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Interview with Larry Butch Carroll (MSS 707)

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Duvall: Alrighty. It is April 18th, 2010. I'm at the old Carmichael House with Larry Butch Carroll. And, Mr. Carroll, can you just tell me everything you know about the Kyrock vicinity?

Carroll: Um, yes. I was born in Woodside, which is a outreach of this area that we are in. Kyrock really started its existence in 1891 when Harry St. George Tucker Carmichael came to this area. From a geological standpoint, because of its tar sands and asphalt deposits as a result of the silica sands and oil impregnation of this material. From this geological point, sprang a community called Kyrock, Kentucky Rock, Kentucky Rock Asphalt Company. Was the name of the company that was started in late, late 1890's. This community built a culture around a geological site. At its maximum, there was probably 2500 hundred people that worked in the mining and transportation and excavation of asphalt. This asphalt started probably in the early 1920's through 1956. That was the productive years of the asphalt. The asphalt, like I say, carried the burden of the load; shipped all over the world. Hawaii. So it had a real good purpose and had enough purpose to it that it held a community together for roughly forty years. These were during the lean years, and it included the depression, WWII, and the Korean conflict. Many of the people that had come here in the 20's served in our world wars and our conflicts. But like I say, the thing here that was done was that it created a whole new generation, two new generations of people. People that come in from the surrounding states because of their crafts and their skills, the antiquated type of equipment that had to be used to drilling the air drills, compressors, and stuff. But there was skill trades people even in the early 20's that come from Tennessee, Virginia, and the surrounding states because of their mining skills. When these people come in here and started mining, like I say, a town sprang up, along with commissaries. And people would work on a weekly, well, would work on an hourly basis and it fed families. And like I say, as time went on, the community settled in and company built the houses. In the late 1890's it started with the, an old sears and roebuck purchased house, setting at the site at here now. And then an infirmary was built, to start servicing the people that they had to have. It was such a big operation that they had to have medical skills. One of the first

doctors here was Mr. Carmichael. He was a Vanderbilt medical school graduate. And he became the company doctor. He delivered most of the company babies as the community started to grow.

Midwives, but it adapted into a culture that...is that somebody out there?

Duvall: Um, I don't know. I'll pause the recording. Bye now. (Pause in recording). Alright, um. You spoke about Dr. Carmichael, is this is house now that we're in now, or?

Carroll: No its not. The house that we sit in now was erected in 1926 and 27, completed in 1927. As a result of, the house that set right up above us here was that sears and roebuck house that I said was purchased in the late 1800's, and brought here. But Mr. Carmichael lived if you went through Woodside, there was a road that still exists, that meandered up into a log hotel and his porch. He had a nice home, from a company-wide standpoint. All of the homes were basically the same, but his was a little bit bigger and his was a little bit nicer crafted. But this house was built like I say, now there's a tremendously good story about this house. This house was imported from out west by rail. All the patterns, all the windows, all the hardwoods, and everything. Were by rail sent from out west. The outside of this house is California redwood, the siding. Its 8 inch siding. And the finest qualities that could be bought those days was put into this house. Like I say, ship by rail out west to Bowling Green, KY where it was put on barges at the Barren River. Barren River intersects the Green River down around Rochester, and it came by ferry, it came by ferry, up the mouth of Nolin River. At Nolin River, it was by steamboat, it was brought up here and off-bared here, at the places where they actually transported by barge the asphalt, just in reverse. It was all bared down here, at the canal. It, like I say, two gentlemen that were given credit for the building of this were L.G. Elmore and Euria Sanders which were company paid carpenters and craftsmen, and uh, the house still stands today. And as far as I'm concerned, being the owner, it's really still in good shape.

Duvall: Were there any, you said it was probably nicer than most of the other company houses around. Were there any special features that...

