) The other thing we let slip was, you were going to finish describing the towns you went through on that first trip. We missed the second half of that. Would you name those towns?

B.5

Rec Childress: We'd, ah, after we left Maysville than we started back down the Ohio river.

Mrs. Childress: Is that where you wanted him to start?

Rec Childress: We started back down the Ohio river and we camped at a place, and, ah, it was close to Brooksville. And they was a--I'll tell this, have to put in just a little extra along, I don't know whether you mind it or not--if you do why tell me so...

J. Brown: No, I'd like to hear it.

Rec Childress: They was an old hearse setting there. Glass sides, you know--horsedrawn hearse. You know what a hearse is? Haul dead people, you know. And my dad wanted to trade for it.

B.2

J. Brown: Why?

Rec Childress: To haul baskets in. (much laughter) And sleep in it. I said, no, no. I said, not me. So I talked him out of it.

J. Schottenfeld: He was serious? He really...

Mrs Childress: Yeah.

Rec Childress: Yeah. And we come on back down through, ah... See, as we went up, we missed Frankfort, the state capital. We, ah--after we left Maysville, we come down through Brooksville, and Falmouth, Kentucky -- and that's on the Lincoln River--and, ah, sometimes we'd come to Covington. That's just this side of Cincinnati. And then we'd come through Williamstown and Falmouth and Frankfort. And then we'd come from Frankfort down through a little place on the Frankfort and Louisville Pike named Graffenburg. We camped there a lot. There was a big church there beside of a little creek. And that was an old camping ground for us--beautiful place to camp. And we camped there. We'd come on through Shelbyville and down through Taylorsville and Bardstown and back in through New Haven and then home.

J. Brown: How many days did that first trip take you?

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Rec Childress: Well, usually that trip, ah, we made that trip, oh, I don't know how many times we did make it in the years that I went with him. About thirty days--28 and 30 days.

J. Brown: How many times would you approximate that you made that trip?

Rec Childress: Well, we'd make it, I'd say, on the average of twice to the year. And part of the time we'd go south, and part of the time we'd go to Indiana. See, I told you, one time, one time when we went up there--I told you that the other day--ah, when we got to Maysville, we hadn't ever been in Ohio. And they was 3 wagons of us that time. My uncle was along with a wagon, and, and my dad had 2 wagons. They was 3 wagons of us. And that's the longest time I guess my uncle ever was out on a trip. And he didn't stay till we went home. He left us at Cincinnati and headed straight for home. But we crossed over into Aberdeen, Ohio, and went down through Georgetown. I remember going through Georgetown, Ohio, because it was the home of Ulysses Grant. And down through Coney Islands and through Cincinnati. And we was on the busiest street there was in Cincinnati at that time, Pearl Street; we was, oh, half a day driving through Cincinnati with a wagon. And we came on down, too, to where we struck Indiana--where Indiana and Ohio met, you know--and we crossed back over into Kentucky at Madison, Indiana. But we never made that trip but once.

J. Brown: How many states, ah, did you go to in these trips?

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Rec Childress: Well, we, ah--outside of Kentucky, we went into Ohio, and we went into Indiana, out as far, I believe, about as far as I was ever out in Indiana with a wagon was Vincennes. It's on the Wabash river. And we come back through Louisville with it. But, ah, I never was, now, in Illinois with a wagon, but after we got to driving T-model trucks, we did go now to Beardstown, Illinois once. That was on the Illinois river. And of course it was a concrete highway went in there, but it was--the Illinois river was out of its banks and we had to go through water I guess that deep (indicates one foot) on that highway. But it was clear and they had stakes along it, you know. And they was carrying the mail into Beardstown in boats.

J. Brown: I guess you'd rather been in a wagon than a T-model right then.

Rec Childress: Yeah, yeah, I'd rather had a wagon.

J. Brown: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois with a truck...

Rec Childress: I, I was out in Missouri once, but we was in a T-model truck then. And I believe I told you about that. The way we went there, we started south and we went down through Bowling Green--no, we went down from here through Leitchfield, Falls of Rough, Fordsville, Owensboro, Henderson and Morgantown and Paducah. Then we turned right at Paducah -- and went over to Wycliffe, Kentucky--it's on the Mississippi river. And we had to get on a boat there--they called in the Three States Landing boat, and it was 7 miles up to Cairo, Illinois, up the Mississippi. See, the Ohio empties into the Mississippi at Cairo. And we pulled into Cairo, the boat pulled into Cairo, and we had, of course we didn't have to get off of it there; but then it pulled around to Byrds Point, Missouri, and there's where we got off. And we just drove out to Charlestown, Missouri--that's as far out as I was ever, out in Charleston, Missouri. But I never told you the other day, my dad used to, he used to make trips on the train.

J. Brown: With baskets?

Rec Childress: And sell those baskets.

