

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

---

Folklife Archives Oral Histories

Folklife Archives

---

6-24-1987

## Interview with Charles Hobert Vincent (FA 81)

Manuscripts & Folklife Archives

Western Kentucky University, mssfa@wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc\\_fa\\_oral\\_hist](https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_fa_oral_hist)



Part of the **Folklore Commons**

---

### Recommended Citation

Folklife Archives, Manuscripts &, "Interview with Charles Hobert Vincent (FA 81)" (1987). *Folklife Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 372.

[https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc\\_fa\\_oral\\_hist/372](https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_fa_oral_hist/372)

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Folklife Archives Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

The following is an unrehearsed interview with Mr. Hobart Vincent on his work with the CCC at Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. The interview was conducted by Kelly Lally near Brownsville, Kentucky on June 24, 1987.

**Lalley:** When were you born Mr. Vincent?

**Vincent:** I was born in a little neighborhood about 15 miles north of Brownsville called Ollie, Kentucky.

**Lalley:** And what year was this?

**Vincent:** 19 and 20; May 7th.

**Lalley:** What were times like for you and your family during the Depression?

**Vincent:** Starvation almost. That's all hardly I know to tell you. I don't know; it was rough to get by.

**Lalley:** Was your family into farming or...?

**Vincent:** That's it. Had a little farm...couple of old mules and one old...two old cows. That was it.

**Lalley:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**Vincent:** There was six of us -- three boys; three girls.

**Lalley:** And where did you fall in the line of brothers and sisters?

**Vincent:** I fell the third one. One...there was a sister and a brother older than I am. They done deceased.

**Lalley:** How did you hear about the CCC?

**Vincent:** Well, in 1935 my brother went to the CC camp and, uh, there wasn't a penny to be made otherwise. So, in 1937 I followed him.

**Lalley:** How were people selected for the CCC in the area or did you just sign up or...?

**Vincent:** Yeah, you'd sign up at the county seat and you'd go to No. 2 camp and take your physical and they'd send you whereabouts...anywhere they wanted to. So I stayed there when I'd take my...my brother was there, had a little pull, see? [laughing]

**Lalley:** Did you know of anybody who was not accepted to the CCC?

**Vincent:** No, I didn't.

**Lalley:** So you entered in 1937?

**Vincent:** Yeah.

**Lalley:** And how old were you? 17 was it?

**Vincent:** Hardly. [laughter]

**Lalley:** And how long did you stay in the CCC?

**Vincent:** I stayed two years at this one place. I came out, uh, March of '39. I came home and there's still nothing to be found. I went back. I had two different names. The first time I went in, I used Charles. To get by...I went back...I had a double name; I used Hobart.

**Lalley:** Oh.

**Vincent:** So, I went back in and...the tenth day of April...after I'd just been out 11 days. And they accepted me at the same place. I had to take another physical. It hadn't been but two weeks since I'd taken one. And they sent me to No. 4, which the number of it was 516.

**Lalley:** So first you were in 2 and then you were in 4?

**Vincent:** Right. Did many people do that? Use a different name so they could come back in?

**Vincent:** Well, I was the only one I know about. [laughter]

**Lalley:** I guess you didn't have to go very far, but how did you feel when you left home for the CCC?

**Vincent:** Well, I don't hardly know how to explain it. Course I was lost for awhile. I was real young and, I don't know hardly how to say it, but I was kind of scared cause I was with older people. Lot of them was a lot older than I was. Some of them was 30, 35 years old. My brother was four years older than I was, and he'd done been in two years when I went. So I was kind of lost I guess...[laughing]

**Lalley:** Did you have any type of training...did the CCC guys give you any training at all or conditioning before you started work?

**Vincent:** No. They just take you around, showed you more of the camp and all...that's about all they showed you. Then you went up with a crew to work and your foreman told you what to do.