Carroll: Oh, absolutely. I'd like to refer you to the poster I've got back here. This was Kyrock as we know it from a...here was Woodside. This was Woodside, this picture in the case was Ridgedale. This was the canal. Here lays the barges being off bared. The water tank with you know with the chutes, the asphalt chutes, it was by (not understood) this quarry here. It all filters down, and it was transported from these asphalt locations by Dinkie. Dinkies are little steam engines that carry, small buckets, of asphalt. It was brought to these chutes, you see here, it was put down these chutes down into the river down here to the canal into barges, which were pulled in and (not understood). The commissary being right here. They also would load asphalt this was all asphalt bottom, at that time til these ports exist, in the 20's. Concrete structures here that could actually load barges from a pontoon (not understood). This whole area, these were their cabins. Where we're at, I mean. These little small houses this was the community. The houses (not understood). The paths that existed because as a result of these houses. The roads and the road system. This here was the home site of Maryanne Key. He farmed that rock. It was nothing but a rock. He spent his whole life just cleaning that one spot off. Just keep it clean. Today, it's kind of grown up. But, he farmed, he had cows. He farmed that, I mean that was his whole life. But he fed his kids, his grandkids, and his whole family, when everything else was starving. So he was pretty lucky. We might talk about being meek, but meek is better than nothing. But probably the greatest, if I could describe anything to what makes this place so unique its so self-sufficient. It has timber, it has water. Water was purified, and has been tested to really be of really quality water. It's filtered through silica sand for miles and miles. And the timber that was on here, all these houses that we look at here were built from the timbers that were here. But one of the biggest things that I want to talk to you about is the church that sit on top of the hill here. In 1925, Mr. Carmichael thought that there needed to be some substance to this place. And he erected a church. The total cost of that church, I was looking at the deed the other day, was \$100. But his people, Mr. Carmichael had people, he had his people. The same people that built this built this, all these structures here, the high school. He created an

infrastructure of religion, schooling and education and I don't know what the word would be, capitalizing on all the natural assets that lie here it can be here. Everything ended up here and put on barges and transported around the world.

Duvall: So this would more or less be the road we have today, more or less.

Carroll: You and I pulled in right here and you parked your vehicle there.

Duvall: Right there. Looks like there were more subsequent paths off the road to the communities.

Carroll: Well, this led to Ridgedale and was to Woodside, and these were the paths to Sweeden, another community that existed. Up the bottoms I'd say you could walk, less than a quarter of a mile from there.

Duvall: Do you know if the road at that time was paved with all the asphalt? They didn't have a paved road.

Carroll: No, not at all. Everything was gravel. But most of it, luckily, this company, the things that was around here had asphalt on it. Many things exist to tell you that there was life here long before there was asphalt mining. The sand houses, the caves, the mounds the things they says that I believe there was life here probably millions of years ago. And I think it was only discovered by geologists that knew that this was geological rich area. Geologically rich area. As a matter of fact, in 1851 or 52 a geologists came through here and did a pencil of the dismal rock, and its logged in some of the journals at western I'm sure where he done this and to find these areas, he knew even at that time that this was a geologically rich area. Also, Green River Oil Company, in the 1830's and 1840's and early 50's, had all these mineral rights as to oil in the axis. And as you see to how over the years been busted up because of the geological sites that we have. Coal is a rich item we have in this county. Not necessarily in as abundance we probably have as much asphalt as we do coal but we do have a lot of good coal seed. Not on this place, but on the outreaches of this area.

Duvall: Do you mind walking me around the house and showing me some of the special features?

Carroll: Not at all. Special features, I feel like at this time is its location. Its located on the rock, built on the rock. High above and at that time, he'd probably been able to see the operation of Kyrock, probably.

Duvall: Do you think that's why he built it here, or one of the reasons maybe?

Carroll: Well, I don't know the real purpose, but because of its scenic beauty at the time. This house is pretty unique. It's a 60 by 60 house. It has a basement under it. It has an upstairs for storage and stuff. Very well constructed. Way ahead of its time. Kyrock in the 20's had its own electrical power plant. The light fixtures that you see that I've taken off here and the ones you don't see, in 1927, you could come and hit a light switch, and have your own electricity, everything. It's just amazing. Lighting and...

