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(SNP011) Isaac William Beahm interviewed by Charles Anibal, transcribed by Joy K. Stiles

Isaac William Beahm

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Interview with Izzac William Beahm
Part of the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, SdArch SNP-011
(SC #4030)

Interview conducted in Luray, Virginia
By Charles Anibal on October 23, 1985

Transcribed by Joy K. Stiles, date unknown

Key

[DS:] Interviewer, Charles Anibal
[MF:] Interviewee, Izzac William Beahm
[BD]: Beahm's daughter

[Notes regarding transcription technique]
[unintelligible] Unable to understand more than one word
— Speaker makes abrupt change in sentence
Refer to the Baylor University Style Guide for consistency in transcription

Total interview length: 00:36:15 min.

[Begin Audio, 00:00:01 min.]

Charles Anibal: This interview is with Izzac William Beahm, on October 23, 1985 at the home of Mr. Beahm's daughter, in Luray, Virginia. Interviewer is Charles Anibal. Okay, Mr. Beahm, you can start by telling me where you were born, where exactly you lived and grew up?

Izzac Beahm: Well, see, I was born and raised not far over by the Sam Batman place. Do you know where that is?

CA: I don't think I do, but if you'd tell me, I think I can figure it out. How do you get--

BD: [unintelligible] Run, toward Vaughn. [three Vaughn families in Rocky Branch]

CA: Okay, up in--okay. And what was the name that he--what was the name, Sir?

IB: [unintelligible]

CA: Sam who? What was the last name? Sam . . .

BD: Batman.

CA: Batman.

IB: Sam Batman.

CA: Sam Batman, I understand. Yes, I know the place. Okay.

BD: You know Dickey?

CA: Yeah, I know him. The whole--

BD: That's his grandfather.

CA: Dick Batman the grandfather. And what year were you born, Sir?

IB: What year?

CA: Yes, sir.

IB: I was born in 1895.

CA: 1895. My goodness, so you're already 90 years old, now.

IB: That's right.

CA: I'd have never known it. And what was your father's name?

IB: Thomas Jefferson Beahm.

CA: Thomas Jefferson Beahm. Did you have brothers and sisters?

IB: [unintelligible] I had eight brothers and sisters.

CA: My goodness.

IB: [unintelligible] last one was a girl. But we lost three of them.

CA: When they were young?

IB: When my daddy passed on, I was six years old.

CA: You were?

IB: Yes.

CA: Were you--the ones that, of the children that lived, which ones were they? That grew up. Your brothers or sisters, or what?

IB: Two brothers and one sister died. When they were small.

BD: He said the ones that lived.

IB: Five sisters lived. [unintelligible]

CA: Well, then, sir, you were the only boy, then, growing up?

IB: That's right.

CA: From the time you were six years old, you, you were the man of the house, is that true?

IB: (laughs)

CA: Just about.

IB: [unintelligible]

CA: Well, what did you have to do, then, growing up, as a six year boy, the only boy in the house, taking care of things for your mother and your sisters, what did you have to do?

IB: Well, --

BD: His mother died six months after his dad.

CA: Oh, my goodness.

IB: My mother died three months--

BD: Three months

IB: --after my Daddy died.

BD: So it was just the children.

CA: Well, with just the children, who did you live with, then? Did you live with an uncle or grandparents, or anything like that?

IB: No, sir. My father had a home [unintelligible] and my oldest sister stayed there and kept house.

CA: I see. Your oldest sister then took care of you?

IB: [unintelligible] take care of us.

CA: Now, when you were living up there, what was the place like? Did you have any hogs or any corn growing or what did you live on? Did you have a farm?

IB: Yeah, had seventy-five acres. [unintelligible] when my father died, we had three horses, we had four cows and a bunch of sheep.

CA: So you had quite an operation. Were you growing anything? Were you growing apples?

IB: Yeah, had a small orchard.

CA: Small orchard.

IB: [unintelligible] corn, wheat, stuff like that, on the place. That's what helped to take care of the small kids.

CA: Yes, you'd need that. And your job, what did--growing up in a place like this, seventy-five acres, did you have a lot of work you had to do around the place, taking care of the cows, horses, sheep and--

IB: Well, after I got big enough, I did. But I was too small when they passed on.

CA: Did you go to school at all when you were living up there?

IB: Oh, yes.

CA: Where did you go to school?

IB: Rocky Branch.

CA: Down at Rocky Branch. How far away from the house, from your home place, was that?

IB: It was about a half a mile.

CA: It was not too far, then, for you to get.

IB: No.

CA: How many students were in that school? Do you remember?

