

1-9-1966

# (SNP032) George Corbin interviewed by Edward Garvey, transcribed by Victoria M. Edwards

George Corbin

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Interview with George Corbin

Part of the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, SdArch SNP-032  
(SC# 4030)

Interview conducted at home of George Corbin, Falls Church, Virginia

By Edward Garvey on January 9, 1966

Transcribed by Victoria M. Edwards, October, 2009

and Mary M. Darrough, January, 2010

Key

[EG:] Interviewer, Edward Garvey

[GC:] Interviewee, George Corbin

[Notes regarding transcription technique]

[unintelligible] Unable to understand more than one word

\_\_\_\_\_ (??) Transcriber's best guess

– Speaker makes abrupt change in sentence

Refer to the Baylor University Style Guide for consistency in transcription

Total interview length: 00:31:59 min.

[Begin audio, 00:00:01]

EG: Recording taking place in Falls Church, Virginia on Sunday, January 9th, 1966 between Edward B. Garvey of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and Mr. George T. Corbin. I am Mr. Garvey and the other voice is that of Mr. Corbin. The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club maintains about 250 miles of hiking trails in the Blue Ridge Mountains and surrounding areas and maintains thirteen locked cabins. One of these cabins is called Corbin Cabin and that is the subject of our conversation today. In 1953, the Trail Club obtained permission from the Shenandoah National Park to renovate an abandoned mountaineer's cabin in the park. This is about seven miles north of the intersection of US Highway 211 and Skyline Drive. The renovation project took approximately a year. The Corbins, when they left there, had just built a new metal roof on the cabin, prior to the time they were evicted in 1938 and the roof was still in good condition. At the dedication ceremonies in 1954, George Corbin, then living in Ida, Virginia, was invited to attend and did attend and the article concerning the building of the cabin originally, was written in the July/September 1954 issue of The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club Bulletin. This article is by Alvin E. Peterson. Other information concerning Nicholson Hollow and George Corbin is contained in the book Skyland by George Freeman Pollock, copyright 1960 by the Chesapeake Book Company, Library of Congress catalogue card number 60-16567. George, I'd like to have you tell us a little bit about the building of the cabin, when you were born and various aspects of life in Nicholson Hollow. Could you tell us now when you were born, when you built the cabin and some of these details?

GC: I was born in August the second, 1888. Just the date when I built the cabin.

EG: I think that was around 1909 or '10, according to Peterson.

GC: That's right, Mr. Peterson, he, we checked back, what he's got, that was when I built it. Yeah.

EG: So you were around twenty-one or twenty-two then, I believe.

GC: That's right.

EG: Were you married then, George? When you built that cabin?

GC: Oh yes.

EG: This was your first wife?

GC: Second wife.

EG: Your second wife.

GC: The first one had died—

EG: So you lived with your first wife at your father's?

GC: All the time, sure did. Lived then with my father. Madison Corbin.

EG: Madison Corbin. That was your father's name.

GC: Yeah.

EG: Now, your father owned about fifty acres of land there, did he?

GC: Yeah.

EG: And when you built your cabin, you acquired some of that?

GC: Yeah, I bought four or five acres that I built on.

EG: Could you tell me about the building the cabin itself, George? What you went through, what kind of help you got and so forth?

GC: Well, I had to go to the mountain and cut all these logs and haul them out with a horse. Then I hewed them myself.

EG: Now these weren't sawn, these were all hewn?

GC: All hewn by hand.

EG: What kind of a tool did you use to do that?

GC: Broad axe.

EG: Broad axe.

GC: And then cutting into that I used my regular chopping axe. Stretch a line, hew to that line, make a line with a chalk, you know? And hew 'em down, when I got them all ready, why then we had to call a house raising. Gang come in, take four corner men and four for to kick the logs up to us to build it, and then, we called it rib it off (??). Put these ribs on for the roof and before night come we had it ready for the roof, lines stood at the evening (??). I had to do all the rest by hand, just as long as I could do it, outside of working these other jobs to make a living. So I was living with my father.