**Lalley:** Describe your very first day in camp if you can. Do you remember? [laughing]

**Vincent:** I really...I really can't.

**Lalley:** Okay. That's fine. How did you spend your personal money? I know that they sent some money home to your family...

**Vincent:** My father got \$25 and I got 5.

**Lalley:** And how did you spend your \$5?

**Vincent:** [laughing] Mostly eating around. They had a little canteen...mostly eat it up in candy

bars and [not clear].

**Lalley:** What role did you have within the CCC camp?

**Vincent:** What what now?

**Lalley:** What role did you have...were you an enrollee or did you have a special...?

**Vincent:** Well, for...I can't really say what I did the first five or six months. But from there I went to the kitchen and I was what they called a K.P. I washed dishes, cleaned tables, set the tables back, get ready for the next meal. And I did that I guess for six or eight months and I went from there to...on the road construction crew. We built a road from up there where the crossroads is...one goes to the maintenance area and the other one goes to the river. I helped build that all the way to the river. That was my last...we worked on it I guess till the last year I was there, at No. 2. I got discharged. I went back to No. 4 and I went back on the road on the other side of the river which No. 4 was building the other side. And I was a truck driver at that time...all the way through that time, stayed on the truck. Now at No. 2...I remember I worked down at headquarters as a janitor, oh, I guess, six months. Then I went from there...No. 3 camp broke up. It was over here at Joppy Church. It broke up before the other three did and they sent me and Glendon Miller over there as guards...to watch over the camp. They wouldn't nothing moved, only part of the vehicles, and everything was there just like they'd walked off and left it...only took their clothes with them, see. They split them up and sent part of them to No. 4 and part of them to No. 2, some of them some other places. And Glendon Miller was night watchman and I had to stay on day shift. So I was on day shift and he was on night shift, uh, five days a week then somebody else came in temporary on weekends, see? We stayed there till...until it was tore down. That's what the building...this building was made out of part of the lumber that came from No. 3. It's in there...tell you all about it.

**Lalley:** The education building?

**Vincent:** Umhumm. That's it.

**Lalley:** Aside from the roads, what other types of projects did the CCC men work on at Mammoth Cave?

**Vincent:** Well, we'd...we had a rock crusher...we crushed the rock...we had a rock quarry. We got it all out by hand, crushed it, hauled it out on the roads. Built all the roads that's in the park.

And, uh, oh, I don't know...

**Lalley:** Did many men work in the Cave at all?

**Vincent:** Uh, not...very few. Uh, it was state operated at the time. It belonged to the state till 1941 and there was so many of them operated the ferry boats. There would be two guys on there at a time and it operated two shifts. Now, I worked part time down at [not clear] ferry. Uh, for about, oh, I don't know, four or five months. They were only one at the time down there cause they had a civilian operating it part of the time. I worked with old man [first name not clear] Blanton for a right smart while down there. Oh, they...they'd clean out all the...take care all around the hotels and over there around the key. They'd go back in the woods and they'd carry all the dead brush out, haul it off, burn it, and stuff like that. Uh, it kept it really neat all the time. We'd see back...you couldn't see no dead brush laying down in there then, like it is now. Now, they won't let you touch it; they just let it lay there and decay away.

**Lalley:** I guess you had a lot of jobs. Is there any way you could describe a typical day's work for you...you know, what time you got up and...?

**Vincent:** I know one day I can really tell you about, the day I left. [laughing] Me and another boy that run around together all during the time [beeping sound]

**Lalley:** We'll turn it off.

**Vincent:** ...we was talking about here, they had one place over here they called Brooks Knob and they had one over in the Fork's River was Hickory Cabin. And they had one at No. 1 but there wasn't no cabin there. There was a man stayed there...it'd be two men assigned to that tower. They had you a big scope and you could locate what degree and everything was on it, see. Where the fire was at, which they'd call in, and then there'd be a fire crew that would go to it. And they'd have two shifts on that. They closed up at ten o'clock at night...went to work at six of a morning and they'd put two eight-hour shifts together. So, you had three towers to take care of. The colored boys would take care of theirs over there, and No. 2 would take care of Brooks Knob, and No. 4 would take care of Hickory Cabin cause it was on that side of the river, see?

