

8-9-1997

(SNP068) Louis Graves interviewed by Reed Engle, transcribed by Joy K. Stiles

Louis W. Graves

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Recommended Citation

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Interview with Louis Graves
Part of the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, SdArch SNP-068
(SC# 4030)

Interview conducted at unknown location
By Reed Engle
August 9, 1997

Transcribed by Joy K. Stiles, date unknown

Key

[RE:] Interviewer, Reed Engle

[LG:] Interviewee, Louis Graves

() Unable to understand word

Total interview length: unknown

Reed Engle: . . . Madison County with Louis Graves who was 13 years old on the original Hoover Day in 1929. [tape stops, then starts again in mid-sentence] . . . Park today, that, you don't mind the tape recorder, do you?

Louis Graves: No.

RE: We're so spread out in the Park today, well, you know how big the Park is, 105 miles long, so you've got--

LG: Well, you can't get around in it, now. (laughs)

RE: No, you can't. (laughs) And people are so spread out between South District and Central District and North District, that, that, that there are a lot of people out there that I don't think a lot of us even know, so. You never get the whole park staff together. You can move over if you want, Gloria. (woman laughs) So you were 13 years old?

LG: Umm hmm.

RE: Where were you living?

LG: I was born in 1916.

RE: 1916?

LG: Right.

RE: Where, where were you living? In Madison?

LG: Not Madison, Rochelle.

RE: In Rochelle?

LG: Umm hmm.

RE: What, when did you hear about, when did you hear that Hoover was going to establish a fishing camp?

LG: Well, back before then it was all the talk. Now, I can't give you a date on it, but it was long before this date.

RE: And were people excited?

LG: Well, I think so. They used to, some of them wanted it, some of them gave a hard time. Especially the Marines. My father was a policeman in the town of Orange. They used to go over there and try to tear the town up. (laughs)

RE: (laughing) Oh, really! The Marines.

LG: He didn't think too much of it.

RE: Well, they had quite a few Marines up there, of course, when the President was in residence.

LG: Yeah. Had the men building the road and all that.

RE: Of course, Miss Lucy married one and Christine Vest married one. A lot of the local women married Marines, didn't they?

LG: Umm hmm.

RE: Was there a little jealousy among the local boys, about the Marines?

LG: You know Miss Lucy, huh?

RE: I never met her before today, but we just spent an hour and a half talking.

LG: Umm hmm.

RE: Really neat person.

LG: She grew up in the same area that I lived in.

RE: That's what she said, yeah, she grew up in Rochelle.

LG: Umm hmm.

RE: So, what's interesting to me is that 10,000 people would have come out for an event like Hoover Day.

LG: Well, since I've seen that figure in the paper, kind of make me wonder, "Where did they all come from?"

RE: That's what I wondered, because there couldn't have been more than 1,500, 2,000 people in all of Madison County back then.

LG: No, it wasn't, wasn't too far from today. It was around 9,000 or so.

RE: Oh, really? In 1929?

LG: Right.

RE: Where'd they live? Just a little bit of everywhere?

LG: Little bit of everywhere. Population, I think, about 13 [thousand] now, and that's it.

RE: You don't think of, you don't think of 13,000 people living in Madison County. I mean, everybody's pretty separated. So, so it's just about the whole county came to Hoover Day.

LG: I would say so.

RE: It's a lot of food. (laughing)

LG: Lot of black pots out there.

RE: Black pots? Did your mother bring food that day?

LG: I think they brought some fried chicken. Yeah, fried chicken. But they had, I guess 30 or 40 big black pots. Made soup.

RE: Like soup pots? Or bigger? Rendering pots for lard?

LG: Yeah, big, big old wash pots. Steel, iron, you know. And they were selling soup for 10¢ a cup and you could keep the cup. They were metal cup. I wish I had one today. (laughing)

RE: Ten cents a cup?

LG: Ten cents a cup.

RE: And where'd the cups come from? Who organized it?