EG: While you were building the cabin.

GC: That's right.

EG: How many men did you have helping you build the cabin that day?

GC: Just about ten. Ten of us.

EG: Their wives come too and children to the house raising?

GC: Well, I had none but—

EG: I mean did the men bring their wives and families?

GC: Oh no.

EG: Just the men themselves?

GC: We fed them at my father's house.

EG: I see.

GC: We all had lunch there. We called it dinner, then.

EG: Then, after the house was raised, what about the shingles and all the rest of it?

GC: Well I went to the mountain and cut these trees and rivened (??) out by hand, what you call a flow (??). Rivened (??) 'em out and covered it, that stayed on so many year, and got bad and then I went and borrowed this money, Mr. Judd, and went to Culpeper and bought the metal roof and put it on. Hired my cousin, he was a carpenter and a tanner, too. And the same, I bought that in Culpeper and all the ceiling that's in, hauled it up to Culpeper on a truck and from there hauled it up on a wagon. And the roof's still on there now.

EG: That's right, I've seen that roof. It's still a good roof.

GC: Still a good roof, yeah.

EG: See, that roof's been up there almost thirty years now.

GC: Yeah.

EG: Yeah, that's a good roof. Now, you moved in there I guess around 1910, George. This was your second wife, was it?

GC: Yeah, second wife. I didn't live with the first one, I lived with my father all the time. She didn't live but about two year after we married.

EG: Now, your first wife, she was a Nicholson, was she?

GC: Corbin.

EG: She was a Corbin?

GC: Yeah.

EG: She was a Corbin. And she was married you told me, I believe, in Hannah Run?

GC: Yeah, lived up Hannah Run.

EG: Now, how many of your children were born in the cabin that we have now?

GC: That we're speaking of?

EG: Yeah.

GC: All four of them.

EG: Four of your children.

GC: The preacher, and Virgil and the daughter that's in Michigan and the boy that died here.

EG: I might say that George's youngest son Franklin was—

GC: Franklin, yeah.

EG: He -- we're recording this at 315 South Virginia Avenue in Falls Church and Franklin died here just about three years ago of a heart attack, this was George's youngest son who was working here with him in Falls Church.

GC: Served in the Army, too. Yeah.

EG: Yeah. Now, your wife died, did she, your second wife died in the cabin, didn't she, George?

GC: No, she, we moved--yeah, the second wife died in it, that's right. The first one in my father's house.

EG: How old was -- she died in childbirth, didn't she?

GC: Yeah, my second wife.

EG: And how old was the baby when she--?

GC: About three hours old.

EG: Three hours. And this was in the winter time too, wasn't it?

GC: Yeah, dead of winter and Dr. Long, he rode to the foot of the mountain in a car and I had a horse over there and rode across the Blue Ridge full of ice and come there and waited on her and I went back with him, and after we left she died.

EG: She died real suddenly, then.

GC: Yeah.

EG: Then you had a three-hour old baby, who took care of the baby, then?

GC: Just first one and then the other, my sister-in-law kept it a long time and then a doctor, his wife took it and they had trouble and then I just had to carry him around until I married my last wife, Franklin's mother, and she took it and raised all four, all four of the children, they was all small.

EG: I see.

GC: And she died in the university hospital, we sent her there from Ida. And that was my last wife.

EG: I see. That's when you were living in Ida. Now, the cemetery you have, I've seen there, George, across from the cabin. How many people are buried in the cemetery, would you say?

GC: Oh, there's twenty-five or thirty.

EG: Twenty-five, there's mostly Nicholsons, were they?

GC: Mostly, yeah. Just about all of them. There's Uncle Rust (??) and his wife and my father and my grand--no, my, Old Man Aaron Nicholson, he's buried at Wolftown, but his wife was buried--I said, he was married the second time. But a lot of people buried there. Preacher Nicholson and a lot of 'em buried there.

EG: Well I've noticed you've got a good fence around it and a good iron gate and--

GC: Yeah, and I got that fence at Luray and hauled it up that mountain and put it in and everything.