IB: [unintelligible] my sisters were in school . . . it was . . .

BD: Do you know how many children went there, he means?

CA: How many children in the school?

IB: Oh, oh . . .

BD: All together, in school.

IB: Oh, oh, well, about twenty-five.

CA: Is that right? Twenty-five students.

IB: Yeah.

CA: How long did you go to school? Until you were how old?

IB: How old? One [unintelligible] until you got grown up.

CA: Yeah, so you were able to keep on going to school right up until you were grown up, then?

IB: Yeah, yeah. And my sisters, too.

CA: So about how--do you know how old you were when you finished the school?

IB: When I went to school?

CA: When you finished school.

IB: I was about fourteen years old when I had to quit and go to work.

CA: Well, then what did you do when you quit school, then? Did you go back to work on your home place or did you have a job somewhere else?

IB: Well, I went back to the home place and went to work.

BD: Didn't you work in a stave mill, or something?

CA: Did you have any other jobs, then?

IB: I did later, yeah.

CA: What other jobs did you have later on in your life?

IB: Worked in a saw mill.

CA: Where was the saw mill?

IB: Where?

CA: Where was it?

IB: Well, there was two or three.

CA: Over in--

IB: Over there pretty close.

CA: Oh, I see. Were these mills outside, down the--outside the hollow, outside the Park area, or were they up on the mountain?

IB: Well, there was a couple of them pretty close to our home. About a half a mile or a mile.

CA: Do you know who owned these sawmills? That you worked in? Do you remember that? Who ran them?

IB: Yeah, uh . . . name of . . .

BD: Some Alice, wasn't it?

IB: No, no . . . Ellis Miller.

CA: Ellis Miller, he was the owner of the sawmill.

IB: He owned the sawmill.

CA: How long did you stay, living at the home place up there, after you grew up?

IB: I was nineteen years old.

CA: What happened when you were nineteen years old?

IB: I got married and I left home.

CA: Oh, you left home, you didn't stay there when you got married. Where did you move to when you got married?

IB: Well, we went and lived with my wife's people a year, and then we went to housekeeping on Sam Beahm's and Brady Beahm's place.

CA: Sam Beahm is this the same--

BD: Actually, it was his uncle.

CA: That was your uncle?

IB: That's right.

CA: Where was this place, exactly? That you set up?

IB: Right close, about a half a mile from where I was born and raised.

CA: Oh, I see. So you just only moved about a half a mile away, you lived in the same area there, where your--

IB: That's right.

CA: --father, where your uncle had lived. Now, how long did you stay in this place, then? That you moved into with your wife?

IB: Well, I stayed there two or three years. Then I went somewhere else that was around there close.

CA: So you lived in different houses right around there close?

IB: That's right.

CA: All of these in the Park area, where the Park is now?

IB: Well, a part come down inside there and this other part of the property is out of the Park.

CA: Were you living in the Park area when the Park came in, or were you outside the Park at that time?

IB: No, I was in the Park area part of the time. When we first went into housekeeping, I moved into the old Johnny Lehew place. I stayed there three years. When I was out of there, I took a place in the Park.

CA: I see. Now, this place that you were staying, Johnny Lehew?

IB: Yes, Johnny Lehew place.

CA: Lehew. And that was not, you say that was inside the Park area?

BD: Yeah.

CA: When you were living there at the time the Park came in?

IB: Yeah.

CA: Well, what happened to you then?

IB: Well, I stayed there at the, where I got raised. And they, Park, nobody didn't bother me, but

[unintelligible] Well, then [unintelligible] man come around, but he wouldn't bother me. He'd just go on to his, tend to his business.

CA: Well, did you have to leave, sometime there?

IB: No, no, I didn't have to leave. But my wife's health was bad on her and she wanted to move out.

CA: Oh, I see.

IB: Down, out of the Park.

CA: So you went ahead and moved out of the park anyway. You wanted to move out of the Park area?

IB: Yeah.

CA: You had to move out anyway. But up until you moved out of the Park, you were still farming on the various places that you worked and worked in the sawmills, right?

IB: Worked sawmill when I had the chance to work.

CA: Uh huh, and you did, did you, but you were, were you farming in the meantime, in the different places, did you farm at home, too?

IB: Yeah.

CA: What all, what did you raise?

IB: Oh, raised corn, wheat, oats, buckwheat . . .

CA: Did you have sheep like your father, at any time?

IB: Yup, most of the time I did.

CA: And you raised them for wool, or for meat?

IB: I raised them for wool.

CA: How many sheep did you have?

IB: Oh, I had sometimes twenty-five or thirty.