J. Brown: How'd he carry them on a train?

Rec Childress: Well, way he done that, he would go to one of the merchants, just like he did when we was hauling them on a wagon, and the merchant would have a thousand, or fifteen hundred, or twelve hundred, and sometimes-- about fifteen hundred's the most I, they ever had, as I remember of. And he'd buy these baskets from the merchant and the merchant would-- he'd buy them where the merchant would deliver to the railroad. And, ah, he mostly done that when we lived in Grayson county. He'd buy them from this A. J. Clemens and A. J. Higdon, two stores that carried them, close together. They'd haul them to Clarkson and ship them to places he wanted. He'd give them the name of the places he wanted them shipped to. And he went to Leitchfield, went to Clarkson and bought a thousand mile ticket-- give 20 dollars for it--on the train. And he, he would carry a sample, two sample baskets with him. A big one, bushel basket, and--maybe 3, maybe a half bushel and a peck basket. He carried them with him. He had a right to, on the train, you see. And when he went in to town, why, he, ah, just carried this basket to all these stores and showed them what he had for sale, you see. And they bought them, and then--of course if they bought them, why they had, they had transportation theirselves because their goods, you know, they had to transport their other goods in there, and so they'd just go out theirselves to the depot and bring them in. And he went as far as, he went as far out as, ah, way out in Missouri-- Springfield. Went through St. Louis and Springfield on one trip. And one

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trip he went to, ah, he went to Chattanooga and Chickamauga, Tennessee. And, ah...

J. Brown: Was this before you started going with him?

Rec Childress: That was before I started going, yes.

J. Brown: Could you estimate what year that would have been, that he did these train trips?

Rec Childress: How long it...?

J. Brown: What year that would have been.

Rec Childress: No--well, let's see. I was born in 1903 and I, I think maybe I was about 15 years old whenever I made the first trip. That would have been about--I would have been about ten--ten, twelve, fourteen, fifteen years old. He made that a right smart little while.

J. Brown: Did the train stop in a town long enough for him to go sell his baskets and then to get on?

Rec Childress: No, no, no, no. He just had to...

J. Brown: He had to do that before the train got there?

Rec Childress: Yeah, he--like whenever he started out on the train, like his first, maybe his first bunch of baskets would be shipped to Owensboro and Henderson. Well he went there. He sold those baskets. Well the next bunch was shipped quite a distance from there.

J. Brown: I see.

Mrs. Childress: See, he stayed maybe a couple of days...I mean in each town.

Rec Childress: And he'd be gone several days on that trip on the train.

J. Brown: I see.

Rec Childress: And I know when he told about going to Chattanooga on that trip, now that was before I was even big enough to go with him--why, whenever he went there on that trip, why he said there was an old soldier's reunion in Chattanooga. And they was going to go out in Chickamauga battlefield, these old soldiers, ones that didn't get killed, you know, in the Civil War. And he went out there with them. And he said they was pieces of cannonballs sticking in trees, you know, and things, and...and he said then they decided that some of them wanted to take a boat in place of going on the train. They wanted to take a boat from the, Chattanooga down to Paducah, I believe it was, down the Tennessee river. And he got on the boat with them, and went down on that boat, I think the way he talked they had some pretty big times (laughs), a-drinking and...

J. Brown: Well, your dad enjoyed this?

Rec Childress: The trips I went?

J. Brown: Yeah.

Rec Childress: Oh, I really enjoyed it, yes I did, I enjoyed it. Because when you got up of a morning, why, ah--well especially the first trips, why, I was going somewheres new. Now after I'd been on several trips I knowed where I was going then when I got started out on one. But it was a challenge to you, you know--you'd get up of a morning and start out, and you'd wonder, well, how many baskets will I sell today. Will it be a good day or will it be a bad one--and we had both kinds. Sometimes you'd drive all day and we'd...we'd meet up of a night. He'd take one road of a morning--he'd pick out a road for him to go and one for me to go, about... and then pick out a town ahead of us, about twenty-five miles. Like, for instance, if we was going to leave here--or, well, not: here would have been too far, it would have been 50, 50 miles to Bowling Green. But if we was down about, ah...

J. Brown: Brownsville, or somewhere like that?

H.B.3

H.B.3

III B.3
III B.2
Rec Childress: Cave City, or somewhere like that, why, he'd start out and he'd go 31-W and he'd, he would send me through Glasgow and that road and we'd meet in Bowling Green that night. And the first trip I ever went, that I told you about going to the Bluegrass--first time I was ever out, you see--we got in Lexington and we drove in this livery stable. I remember the man's name because we stayed there quite a bit after that--his name was Mark Horning(?), that run the stable. So my dad told my uncle--my uncle wasn't married, he just stayed around first one place and then the other one--my dad told my uncle, he said--his name was Bob-- he said, "Now Bob, you and Rec stay around town today. You can sell, or should sell, several baskets just off the wagon retail to farmers." And it was 18 miles up to Paris, and he had a buggy with one horse to it and a little frame on the back end of it. He'd haul, well, he'd put a couple dozen baskets on it. But he had a bunch of baskets shipped to Paris. And he said, "I'll go up to Paris and sell them baskets and meet you all back here tonight," which was 36 miles there and back. And he said, "Now I'll be late a-getting in," but he says, "I'll be back." We said, "Alright." And it was a kind of a little bit of trying time on me. Ah... along a little while after dinner, my uncle said to me, he said, "Rec," he said, "I believe I'll go home." I said, "Go home?" I said, "What are you talking about." I said, "You wouldn't go off and leave me here?" "Well," he says, "Elijah'll be in here after awhile and," he says, "you'll make it alright." Says, "there ain't nothing to bother you." He got homesick. And I, I didn't want him to go. But finally I seen he was pretty well determined to go and finally I told him, "Well, alright." The team was in the stable, you see, the livery stable. And, so he went over there and caught a train. He wanted--it was about two squares from the stable, the railroad station was. He wanted me to go with him over there to the depot, and I went with him, and he got on the train and headed home. Sometime after dark my dad come in.