EG: Could you tell me a little bit about the funerals in those times, George, what it

cost and what they did, the ceremony and so forth?

GC: Didn't really cost much. We had the casket -- we called 'em coffins then -- get a nice a nice one for twenty dollars.

EG: Those were made down in where?

GC: Down in Nethers Mills (??), man name of Rob Jones, found a carpenter, make as pretty a casket as you'd ever seen.

EG: Make 'em to order or would he have them in stock?

GC: No, he'd make 'em by hand.

EG: To order as soon as a person died, you mean?

GC: Yeah, made 'em all alike then, until he got to getting these northern ones.

EG: What do you mean by northern ones?

GC: Well, that's the ones like they use now.

EG: Oh, just the box type, you mean?

GC: Yeah. That's right. But the ones he made, Lord, I liked them a whole lot better.

EG: They were made to fit the person who had just died.

GC: Yeah. Made in the shape of the person. It'd come out here and run down there at there at the foot, and the head and the bows here at the shoulder. Pretty things. And they used real timber in them.

EG: Were they made out of chestnut or oak?

GC: No, he made them out of the finest oak and lots of times out of black walnut.

EG: I see, and those cost twenty dollars?

GC: Yeah.

EG: And there was no embalming of them.

GC: No embalming whatever.

EG: And you dug your own grave and so forth?

GC: Everything, the neighbors would dig 'em.

EG: Tell me, George, quite a bit of money there was made of what they call this tan bark industry, could you tell me about that?

GC: Oh yeah, we made a--that tan bark project run from, before they ever [unintelligible], eight or ten year. Peeling it and getting it out of the mountains, hauling it clear to Luray.

EG: Was there a--what did they have at Luray where they used the--

GC: They had a tannery, steel dow (??), with the Ivory Soap bark and haul it there and grind it and put it in vats, you know, and then added the juice of this bark, why, it'd tan these hides, you know, make genuine leather. Now they can't get it, the leather's tanned too quick, leather don't last like it used to.

EG: Now who owned all this land where the tan bark work was going on?

GC: Why, Mr. Pollock. But they got out about all of it before he come in and showed 'em what they did own. He wasn't bothered about it, he never give 'em no trouble. Well, he knowed he couldn't. My grandfather claimed it at one time, but after we found out—well, he did sell some of it. He'd give Mr. Woodard and, John Woodard and Pete Sowers (??) authority to peel it. He didn't own it.

EG: What was this process where you took off the tan bark, how'd you go about it, would you explain that?

GC: Well, you'd take it off with spuds when the sap was a-running, chop the tree down and let it lay until it turned yellow stack it up and then they'd come through and make roads to it and with these wagons and haul it to Luray to the tan yard.

EG: Now these were, what kind of trees mostly were used in tan bark work?

GC: Chestnut oak.

EG: Chestnut oak.

GC: Chestnut oak.

EG: How about chestnut itself?

GC: No, that's no good.

EG: Oh, it had to go to the—

GC: They did use spruce pine a while, they didn't pay much according to that and that didn't work as good as this chestnut oak.

EG: Chestnut oak was the best.

GC: The best, yeah, far better.

EG: And after you cut the trees and took the bark off, what happened to the—

GC: They just lay down and went to nothing, rotted up.

EG: Didn't use them for anything else?

GC: No, indeed. Nothing to use them for.

EG: Not even for firewood?

GC: The saw mills in there. No, most of 'em was too full back up against the mountain, we had firewood close to us, all around us.

EG: Yeah. That's a shame, just to cull that nice timber just for the bark and then throw it away or let it rot. George, you used to make a little money, according to Pollock's book, you made some very good peach brandy and some apple brandy, and I guess during a period there, you did a little moonshining, too.

GC: Yeah, I moonshined for five year and made peach brandy, apple brandy and regular whiskey, that's made out of rye and corn.

EG: Where'd you have your still for the whiskey?

GC: Had it back in the mountain.

EG: Right near your house, there?

GC: Well, at one time did, but they got to hunting for me so much, put it further back in the mountain.