**Lalley:** A few minutes ago, you were about to tell me about your last day...

**Vincent:** Well, me and another boy went together...his name was Elvin Cox...and we's always together and about a month before we got out...maybe two, I don't know exactly...I was driving a

truck. He run a little [not clear] of a thing down at the rock quarry. Well, we'd been out all night. He got...he went to sleep and run these little cars on the track. And they sent him out on the road crew, and I had a little wreck and they sent me out with him. We's over in the forks of the river called, uh...shoot, we's on the road cleaning up the ditches...Little [not clear]. And that was in, uh, August of 19 and 40. Well, he come up and he said, "I will back you out of going to the Army." I said, "You never did back me out of doing anything." Well, we both had a [not clear] we just threw them over in the hollow and walked back to camp, got in my old car and took off for Cave City. We caught us a bus in Cave City, went to Ft. Knox and enlisted that evening. [laughing]

**Lalley:** ...last day. [laughter--Vincent]

**Vincent:** Yep.

**Lalley:** How much free time did you have?

**Vincent:** Well, you had what we called a fire detail and it went up on the bulletin board every Friday afternoon. You had a leader, assistant leader, and truck drivers and all the crew to fight the fires. They had to stay over the weekend. If you was on that...what we called fire detail, you stayed there. And if you wasn't, you was allowed to go anywhere you wanted to...or anyplace you was able to go, I'll put it that way. You find that [not clear] which I had an old car, you could buy a gallon or two of gas and take off.

**Lalley:** To what extent, if any, did you participate in the organized recreation or the education programs?

**Vincent:** I never did get wound up in the educational part of it, which would have been good if I had. My brother done practically...he done half of that work on this building. He was a pretty good carpenter; he was old enough to...age enough to be settled down and I was a kid.

[laughing] I didn't want no part of it. So, that's about all I can tell you about it, which...oh, I helped work a little bit on it, but not much.

**Lalley:** Did you, uh, did you play in the sports...the baseball or the...?

**Vincent:** Baseball.

**Lalley:** You did?

**Vincent:** Yeah. Yeah, we had quite a few games in the baseball park. But, uh, I never was...I

was too little to play anything else. [laughing] I remember when I first went in...I was 17 hardly...and, uh, I only weighed a hundred and nine pounds when I went in. When I...I stayed five years or a little better...no, three years...little over three years...and I went to the Army, I weighed a hundred and fifty-eight, which I was done 20 at that time. I was 20 in May and I went in the Army in August, right after I was 20. This same boy that went with me to the Army went with me to camp the last time. He passed away. He went overseas, came back...uh, with a whole lot of trouble, and they discharged him on a hundred percent disability. And he's been gone since, uh, '76.

**Lalley:** Did the CCC boys play pranks on each other?

**Vincent:** Plenty of them. Plenty of them.

**Lalley:** Any you could describe? [laughing]

**Vincent:** Yeah. You could catch one of them laying down in bed asleep, put a little shoe polish on his shoe and set it on fire, you can make him move real quick. Or you had a little...our bunks was just ordinary G.I. bunk...course you had a spring that hooked on each side down here for your mattress. You could take them out, tie a little string on each one of them. He'd jump in bed, he'd go all the way to the floor. [laughter] Or you could take his sheet loose at the lower end, bring it up here like this, just leave it hid down under his blanket, see?

**Lalley:** Short sheet him?

**Vincent:** Yeah. He'd slide down there, he couldn't go in. He'd just...if he went in, he'd run his feet on through the sheet. [laughter -- Lalley] Oh, we had a lot of pranks going on. We didn't have too bad a time. I've seen two, three fist fights. We had a few boys that were a little overbearing and some of them wouldn't stand it, then they'd tie up and tangle up and [not clear]. Lots of times, they'd make them go over to the ring and put on a glove.