Mrs. Childress: And was you glad to see him.

Rec Childress: It was a while before he missed my uncle Bob. And finally he says, "Where's Bob at?" Well I says, "He's gone home." He says, "Home?" I said, "Yes." "Why," he says, "my goodness sakes alive!" That was a word he'd say a whole lot. He says, "What in the world did they, did he mean," says, "go off and leave you here by yourself?" "Well," I says, "said he believed he'd go home." I says, "He's just pulled out home." He fretted about it a little bit and finally he says, "Well," he said, "let's go up here and get us a bite to eat." He says, "We can make it." I says, "Why sure we can make it." And we went up there to a little restaurant. And he always liked fish. And he got us a, a hamburger, I mean a fish...of course, restaurants then, you know, were cheap places. But anyhow then they kept fish there all the time. And, ah, fish with a slice or two, two slices of bread, I believe, with it. And CocaColas hadn't been out too long, then, and he got us aCoke. And he wasn't a heavy spender. So went on back to the stables and slept in our wagons that night. And we got up the next morning and he went to starting me out on trips by myself, just like my uncle. Course my uncle had been going with him for years, you see. But--I think maybe the first day, why, we went along together, and finally he said, "You reckon," he said, "you could make it," he says, "if I'd send you out by yourself?" "Why," I said, "yeah, I can make it." I didn't care to ask people, you know, if I

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didn't...of course I didn't know the country because it was the first trip I was up there. I didn't care to ask them. And he'd pick out a road for me to go and one for him, told me where to meet him at. Of course he knowed the distance, he'd been so much he knowed pretty well the distance without even asking anybody himself. And we done that till we got home.

Mrs. Childress: People trusted each other then, you know. They could sleep by the side of the road.

J. Brown: Yeah. Be hard now. What would have been the last year that, ah, you and your father made that, uh, made a trip together?

Rec Childress: Well of course the last trip we made together was in a T-model truck and (aside to wife) do you remember how long ago it's been? It was a while before dad passed away, wasn't it?

Mrs. Childress: Yeah--it was--our two oldest children was about 4 and 5, or 3 and 5 years old, and let's see, (the oldest) is 48 and Cornell's 46. (that makes it ca. 1934).

J. Schottenfeld: How many years do you think he took the truck around?

Rec Childress: The trucking?

J. Schottenfeld: Yeah.

Rec Childress: Well...

Mrs. Childress: How many years did he go in the truck, is what she means.

Rec Childress: Well, I understood her, I was studying how long it was. I don't guess over ten years, was it?

Mrs. Childress: No, ten or twelve.

Rec Childress: Ten or twelve years, I guess, till he got so that he wouldn't go out. I guess--we stayed with the wagons till about ten, ten or twelve years, I buess, before he quit, before he got to where he was too old to go.

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J. Schottenfeld: Was there a big difference, going out in awagon, and going out in a truck?

Rec Childress: Any difference?

J. Schottenfeld: In the feeling of the trip.

Rec Childress: Well, ah, they was, they was a lot of difference in it. And, different, and in different ways. He never did make anything after he started going with the trucks. He made money, when he went with the wagons. But after he went to buying old T-model trucks--he never did buy a new one, and he always got one somebody else had wore out.

J. Schottenfeld: Why didn't--could he have gone back to the wagons?

Rec Childress: Well, one reason he got to going with the trucks, why, every year traffic got a little heavier on the highways. I've been driving wagons along and they'd pass me, and their fender would tip the end of the singletrees. That was getting pretty close to you.

J. Schottenfeld: "Times were a-changin'."

Rec Childress: And sometimes they'd be drunk, you know, and drive along just as hard as they could go, and waving their whiskey bottles at you, you know. I've been out, and I was so glad to get in off the road at night time. Especially if it was weekend, Saturday evening, up here in the Bluegrass country. That was worse, than anywhere else.

J. Brown: Mr. Childress, we've kept you at this for nearly an hour, now...

Rec Childress: Oh, that's alright.

J. Brown: There's a lot more stuff that I'd really like to hear about, like--I'd like to get you to tell me about how the baskets was loaded on, and I want to get some more detail about the trips. Would you object if I came back, ah, at a later time, maybe in a week or so?

Rec Childress: Not a bit...not a bit.

J. Brown: This has been really nice of you to spend time with me. Thank you. Let me turn this thing off.