EG: Is this the one you built up Hemp Patch Run, you call it?

GC: Yeah, had more than that beyond there. They never did get that still, the still they got I had it down in Nicholson's Hollow and it was making this apple brandy.

EG: I see.

GC: But they got that, and told the people when they down to Mr. Neville's, "See, did you catch anybody?" See, "No, it was reported to us that a crippled man owned it, but see if he's a crippled man. I'd hate to see who running it who wasn't crippled."1

EG: (laughs) That was you that was the crippled man, huh?

GC: Now, they'd pulled the crippled man, I'd sent him to Luray, if he'd a been back they'd a got him. I sent him to Luray to get more charred casks to put this brandy in. We'd made fifteen gallons the night before and had around enough to make eight or ten more of them like that. But destroyed it all.

EG: How did they hear about, did somebody—

GC: Somebody poked us. Yeah, down at Navver's (??).

EG: Yeah. Now, on the making whiskey, about how many gallons and how long would it take to make a batch of that stuff?

GC: Well, it takes—if it was warm weather, it took seventy-two hours after setting the mash to work off. Then three days and nights to run it, very slow, had a fifty-gallon copper still. Because to make it good, you had to run in slow and not let the water be hot, it gets hot in the cooling tub. Running it fast is what makes it so hot and fiery. That's right.

EG: Now you had to be there all the time—

GC: All the time, three of us. One of us would go out and get something to eat or come back and bring the others something.

EG: Did the revenueurs ever find you when you were making your whiskey up there?

GC: No, they never did.

EG: How come—

GC: Got really close to me that time, when I was making the apple brandy.

EG: How come you quit making moonshine?

GC: Well, I just knew if I kept it up I'd be caught and if they caught you then, you got a year in Atlanta, Georgia and that's the reason I run south when they was right on me.

EG: That's a mighty good reason. Mighty good reason.

GC: I quit myself, I knew if I did keep it up, I'd be caught and I'd get no credit and I just quit it myself.

EG: Yeah. George—

GC: And they'd even haul it in to Washington City, right here through Falls Church in a Model T car.

EG: Is that right?

GC: That's right.

EG: And never did catch you.

GC: Never did.

EG: I see. George, you grew a lot of your own food there, and you mentioned I think one time that you had sauerkraut and things like that.

GC: Oh yeah.

EG: What were some of the things that you grew there for your own use?

GC: Well, I would grow all of our corn, and lots of times wheat and the buckwheat and grow all our vegetables, beans and cabbage and everything you needed to eat in the way of the day (??) and have it all put away in the cellar for winter, you know, it's all, yeah, the root cellar.

EG: That root cellar outside your place there, yeah.

GC: Yeah, we all had 'em, my father had a big one. And them that didn't have 'em, they buried—course them's better, you couldn't put things—we put cabbages, hundreds of heads, dig a trench, pull it up at the roots and stick the head down in it, throw the dirt back and put in another row, you could go any time in the winter and take them cabbage out and they just as good as the day you put 'em in there. That's taters, you couldn't let them freeze, freezing helps cabbage. Same way with turnips, we raised a lot of turnips, you had to bury them to keep 'em from freezing.

EG: You bury them right there in the ground.

GC: Turnips. That's right. And the taters, too, until we got cellars. We buried a many, took twenty-five and thirty bushels of potatoes.

EG: Now, did you make sauerkraut up there?

GC: Oh yeah, made fifty gallons at a time.

EG: Would you have a great big—

GC: Fifty-gallon oak barrel.

EG: Oh, oak barrel you used, not crockery, oak barrel.

GC: Oak, solid oak, like you put whiskey in. Lot of barrels you put it in it would ruin, it'd be soft, you get a softwood barrel and sauerkraut's no account (??).

EG: Yeah. What kind of green did you grow up there?

GC: Oh, we raised our corn, then we raised wheat and rye and buckwheat. That's all we raised.

EG: Tell me about this buckwheat, what, growing that, you mentioned that to me one time, too.