CA: Uh huh. And you had hogs?

IB: Hogs, yeah.

CA: Did you have them penned up or were they running free up in the, out in the woods, the hogs?

IB: Hogs? Let them out in the field.

CA: Did you have your own mark on them?

IB: Yeah.

CA: Do you remember what your mark was?

IB: Yes, sir. Hole and slit in the right ear.

CA: Ah ha, and you knew that was your mark, huh?

IB: That was my mark.

CA: And a lot of people up there had their, had their hogs out there running . . . what would you do, you'd go, would you go get them for butchering every year or so?

IB: Yeah, yeah. You would do the butchering and sell and start off for another year.

CA: How did you ever find your own hog when it came time for you to get one to butcher?

IB: (laughing) Always marked.

CA: Well, did you have to look at a lot of hogs before you found your mark?

IB: Well, you, sometimes you did. Sometimes you wouldn't.

CA: How far away would they roam? How far away would they go from the place, if they're wandering out loose all year long?

IB: (laughs) Oh, they're generally a mile, three miles away from home.

CA: Is that right?

IB: Yeah.

CA: And you'd have to go find them?

IB: Yeah.

CA: Did you have cows?

IB: Yeah.

CA: Milk cows?

IB: Oh, yeah, kept milk cows, oh, up until a couple years ago. Couldn't milk no longer.

BD: Just sold his cows this year.

CA: Just now? Is that right? Where did he have them, where did he keep them, out here? You have land here, right here?

BD: Uh huh.

CA: So, now you got married when you were nineteen--

IB: That's right.

CA: --and you raised your family, and how many children did you have?

IB: I had two. Two girls.

CA: I believe I met one of them here.

BD: And what else did you do?

IB: My brother-in-law had a young boy--

BD: Eighteen months old.

IB: Eighteen month old, and he lost his wife, and I took this boy and raised him.

CA: I see, you raised your brother-in-law's boy. This would be your sister's, is it, it would be your sister's son, your nephew?

BD: Yeah.

IB: Yeah. I called Jason my boy as I did the girls.

BD: He always wanted a boy, so he got him a boy.

CA: So you had a boy after all?

IB: That's right.

CA: And you raised him, too?

IB: Raised him until he got married.

CA: Were your children and your nephew, were they born up in the area, there? Were you raised up there, were you raised up there?

BD: Yes, I was.

CA: In that area?

BD: Absolutely. All were. Rocky Branch.

CA: Up there in Rocky Branch.

BD: That's right.

CA: Can you remember back to when you were still growing up, and going to school, living with your sister, and being taken care of by your uncle, those times, and what your days were like, what you did? You'd go to school, and what else did you do, what did you do for fun if you were a little boy?

IB: When I was a boy, well, I'd play with other boys and fool around, with [unintelligible] if I had time. There was always a boy. After I'd grewed up a little, I had to truck wood, carry wood in, in the winter. It was cold weather.

CA: So you still had a lot of work to do, you didn't have a lot of time to fool around with the boys.

IB: No, I didn't have the time to do it, like other boys.

CA: Probably most of the boys around, the boys you knew there, they all had jobs, too, to do. Everybody living out there had work to do, to keep the place going.

IB: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

CA: But if you ever did have any time, did you have any games that you played, anything

like that that went on? You didn't watch television, I know that.

IB: (laughs) No, didn't have no . . .

CA: You didn't have a radio, probably.

IB: No television.

BD: No radio.

IB: No cars, nothing like that.

CA: Were there roads up to where you lived, enough to get a car up there, would cars drive up there?

IB: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

CA: Yeah? It wasn't just, just wagons that got up there, but cars.

IB: Yeah.

CA: Did people near you own cars, back when they came in?

IB: When I was growing up?

CA: Uh huh.

IB: No, wasn't no cars up there.

CA: Is that right? Of course, when you were growing up, there were no cars anyway, I guess, we're getting way back there.

BD: No, no.

CA: But getting back to your life there as a boy, you did a lot of chores, and you said you'd fool around with the other boys if you had time. When you were fooling around, what did you do? Did you have games to play, or did you just run around in the woods, or what?

IB: Well, [unintelligible] game [unintelligible] most of us. When you're little like that.

CA: Yeah. I think that's what all boys do, I guess. That's what my boys did, that's all they say they did. So when you were raising your family, was it hard times to raise a family up there, was it pretty hard work keeping the farm going, keeping stuff, keeping enough money in to go all winter long?

IB: Well, I'll tell you, money was scarce, sure enough.

CA: I'll bet.

IB: [unintelligible] had a family and [unintelligible] up with them. We didn't have no money. You couldn't get no money.