**Lalley:** Really? Settle their differences in that way?

**Vincent:** [laughing] Well, you wouldn't hurt one another so bad, see, with a glove on. But, uh, I've seen a couple of fights. A boy from up in...around Ashland, he said he lived on Big Sandy River, by the name of Steve Keilen, I've seen him and Red...well, his name was Lancer, Lancer Saylor, fight one evening till they give out. Neither one of them didn't get...they didn't whoop neither one. They had blue places all over them [laughing] but...



**Lalley:** There were, you know, four different camps. Was there much interaction between the camps or among the camps...?

**Vincent:** Well, we never...no, not too much. Not too much. Now we had a big dance hall which was...have you...you've been over to Mammoth Cave...the old road that goes towards the old job corp site...have you ever been down the hill? Right at the foot of the big hill you go down towards the old...uh, see, where the job corp was was where No. 1 camp was. That was colored people, [cough] and right down at the foot of the hill, we had a...well it was a gym was what it was...and, uh, we got to use it one night or two nights, you know, they'd have a time set, which was four nights. There was four camps, you see, and each person had a night to go down and play basketball or...they had any kind a set-up, any kind of place you wanted to. Uh, it was called a [not clear].

**Lalley:** Whoopee House...yeah, I've heard someone mention that. [laughing]

**Vincent:** Uh, we's there one night at a big dance...they'd go out to these little towns and they'd bring a bunch of girls in, or boys go and bring the girls in and so on and so forth. At that time, I was still young enough I wasn't paying no attention to girls. Two boys got in a fight; one of them was from Cave City, was named Clifton Bird. And the other boy was from Bowling Green; we called him Candy Man but his name was Williams.

**Lalley:** Why was he Candy Man? [laughing]

**Vincent:** He was a Supply Sergeant; he issued all your clothes out and so on and so forth. Earl Williams. They got into a fight; Clifton got [phone rings--tape stopped]

**Lalley:** Okay. Go on about the fight.

**Vincent:** Well, somebody pulled Clifton off of Candy Man. When he come out...he had him down in a coal box...we had big boxes put coal in it [not clear] a stove. Now when Candy Man come up, he came up with two big pieces of coal in his hand. He knocked old Clifton down with one and then he came right on across with the other and hit me right over the eye. He put of us in the infirmary.

**Lalley:** And you had nothing to do with...

**Vincent:** No, uh-uh, I wasn't 30, 40 feet of them. But, uh, that kind of cooled the dance off that night so me and old Clifton, we had to spend the night at the barracks. [laughing] He had his head

peeled, come right across the top of his head; and I had a big black eye for about two weeks.

[laughing]

**Lalley:** How did the white people feel about the presence of blacks in the camp nearby?

**Vincent:** We didn't mix. We didn't even work together. They stayed over there; we stayed at our place.

**Lalley:** Were there any instances of racial tension?

**Vincent:** Well, they never did get together in other words. That's the way it was when we went to Army. It wasn't no blacks mixed with the whites, no whites mixed with the blacks. They had a separate company and we had a separate company.

**Lalley:** How did the local residents feel about the CCC being...

**Vincent:** They liked it.

**Lalley:** ...in the area?

**Vincent:** Only they kept us busy fighting fires all the time. They'd get out there and set fires just to get to see us come and fight it, see?

**Lalley:** Yeah, uh, Smith Meredith was telling me about some of the local girls setting fires so the guys would come out. [laughing]

**Vincent:** Yeah, we had a big one one night. Well, Smith remembers that, at...it was over on [not clear] River near what we call the Whistling Mountain. And we'd fought the fire over there a week before it was put out and we never did go in only just go in...truck driver would go in...course I was truck driver...go in and get something to eat and bring it back out to the boys. They'd come in and eat when they could, and that wasn't too often. [laughing]

**Lalley:** Was there much tension at all because with the government because of the displacement of people from their homes or did you come in late enough that you didn't feel any of that?