GC: Oh, we sowed the buckwheat in the, about August, it's something that grows fast. And then you cut it in the fall after the frost takes the leaf off. And when it's ripe, it turns perfectly black. And that's easy perishing (??), you can get that out in a hurry.

EG: Who ground your buckwheat for you?

GC: Same mill down at Nether's (??).

EG: And how much would they charge for grinding the—

GC: A gallon to the bushel, which was—

EG: That'd be about one-eighth.

GC: Yeah.

EG: About twelve percent.

GC: Of course, buckwheat don't weigh as much as corn, corn weighs fifty-six and they'd take a gallon of that and I reckon they'd take the buckwheat in the post (??) and that ain't as heavy as corn. The wheat weighs sixty to the bushel and the corn fifty-six.

EG: Well now, how did you harvest your wheat and rye and so forth?

GC: With hooks and cradles.

EG: A hook, that's just a sickle, you mean?

GC: That sickle in your hand, you just reach with the left and get a bunch and cut it off and throw it down and get a whole lot down and you tie that up in bundles and shock it until it dried out and then when the scything cradles come, everybody could use them, my uncle could use 'em good, I learned to use 'em.

EG: The cradle, you mean?

GC: The cradle, scything cradle. They would give them a swing.

EG: Yeah.

GC: Yeah. And—

EG: And they'd cut it then they'd stack it for you at the same time, bundle it and stuff.

GC: Most of 'em would get these spool and they'd grab it and throw it a pile, and others would wing roll (??) just let it come off itself, and they'd come along with a rake and rake it up and tie it in bundles.

EG: I see.

GC: Yeah.

EG: Now, how did—

GC: Hardly would fill but two or three cradles in a day.

EG: Well how did you actually thresh the grain out of the stem when you—

GC: By hand.

EG: By hand.

GC: Yeah. Make what we call a thrashing yard, dig down and level it off and beat it down just as hard to the clay as could be, then go to the mountain and cut these hickory poles and the thrashing part out, leave about three or four feet and beat it. Make a twist of it and then you thrash it out with them. Throw 'em up on over your [unintelligible] wrapping, and sure the grain would fly.

EG: Then you'd collect the grain and take it down to Nether's for grinding, would you?

GC: They'd clean it and then take it down to Otten (??) and they'd grind it for you.

EG: So then you had your corn flour and you had your wheat flour and you could make bread and stuff.

GC: Oh yeah, all of it, yeah.

EG: How about all these buckwheat, George, did you make buckwheat pancakes?

GC: That's what we used it for. Buckwheat pancakes.

EG: What did you use for syrup?

GC: This homemade sorghum, we called it homemade molasses, grow our sugar cane.

EG: Did you grow some of that or did your father?

GC: My father growed it. Yeah. Yeah, he got to growing it.

EG: Did you have your own squeezer for making the—

GC: No, there's a man would come through, would come up and make it for so much, he had it own -- you had to set this machine up and had a real big sweep to it, and hook a horse to it and he'd just keep going around and around like you grind apples and the man now poking this cane in and the tub here just to bring it never dropped the juice out and the stalks were burned the next day. Get all the juice out and then go to making, would go to making molasses so you'd get a gallon or two.

EG: Oh, so you made your own molasses but some other fella did all the grinding for you?

GC: Well, any of us could do that 'cause he set the mill up.

EG: Yeah, but he brought the machinery in for you.

GC: He made the molasses, yeah.

EG: And then he charged you, what, so much molasses or so much money?

GC: So much molasses, or if you wanted to pay money it didn't cost much.

EG: Yeah.

GC: No, indeed. It was all cheap, then.

EG: Now, about the roads in the area, transportation, George, did you have roads anywhere near you there?

GC: Oh, had that road was the county, run heat up (??). Well, they finally made it public to the top of the Blue Ridge.

EG: From Don Edder's, you mean?

GC: Yeah.

EG: All the way up?

GC: Yeah, that was a county road. Come right up there by the cabin and get on then it's eighty-two (??) to the top of the mountain, that's the reason I knew how far it was from the cabin to the top, it's two miles.