Duvall: In '27?

Carroll: 1927, you could come up here and hit these light switches, the same light switches that are here. You hit this one, they have light in here. Got 10 foot plastered walls and ceilings. Got a fireplace. Matter of a fact, it has four flues in this house, for upstairs, downstairs, so and so forth. It's a bit house. It was mainly built for entertaining. In this same house, governors, senators, congressmen have walked on these same floors that you and I are walking. Now they're done gone, but they were instrumental in the development of this area. The Natchers, the Chandlers, took steam boat travel up from, there was various steamboats and carnivals come up the river here. Although its hard to believe, it was an active river. There are tales of bordellos, probably no more than there is today, but at that time it was a big thing. People had a red-light district. A lot of moonshining because of the water. It was a good place to be I guess if you had no other where else to go. Days were spent playing baseball. Kyrock, in the 1920's 30's and 40's was noted for having the best baseball team in the state, surrounding states.

They played, I don't think it's the right word, but commission ball. I mean, it was a minor-league type people. I mean some really good athletes. They said that up here in the field that lays on top they would play all day Sundays. There would be teams that come from everywhere or they would travel. Mr. Carmichael, I knew, I found literature shown where he had endorsed and help finance the teams. Participation in these areas, really a methodical man. Well educated, WMI. Mr. Carmichael, I only have literature of the, he was a VMI graduate, still some stuff exists, some old annuals and stuff. He was a mine guy. Found a lot of books here. Well read. He, those books, he had volumes of books. Religious man. He was a Methodist Episcopal. That's the reason why I think he thought that any culture to survive had to have something in it that bound people together.

Duvall: And you said that it was mainly his idea to build the church house?

Carroll: Yeah, it was definitely his idea. The school, yes, it was his idea. He felt, the better educated you was, and the better your moral fabric is, the better things would go. And like I say, that's why it was good enough and planned well enough that it existed for forty years, today, this still remains, the most productive area in our county, and probably always will be. And we've found records, and I've been told, that in 1927, which was a really good year, they made over 3 million dollars in profits. How accurate is that data, how much was his, I don't know, I'm wanting to brag about it more than wanting to get it down. It was a progressive little company and it got to where it was with the different road services coming on, asphalt, as we knew it was taken over by hot mix, gravel and limestone. Although its of inferior quality, economically it was the best buy of the time. And the old streets, I'm sure in Louisville and different areas still exist just as this driveway does out here, a portion of that stuff's still here. Its of such good quality. Abrasiveness, I guess would be the best word. Good traction. That it was a top notch surface material. But in today's interstate highways and stuff it's just a better animal than to get it at a hot mix plant. But it was really good for about 35-40 years, well about longer than that, give it credit. But in its peak, even it took as long time to die in 1956. You still want to go (not understood). There's

things I'm leaving out and there's things that I don't really know that I would be telling the truth if I told it, but it's things that I want to believe, the good, in what this area done. The families and the, I was born in a company house, my brother was born in the old log hotel up on the Sweeden side of Kyrock. My mom and dad were both born here in Kyrock. And like I say, a lot of memories created and stayed here, and still go on today. But like everything else, everything will fade into oblivion. But somebody will come along again and say it's worth being here and what it will do.

Duvall: You mentioned a little bit about the water, is that something that is still pretty viable today, or?