CA: Those were hard for everybody, too.

IB: Yeah, yeah, sure.

BD: He helped build the tunnel, and worked on up there.

CA: Did you help work on the Skyline Drive?

IB: Yes, I did.

CA: Well, tell me about that.

IB: That was a cold job.

CA: I'll bet!

IB: I worked the whole winter. And that was a cold job, sure enough.

CA: What did you do? What was your job up there?

IB: Working in the rock quarry part of the time, and part of the time dug out for the overflow of the road. The road, washing the, overflow, you know. Yeah, it was a cold job up there . . .

CA: I'd imagine it was a cold job up there. How did you get up there, to the job?

IB: Well, sir, I rode about three miles horseback and the rest of the way I had to walk. Couldn't take a horse up there.

CA: It was that far up there, huh? Well, it was so bad, you couldn't even ride a horse up there. How far did you have to walk?

IB: Oh, a mile or more.

CA: Is that right?

IB: Yes, sir.

CA: How long did you work for, on the Skyline Drive? How long did you have that job up there?

IB: I didn't have it so long. I got another job working on back at the Tannery. I worked at the [unintelligible] for forty years, worked twenty years for the [unintelligible] company and then they broke up, lost out, when they quit, I lost my job. I went back, back home and [unintelligible] Smith was running a sawmill and [unintelligible] most of it to Culpeper. I would go down there, drove logs for him. In three years, the Virginia Oak Tannery started again. I went back and got another job, went back there again. But still I wasn't getting much money. We was getting ours, getting two dollar and forty-two cent for a nine hour.

CA: Not much money.

IB: No, sir! Not very much.

CA: Hard work.

IB: That's right. You had to work when you was there.

CA: Do you remember when they finished up the Skyline Drive, and cars started coming up, up the road and people started coming into this area and driving up there? Remember any of that?

IB: Yeah, I remember it. Sure do.

CA: Things change around here a lot, then?

IB: Oh, Lord, yes!

CA: What happened?

IB: Well, there was a big change . . . more money. [unintelligible] very much up there.

CA: You know, in 1936, almost fifty years ago, the President of the United States came in to dedicate the Park at Big Meadows. Do you remember when that happened?

IB: Yes, I do.

CA: Did you find out about it at the time?

IB: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

CA: What was it like then? Do you remember it happening and what you did then?

IB: [unintelligible] hardly knew what he'd done.

CA: But you do remember it happening? A lot of folks knew about it then?

[TAPE AUDIO LEVEL ABRUPTLY BECOMES VERY FAINT]

IB: Oh, yeah.

BD: [unintelligible]

CA: You were there?

BD: I participated in [unintelligible]

CA: Oh, you did!

BD: [unintelligible]

CA: Well, I'm going to have to get another [unintelligible] can't [unintelligible].

BD: [unintelligible]

CA: Well, sir, tell me, do you know anything about where, about the people, when they first came into the area? Did your uncle or anybody, your relatives ever tell you when the Beahms came into the area? Your old grandfather and people like that. Know anything about that?

IB: [unintelligible] my grand-daddy [unintelligible] died before I was born [unintelligible]. [unintelligible] got married and had four children. Had to bring Joe home to raise him, he didn't have a mom, and after Joe was grown up a little, he had to [unintelligible]

CA: This was your grandfather you're talking about?

IB: Yes.

CA: Where'd he live?

IB: He lived [unintelligible] very close to Rocky Branch school house.

CA: Do you know when was he born, was this grandfather, was he born in that area?

IB: Well, yeah, he was born there, too.

CA: You know if his father was born in the area? Or do you know that?

IB: No, I don't know [unintelligible] he was born. But he was an old man, I remember him. I didn't know [unintelligible].

CA: Tell me, is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to tell me now? Any stories, or anything, any memories about what it was like back when you were growing up or when you were raising your family up there in the area?

IB: [unintelligible] ask Margie.

CA: Well, we can probably do it again sometime, [unintelligible]. You mentioned, you were talking about how hard it was, raising a family and those things. Were there any good times that you can remember, back when you were raising your family [unintelligible]?

IB: The only good time was when everybody was well. Didn't [unintelligible].

CA: Is there anything that you did, when you were a young man, that you enjoyed? I mean, you had to work an awful lot raising your family, but did you ever do anything that [unintelligible] get together with your sisters or family or friends, or did you pretty much work all the time?

IB: Well, [unintelligible]

CA: Right, but you would get together with family. That would be about the one way you would entertain yourselves, I guess.

IB: Yeah.