EG: Now, could you drive on those roads by car?

GC: Not with car, no. Just horse and wagon.

EG: Horse and wagon. Did any cars ever get up very close to the cabin?

GC: No, close it ever got was two mile and then later on the county worked the road, tolerable good, and my sister she drove a Model T right in the yard where the cabin's at now from York, Pennsylvania. Brand new five-passenger Model T, had the curtains, you know.

EG: I remember. Now, did many cars get up there by, up to your cabin, or was she—

GC: That was the first and last one.

EG: First and last car? A Model T Ford.

GC: Model T.

EG: I see. Mighty good.

GC: Closest I could get mine was two miles, I had a garage because I wanted—of course, they just worked the road, how'd she got it done there?

EG: She probably wouldn't want to try it again, that must have been a pretty rough ride.

GC: Well, it was.

EG: I see. You owned a car then later, didn't you, yourself, you had a Model T?

GC: Yeah, I had a Model T then, parked down the hollow two miles.

EG: But you never tried to drive yours all the way up?

GC: Never in life, no. Dr. Ross was a good driver, he never would bring it no further than the church and we'd, if nobody out on a horse, he'd walk the two mile and come on to see us.

EG: Where was the church, George?

GC: Right at the forks of Hannah's Run and Nicholson Hollow.

EG: I see. Where the Hughes River and the Hannah Run come together there.

GC: Yeah.

EG: And that was about two miles from you, or two and a half?

GC: Just about two mile and a half up to my house from where the church is at.

EG: How often did you have services at the church there?

GC: Well, when they first built it, it'd hardly ever run only once a month.

EG: Oh, once a month you'd have it?

GC: First Sunday.

EG: First Sunday of every month. And where was the preacher from?

GC: Well, Preacher Brown, he's from Sperryville, Virginia, over in Rappahannock. He'd come, but to the school house, but my brother, he was a minister, he built this church and he preached there pretty regular then.

EG: I see.

GC: Then you had the one built in Beech Spring in Rappahannock County. Brother Warren.

EG: I see. Now, you had a school somewhere near you, didn't you, George?

GC: Yeah, in two mile, at the school house.

EG: And that was down the river also?

GC: Yeah. Just after you cross the river, after you leave the cabin, go down two miles, it sit back up there. You wouldn't notice it, I don't reckon I could find it now.

EG: Well now, how long was the school open each year?

GC: Four months.

EG: From what, what months of the year?

GC: I forget they opened in the fall and they taught four months.

EG: Just four months each year.

GC: Four months each year.

EG: Now that's where you went to school, isn't it, George?

GC: That's where I went to school, two mile every morning to walk down is all downhill, and two mile to walk back.

EG: And how many years did you go to school there?

GC: I wouldn't say how many. I mean, I just can't remember it good. Anyhow, I stopped when I got into eighth grade.

EG: When you're in the eighth grade you stopped, that would make you around thirteen or fourteen years of age, I guess.

GC: Yeah, that's right.

EG: Let's see, where was your nearest store, George, where you did your trading?

GC: Near West Virginia. That was five miles from the cabin.

EG: Now, you'd take a wagon down there, would you?

GC: Oh yeah, we'd haul the wagons and had horses and father, he had a wagon with two horses, he hauled bark clear to Luray and Easton. 'Course, have to make two or three trips up to the top of the mountain to have a load to go to Luray. Couldn't pull much up there at once, take two good horses to pull half a cord up there.

EG: Up to Luray, you mean?

GC: Yeah. No, up the mountain, over the mountain.

EG: Oh, up to the top of the mountain.

GC: Up the mountain you could take on two horses to take a cord, then you had to walk

heavy to get down that mountain. Most time we cut a, put along a young tree, you know, just tie it to the hind parts of the wagon, that would keep from pushing the horses so.

EG: Oh, going downhill.

GC: Down on the other side, that was steep. That was steep on the side from the cabin up.

EG: I see.

GC: Yeah.