**Vincent:** Uh-uh. [not clear] Uh-uh.

**Lalley:** So a lot of men dated local girls?

**Vincent:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah. A lot of boys was away from here married girls here.

**Lalley:** How suc...agh...successful do you feel the CCC was in relieving the effects of the Depression?

**Vincent:** Well one thing it kept from starving to death, cause a dollar then was worth ten or 15

now. Because stuff you had to buy was real cheap and, well, it just kept us and our family alive, that's it.

**Lalley:** Do you...did you notice some of the effects of the CCC on the economy around Mammoth Cave?

**Vincent:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. You can see, yeah.

**Lalley:** Did it change a lot from...

**Vincent:** Not a real whole lot but, you know, as far as money-wise I guess you'd say it helped a right smart, see? Uh, your little grocery stores got a whole...a lot of it, you know. Keep your family going and you got a little bit which you wouldn't a got if you hadn't a been a going.

**Lalley:** I think I'm going to change...turn the tape over before it decides it's going to stop on us.

[End of Side 1]

**Lalley:** This is the second side of the tape of my interview with Mr. Hobart Vincent. What do you consider to be the greatest contribution of the CCC?

**Vincent:** Well...

**Unidentified voice:** Roads.

**Vincent:** Hmm?

**Unidentified voice:** Roads.

**Vincent:** Yeah, roads was one thing because we had dirt roads. Uh, they widened the roads, they put rock on the roads and then you could drive an automobile over them. You wouldn't get stuck up, have to pull them out with horse and mules. Uh...

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

**Vincent:** No, I don't see...they disbanded it, the 3C camp, before the war started. Uh, I believe they disbanded the camp in '41. Uh, my brother was in it, the younger brother, he was up in Indiana somewhere and then he was shipped back to No. 4 and I believe it disbanded in '41.

**Lalley:** As far as training is concerned, or at least getting used to living with a group of men, do you think that made a difference?

**Vincent:** Whole lot. You had...you met boys from other counties, some of them out of state and it helped you on down...when I got...went to the Army, I knew how to make up my bed, I knew how to take care of my clothes. Then, uh, the first day in the Army...our platoon leader was from

Nashville, by the name of Sergeant Prewitt. Well, he told me how my bed should be made up. I made it up just like the rest of us made it. And then he said, "Where did you learn to make up a bed like that?" Which we had to turn about eight inches down and make a white collar on it, see? All the way across. I said, "Well, I've done spent a little over three years in a 3C camp." And as far as barracks are concerned, where you sleep, it was all about the same thing, see? Now, it was a lot different otherwise but going to your mess hall and eating was all the same things. You just take your old mess kit along and pick out what there was to eat and go on.

**Lalley:** Where there any major problems within the CCC camps?

**Vincent:** Not...nah, there weren't no problems in there. I mean, you know, you just had certain things to do and you done and that's it.

**Lalley:** Any problem with men deserting at all or...?

**Vincent:** Oh, no. Well, we called it going over the hill. Uh, if you went over the hill for a few days and come back, they'd put you on K.P. for a week. You pull...you wash dishes for a week, cooks made it kind of...makes you sweat over that hot water. [laughing]

**Lalley:** Well, what...what did you do after leaving the CCC?

**Vincent:** I went to the Army right out of camp.

**Lalley:** And then after the Army?

**Vincent:** Well, I got married in about two years, I guess, after I went in the Army. Of course, I stayed in the Army five years and two months. I got out of the Army and come back home. I didn't know nothing, how to do nothing. You know, I'd been, say, five and three's eight...about nine years I spent with Uncle Sam. I didn't know nothing hardly to do. I could drive a truck, yeah, but you couldn't get enough money to buy a truck. [laughing] I came back, was married, I had one boy which works over there at the Cave; I don't know whether you've met him or not. But he's a...he's a...a foreman over there.