CA: Sit around, have big dinners. Did you ever have any big apple butter makings and that kind of thing?

IB: Oh, yes. [unintelligible] we'd have [unintelligible] two or three times, in the fall, have the orchard there [unintelligible] apples. [unintelligible]

CA: Those are usually pretty good times when people are boiling apples. Those are usually times when people had a good time and got together.

IB: Yeah.

CA: Right?

IB: Yeah, they were.

CA: How about hog butchering? Was that ever something people got together for, or was that just something you did at home.

IB: [unintelligible] butcher?

CA: Sometimes people get together when they butcher a hog, families get together. Did you do that?

IB: Oh, yeah, yeah. We had a butchering every fall. [unintelligible] hogs [unintelligible] a great big day for it. And people would come in to help you. They were [unintelligible] one day eating.

CA: So times weren't all that hard, I guess. You didn't have any money but you had friends and you had family and everybody helped each other.

IB: Yeah, yeah, sure did. We [unintelligible] butchering day. [unintelligible] kill them [unintelligible] kill them.

CA: Did you have a big meal after that? People get together for a big dinner after the butchering?

IB: Oh, yeah, yeah. Had a big gala.

CA: Anything else that you'd do besides that, any people do any singing or any music or any stuff like that going on, or just sit around and talk?

IB: [unintelligible] music [unintelligible]

CA: [unintelligible] dance, and all that. Oh my goodness! What kind of music did you have? Banjoes, or what?

IB: Banjoes and fiddles.

CA: Most everybody had, knew someone that had a banjo or a fiddle, I reckon.

IB: Oh, yeah, yeah, and most everybody could play.

CA: Uh huh. Anything else? Any other instruments people played besides banjo and fiddles?

IB: No, that's about the most what they had--mouth harp.

CA: Mouth harp?

IB: Yeah.

CA: And they danced, and just had a good old time.

IB: Oh, yeah.

CA: Well, sir, can you think of anything else that you want to tell us about, about your life?

IB: No.

CA: Looking back on it, how do you feel about how you lived your life back there?

IB: I feel very good about it.

CA: You had hard times but you had some good times.

IB: That's right. There was good times with the hard times.

[End Audio, 00:36:13 min.]

End of Interview

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Side A:

Izzac William Beahm is 90 years old at the time of this interview, being conducted at his daughter's home in Luray, Virginia. Beahm is somewhat hard of hearing and has a weak, frail voice. He explains that he was born in the Batman Hollow area of Page County, and lived in various homes in this area throughout his life. He had eight siblings, five girls and he survived to adulthood. His father passed away when Beahm was six years old, his mother three months later. Beahm was raised by an older sister in his parents' home. The family farm was about 75 acres in size. Beahm recalls having three

horses, four milk cows and a number of sheep. There was also a small orchard.

Beahm recalls the farm crops including corn and wheat. He helped with chores as he grew up and he also went to school at Rocky Branch, about a half mile from his home. He believes there were about 25 children attending Rocky Branch School. Beahm recalls having little free time, and spending what free time he had playing with other boys in the area. He quit school at age 14 and went to work, working on the family farm and also at several sawmills near his home. One of the sawmills was owned by Ellis Miller. When he was 19, Beahm married and moved out of his family home. He and his wife were living within the Park boundary when the Park was created. He indicated that they were not forced to leave their land, but chose to move out due to his wife's bad health. At the time, he was farming and raising corn, wheat, oats, and buckwheat. He also had sheep, raising them for their wool, and hogs which he raised for market. He also had milk cows. He raised two daughters and his nephew in the area now owned by Shenandoah National Park.

There is sketchy information about Beahm's working on the Mary's Rock Tunnel, in a rock quarry located in the Park, and on drainage ditches along Skyline Drive during the winter time. He would ride a horse three miles up the mountain and walk the remaining mile to get to work. Beahm was also employed by the Virginia Oak Tannery in Luray, and worked for man named Smith who ran a sawmill.

When asked about the dedication of the Park by President Roosevelt in 1936, Beahm indicated he remembered the event, but he did not give any information about it. His daughter, present for the interview, said she was a participant in the ceremony. Beahm's response to a question about his ancestors was difficult to hear, and much of the information is not audible.

Beahm remembers his family getting together in the fall to boil apple butter and also to butcher hogs. The family would enjoy dinner, music and dancing together. Beahm mentions banjos, fiddles and mouth harps providing the music.

Beahm concludes his interview saying he feels good about how his life was, with a mixture of good times and hard times.

End of interview.

[Note: Izzac owned tract #107, Page County, 24 acres, none of which was taken for park purposes.]