EG: Did you have any community affairs, any get-togethers in the neighborhood where the whole group would get together and—

GC: Oh yeah, they'd get together and help one another with the crops and with the harvesting and—

EG: That was a community affair.

GC: Community affair, help one another.

EG: Now, do the wives come to those things, too, or just the husbands?

[24:29, the tape has distortion, with changes in speed making the audio difficult to decipher]

GC: Oh, they would, the community place like shucking the corn for lots of things the women would come.

EG: And when they'd cook out, I suppose then they [unintelligible]--

[24:41, distortion begins to fade at this point, finishing in the next sentence]

GC: They'd all eat in one place and drink the liquor and have a big time up until all the corn shucked. Oh, my father one year, he had forty barrels in the pile. And ever a time, you'd get a red ear, the rule was then, call for a drink. Bottle had to go around.

EG: Call for a what?

GC: A drink of brandy. Oh, had to have plenty of brandy at these shuckings.

EG: What was the expression, a red ear?

GC: Yeah, a red ear, call for a drink.

EG: And what do you mean by red ear?

GC: Blood red, lot of red corn growing.

EG: Oh, when the corn got red, most ears when they had—

GC: Yeah, you'd plant corn and plant all together white and once in a while you'd find the red ear and they'd holler for another drink. And if they didn't find it, they drink right along.

EG: I see. That was just a good excuse. (chuckle)

GC: Yeah, that's right, that was just a saying.

EG: Now, Aaron Nicholson was your grandfather—

GC: Yeah, he's my grandfather on my mother's side.

EG: Now where was his house?

GC: His was down below the cabin on the left of the river a short piece.

EG: Oh, it's that big old, with the stone chimneys.

GC: That's the big one with the stone end, yeah.

EG: On both ends.

GC: Chimney and in the stone, built up on each side, tall on each end of the sides of the house.

EG: Well, didn't your grandfather own most of that valley?

GC: He claimed it, but he didn't own it.

EG: Oh, he didn't actually own it, then?

GC: No, no. Actually, early on when Mr. Pollock came in and showed him how much he did own, he only had a genuine deed for five acres.

EG: Five acres?

GC: Five acres.

EG: Well, didn't he tell a group of people that he owned the whole land?

GC: Only -- these men come in on horseback, and well-dressed men, say they're there for a Mr. Nicholson, they called, said, "Can you give us any idea how much land you own in here?" "Well you see, you start right there at the pinnacle and as far as your eyes can let you see, turn clear around, and took all the Blue Ridge in."

EG: That'd be about five thousand acres, wouldn't it?

GC: Sure, and Mr. Pollock owned 5,371 that he took in. And then on the other side, a man of New York owned the other side, all except what deed land that I owned, and that's called Christian Door land (??). That was really the deeded land. And he claimed it all, but wound up he had nothing but five acres.

EG: Five acres, all he had.

GC: What his house sat on and his orchard.

EG: How much did your dad own there?

GC: He owned fifty acres. And he bought that off of, I forget who he bought it off of. But that was altogether another tract of land. This on the left of the river going down, that was Mr. Pollock's tract, 5,371 acres to the Rappahannock line, clear on to Skyland.

EG: George, you put a new metal roof on that cabin of yours shortly before you left -- that was in 1938, I think, that you and your family left there. How come that you left the cabin?

GC: Well, the park took over and said we'd have to move out and they'd build us homes out in the valley and we could move into them and give 'em to us. Wound up we had them to buy and them that wasn't able to buy to suit the law and the law sent them out on the road, just like dogs or hogs.

EG: Pretty rough treatment, huh?

GC: Well.

EG: How much money did you get for your five acres and your home right there in the—

GC: They allowed me \$500 for it and I didn't get a nickel of that. I'd borrowed \$500 of Mr. Lee Judd across the mountain to repair the house and he wouldn't charge me no interest. See, they robbed you out of everything, and I give him the \$500. I got nothing.

EG: You got the house all renovated and a new roof and so forth and you borrowed \$500—

GC: Yeah, to do that, repair it and settle it and get all this stuff from Culpeper and everything.