Carroll: I have really good plans for my, It was Kyrock Water Company at one time, again here we go. Its spring water, I have had it tested, I really want to take this water and either have it, either create my own bottling company or have a vendor around here do my bottling just for the people of Edmonson County. It's not that we're really wanting to make a fortune on this, but it's too good of water to be hitting these creeks and river, these polluted rivers. Like to be the people, have the people around here that like to drink bottled water, we'll make some programs around here that we'll buy your plastic back or something. But something that we could capitalize on as a natural resource from this area that is just flowing. Whether we're making whiskey, or whether we're making beer or bottling water that product needs to be consumed. It's too good to be tainted once it gets into the streams. But the water itself rotary drills, it goes back into an underground river, and these files can be found at Western Kentucky University, the geology department, Mr. Mike May. Well, these are doctors I'm sure. Dr. Mike May and probably Dr. Ken Coon. I think Ken retired. They're very familiar with this. And a lot of information geologically exists in the geology department of western Kentucky university. They have had field trips up here. And Mr. Carmichael, he was a rock guy. And there was a collection in here, that he had of different varieties of rock that existed by Kenneth Ashley, which is another individual that I would really like to recognize here. His dad was an employee of Kyrock and Kenneth had a brother named

Frank and a sister named Penny. Her real name was Beverly June. But these people here, they, he kind of hooked me up or hooked us up with Mike May and Mike brought some people, his classes up here and they've come up here several times. And they geologically can tell you everything about where we're standing here. They have topography maps, elevation maps, any type of map and information that exists. But back to the water. The water is a result of a river, an underground river, that flows through this sandstone that comes out, it comes out of different places all the way up to the bottoms. And it has created little creeks of really good water, as it flows. But here it is just another natural asset to this property that needs to be capitalized on, contained, like I say again, we're not really wanting to make a fortune but we need, our schools and everybody around here that really want real clean water, purified water, non-purified, non chemically laden water will have plenty tubs of it, but that's (not understood). Did you have to help all the time? I'd like to talk to people that could help me. The doors that you opened, while I said that, while ago that congressmen, senators, governors have been in this house, they have. They've partied, they've dance in them rooms. They drank liquor in these rooms. They ate, I had a gas (not understood). This dining room, I'm telling you, this was for its day, the Biltmore of Kyrock. Here again, this is not even to compare to the Biltmore, because of its construction, but given its construction, how it's held up, this has been without heat or anything for years and years and years.

Duvall: Yeah, actually as you walk in, you would never guess this was a house that was built in the 20's.

Carroll: Speaking of which, we had four little lanterns. Rural electrification didn't come through here until 1952-1953. Rural electrification. Running water, running water into your house, it goes somewhere else. But in the 1920's, even before 27, they had their own power plants. When they put this in and these are the same, everything, little lights. Something that was unheard of. They had their own boiler system in the basement. Furnished four bathrooms. Bathrooms at that day...I tell you, we

had toilets. It was a one-holer. We had one-holer. And we did, for paper, we did use catalogs. They had multiple sheets. Sharpened tissue was not around.

Duvall: So in that time, we're talking electricity, running water, and even heated water with the boiler?

Carroll: Oh, absolutely. Oh, they had the boiler system in here. They had radiated heat in here with boilers. Took them all out, didn't want them, too heavy. Boy, its really this glass, this wavy glass and stuff its original glass. Now to say this house has stood in this area for as long as it has, these folks (not understood).

Duvall: For there not to be any cracks or bows or jumps.

Carroll: Hey, this is got, this place here what I'm really going to do with it. It may (not understood). Whoever wants to, this may be a good meeting place. I've already got some school board members that have their meetings over here and different things. Just keep it like it is. But I really want up there, I want the church back, and I want a really, really nice building up there for dining. (Not understood).

Duvall: Do you think you could, do you care to walk me through give an almost like an audio floorplan. We'll start at the front door and tell me what each room was originally and how it was used and...

Carroll: Off the, coming off the porch. The porch is approximately 12.5-13 feet wide and 38 feet long, it walks into a little foyer or a receiving room. It was used, they had a radio in it, it had its own electrical system, but they did use battery radios in here. Two of the radios are still here. This like I say was just a casual walk-in to the main great room as I like to call it. Its 15 by 31 or 32, really a big nice large room and adjacent to and straight through this great room into a dining room. Dining room is not, as far as being wide it is 12.5 feet wide by 16. Nice big dining room. Ten people. Had a gas, had a gas had been converted in to a chandelier type table for the dining room here. Sconces on the wall here. Dining