**Lalley:** I haven't met him yet. That's probably how I got your name though. [laughing]

**Vincent:** Royce is his name. I believe...yeah, [not clear]. He's a maintenance foreman; he's over the roads, trails and the ferries. All them boys that works there, he's their boss. He's been over there ten years. He's almost 44 so I'm getting old. [laughing]

**Lalley:** Do you ever go back up that way any?

**Vincent:** Over in the...? Oh, yeah. Yeah, we's up there, uh, Saturday night. One of the boys retired that worked with me. See, I was retired there. Uh, Woodrow Lawson retired and we had supper for him...potluck supper, uh, Saturday night. Oh, I go back up pretty often.

**Lalley:** You worked at the Cave for a while?

**Vincent:** I retired over at the Cave.

**Lalley:** I didn't...what did you do?

**Vincent:** I was a ferry operator.

**Lalley:** I didn't know that.

**Vincent:** Yeah.

**Lalley:** And how many years did you do that?

**Vincent:** Uh, I wasn't there long. I believe I got credit for 11 years and nine months. I got hurt going to work one morning, broke my neck and they never would let me come back. See, I can only turn it that much.

**Lalley:** You're lucky you can turn it at all I suppose. [laughing]

**Vincent:** Broke in three places. I stayed in traction four or five weeks and then I had to wear that...they called it [not clear] collar, you know? But they claim it was my fault; I couldn't draw no insurance. [laughing] But I got paid just the same.

**Lalley:** When did you retire?

**Vincent:** '78. No, I'll put it this way. I got hurt in '78 and, uh, I put off retiring a long time. I had enough time to carry me over till January of '79 already. I drew a check every two weeks just like I was when I was up there. And, uh, I guess somewheres in the middle of '79, they said, "You ain't coming back to work." So, the doctor did, see? And they retired me on 100 percent disability.

**Lalley:** Your son was already working there when...before you...?

**Vincent:** He'd been aworking about six months...he worked 13 years at International Harvester. And it was about to fall through in Louisville and he came home and bought a farm right over here on 259. And he went back and forth maybe a year to Louisville. He got tired of that so he'd taken a leave of absence with 80 percent of his pay and he got a job at the Cave and went to work over there fore he even went back. And then he went back up there...they laid him off in

January...he worked six months and he told the main big boss up there he said, "I'm going to have a job up here someday." He said, "Well, I hope you do." So they called him back in March and he's been there ever since.

**Lalley:** Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience with the CCC?

**Vincent:** Well, I don't know of anything, you know, right offhand. Don't know a thing. It'd be interesting...you could get a whole lot out of this thing...course that's just a fire manual and I might of read it or I might not but I got by with it anyway. It was issued to me by J.C. Meredith.

**Lalley:** So it's been a good experience in your life?

**Vincent:** Oh yeah. I wouldn't take nothing for it. Uh, course they always accuse me I can remember anything long back as long as I lived, but I...if you can remember good, there's a whole lot of things good about it...a whole lot of things. You'll grow up some...you go there as a kid, you'll grow up into a man and, well, you just get through life a little better. You meet a lot of people and know how they get by. And so I think it was a good experience for me and made a little money to maybe buy a few beans with. [laughing]

**Lalley:** Well, that's all the questions that I had so I guess I'll just...

**Vincent:** If you want to take out some of these probably be just, you know, like the other and... I'd like to have them back.

**Lalley:** Yeah, oh yeah.

**Vincent:** But I...I would...

**Lalley:** You wouldn't mind if I copy them?

**Vincent:** No. It showed a lot of jokes in there and cartoons and, oh, uh...

**Lalley:** I'll turn this off now.

[End of Interview]