EG: Then you were evicted and they gave you the \$500 and that just paid for the roof.

GC: That was all they allowed me for and I went ahead and gave it to Mr. Judd.

[28:36, more speed distortion again—begins in the next sentence]

EG: Pretty rough. George, you mentioned one time and I read it in Pollock's book about Charlie Sisk the outlaw. And you mentioned that he killed that—2

GC: He killed Jack Dodson down below me in the cabin where I lived, two miles below.

[28:48, distortion ends here]

EG: That would be down near the school, then.

GC: Yeah. Down close, just beyond where the church was out, down below Hannah's Run.

EG: They got in an argument, had they been drinking or something, or what?

GC: No, just Dodson, he followed him up and Charlie, he come up to the hollow to hire a horse for him and his wife to come to Luray to try the Algiers, they'd killed a gray. And Jack Dodson got with it and he's a drinking and clenched him and got a rock. Charlie was trying to get over to his rud bars (??) as we call them, where you lay down to go through them and put 'em back up. And Charlie, he just pulled out this .32—I sold him the gun, really before whatever happened--and shot him dead.

EG: And his widow's still alive, is she down there in Nethers?

GC: I don't know whether Charlie's widows are living or not, see he's—

EG: No, I mean the Dodson widow.

GC: Oh yeah, she's living, it was her husband he killed. And Dodson, he was, his mother was Jimmy Nethers' sister and he was a well-to-do man and they went and employed lawyers and everything and Charlie Sisk got thirty-five year in the penitentiary for it. Then he broke out twice and they added on to that and then Governor Byrd, he was governor a whole term in Richmond and the Rappahannock people liked Charlie, see, so them big rich fellas like Fletcher and Millers and all of them, they got up a petition and Governor Byrd before he give up he pardoned him.

EG: Oh, I see.

GC: Governor Byrd pardoned him.

EG: I see.

GC: He'd never have got out if he hadn't have done it. Of course, he never got a fair trial, Charlie was no man [unintelligible] like people carried him to do, I laid by him and close to him and worked for him and anything and whatever and he's a coward, he's a cowardly man. And of course, a coward, he'll shoot you quicker than anybody else if they think you're gonna hurt 'em. Charlie Sisk, you could get along with him even when he was drinking. Charlie wasn't due all that term he got for shooting him.

EG: Well, George, do you think, as you look back on it now, the mountain families were all evicted from there, they've gone down into the valleys, they've gotten a little better educations I think, aren't they living better now, aren't your children living a little better than you lived back then.

GC: Oh yes, yes. They wouldn't none of them, very few of them would go back if it, I wouldn't if it was given to them.

EG: So as it turns out—

GC: So inconvenient.

EG: As it turned out, it's probably better then, wasn't it?

GC: Better for 'em, that's right.

EG: Live a better life and opportunities—

GC: If they'd've just treated like they got 'em out and not have taken what they had for nothing.

EG: Yeah. I know Virgil has a nice home there in Luray and—

GC: Yeah.

EG: Well, George, I—

GC: Well, I told you, too, about my oldest son being an ordained minister. He lives in Madison, Virgil, he's a graduate of D. L. Moody's Bible Institute. He's—

EG: And your other daughter's in Michigan now.

GC: And my daughter's in Michigan, Charlotte, Michigan.

EG: Well, George, we're almost out of tape here, it's been real good talking to you, and this is the story of George Corbin and the cabin he built in Nicholson Hollow in the Shenandoah National Park.

GC: Am sure glad you visited and got the information.

EG: Thank you, George.

GC: Thank you.

EG: Now (trails off)

GC: I heard you were, mess up again. (chuckle)

EG: (chuckle) I get, it better not—

[End audio file, 00:31:59]

End of Interview

1 This story is repeated by George Corbin in his other interview, SNP033 (pgs. 4-5).

Also repeated and clarified by Allan Tanner in the interview with Robert Corbin, SNP034 (pgs. 64-65).

2 George Corbin also references Charlie Sisk in his other interview (SNP-033, pg. 8).

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George Corbin, 01/09/1966

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22