room the view highly viewed the quarry operations, from up here, kind of like over the hill looking down. You could see the people, the dining room. Mr. and Mrs. Carmichael, when they came from Virginia, they brought a black man and a black woman as the butler and maid for this home. These people were pretty elite people, so they had their own servants. By which, these servants lived a better life than 99% of the white dominant. Black people were not in this area at the time. Racially, they were not here. But regardless of that, the more refined educated people, the Carmichaels brought these people. They had a home right on the, right in front of this house here. The gentlemen, was the boiler system that provided all the hot water, and the heat system for the radiant heat that they had in the house, was done by him and he done the yard work, everything, picked up around the house. The old lady, the black lady she was the maid and she done the cooking and the ironing. In this area as where in here right now, (not understood). And this was naturally you'll see all the locks and stuff. But done all of her cooking and everything in this area right here. She would do her washing and she would do her ironing here. Ironing board still exists today, it's a wall ironing board that you pull down and pull out and do your ironing. I took the cover off of it, but the ironing, ingenious idea here, you iron your sleeves.

Duvall: Oh yeah. I could use one of those.

Carroll: (Not understood). Against this wall, was a table that sat here. It set flat against there and you let down for convenience down into this area right here. And the stove sat here, over this flue here, wood stove. (Not understood). The stove was just done, no it was oil, it was not wood, it was oil. It burnt the oil (not understood) and the gas, it was vented that way.

Duvall: I see there's a door off the kitchen, was that originally to a chicken coop maybe? The door here, where did that?

Carroll: Do what now, do what? This here. Oh this is just the original doors here.

Duvall: Just an extra exit?

Carroll: No this was a porch I've already took, I've torn off that I'm going to reconstruct because I'm going to extend my roof out here and enclose that, so you'll have a place to set there and look up that valley. You look up that valley its really pretty up through there. But this door was, that is the, everything in here is original. This house is 99% original. These boards, these cabinets and stuff made out of redwood. That is one board. This is one board.

Duvall: Oh wow, that's one. Almost.

Carroll: It probably be 22 maybe 23 inches wide.

Duvall: Maybe 5.5 6 feet long.

Carroll: 6 feet long, yeah. All these. And like I said, the materials used in this house, plus the construction quality what let it endure this whole time. These are the, I'm doing this, taking the paint off and stuff, that's what they look like when you take it off, the hinges.

Duvall: Is that bronze maybe, or?

Carroll: It's copper. These match identically, the sconces that goes on the wall.

Duvall: Everything's all probably custom made, and?

Carroll: Well, I don't know if they were custom made they were probably plated, but they're copper plated and they have, it just real good, or they could've been stamped out of it, it's just real good quality. The house closets, these closets are larger than most the houses that used to be. And they're well laid out and a lot of space here. This was another bedroom. This was a bedroom. This bedroom had its own bathroom inside, like I say. Originally there was a tub that sat in this area and a commode right here and a washstand right here and that was all that was in here. And this will all be redone to be reflect as much original as it could. And just to have a bathroom in this time.

Duvall: Unheard of?

Carroll: More than unheard of. Let me tell you something there was probably kids later on that didn't even know this place existed back here. One, they had, it was kindly scary because they had big

dogs, a couple of big dogs, and they would run, oh they'd run its boundary, and it would scare you off. And probably, their parents had told them to not be over there around that big old house, because like I say there was probably, you're talking about a stratification of cultures, this was the rich and the elite, and just right out their door the poor (not understood) but still be on a subsistence level. These people had more than a lot of people, but these people didn't have to worry. Their monies was well planned. And I'm sure a lot of it was hereditary, because you can see by lets go back to the Carmichael name that it goes back through the generations. Just like the philosophy that Mr. Carmichael put on this land that it requires a certain culture to get certain people, and that's what he done. His was on a different level than what he perpetuate here, on at this place. Closets again, not only that they were lighted closets, big. But this was a bedroom also. (End of recording).