LG: Well, I really don't know. They, they had committees to do this and to do that, and so forth.

RE: I mean, did the churches get involved, or . . . ?

LG: Hmm?

RE: Did the churches get involved?

LG: I think some of them, yeah.

RE: And what, what did, you were 13. So did all your friends go?

LG: Yeah, there was quite a few of them. We came in a, in a, in a wagon, horse and wagon. Me and my family, and some of the neighbors. Back then, there wasn't too many cars, you know.

RE: Right.

LG: Was still horse and buggy days.

RE: Right. Well, they were still driving cattle, they were still driving cattle to Orange and Gordonsville back then, weren't they?

LG: Yes, yes, sir.

RE: To the railroad?

LG: Right.

RE: Chestnuts, and, and they still, Miss Lucy was talking about how when she was a girl, she could still remember the covered wagons, going in to Gordonsville, taking chestnuts and, to the railroad.

LG: That was the transportation then. Talk about driving cattle, they used to drive flocks of turkeys to Richmond.

RE: Flocks of turkeys?

LG: Turkeys.

RE: How would you drive a flock of turkeys?

LG: Not hard to do.

RE: Really? I thought they were about the most stupid animal in the world.

LG: No, you always, you get a leader, like, they're like sheep. You get one going in front and the rest of them follow. They're not hard to drive.

RE: Really?

LG: I've driven them.

RE: How many? I mean, a big flock, or just . . .

LG: Oh, 35 or 40.

RE: Geez. (laughter)

LG: My mother and them used to raise turkeys. Most every evening they'd be a mile, a couple miles over to somebody else's house. We'd go drive them, drive them back.

RE: (laughing) White turkey? Black turkey? What?

LG: ()

RE: What did your family do? Farming?

LG: Farming.

RE: Cattle, or . . .

LG: () farming, cattle, and grain and this, that and the other.

RE: You grow Milo back then? Or is that, is Milo a new crop around here?

LG: Well, wasn't none in that area then, no.

RE: 'Cause it's, it's, Milo's the same thing as sorghum, isn't it? Basically?

LG: It hasn't very much water in it, I guess so.

RE: No soybean back then, either, right?

LG: No, very little, very few.

RE: Corn, essentially corn?

LG: Corn and wheat were the biggest crops.

RE: Winter wheat or summer wheat?

LG: Winter wheat.

RE: So when you got there, what time did you leave to get to Madison for the Hoover Day?

LG: You mean the wagon?

RE: Yeah.

LG: It was about an hour and a half in the wagon.

RE: Hour and a half?

LG: Yeah, that's all.

RE: Lot of traffic on the road, though, I imagine.

LG: Buggies. (laughing)

RE: Buggies! (laughs)

[tape stops, starts again in mid-sentence after Graves had asked for a copy of the tape]

RE: . . . what's your address, so I'll send you a, what's your zip code, then? I don't have . . .

LG: 22738.

RE: Sure, we'll be happy to--

LG: That'd be awful nice of you.

RE: Yeah, I'll get a copy made next week. We have a machine that can--

LG: I want () this for my son. My son is a retired lieutenant () Fairfax County police.

RE: Oh, really?

LG: That's when he started doing some work in the mountain. I don't know what. But at one time, he had a key to every gate up there.

RE: Oh, really?

LG: He was connected with something that was going on in there.

RE: Where were we? Driving turkeys. Oh, so you got, hour and a half, horse and buggy, and you got here, to the celebration. What did you see?

LG: Seen a hell of a lot of people.

RE: (laughing) More people. Did you ever see that many people together?

LG: Thirteen years old, you know, you think of this town or town of Orange, or something little like that. See 15, 20 people, you know, a lot of people.

RE: Right, almost too many, right? (laughs) 10,000 people is a lot of people.

LG: Umm hmm. And getting back to Hoover's Day, it was the beginning of the Depression. It was dry, most everybody had lost their crops. But yet, Democrat, or Republican or what . . . I never

did hear a lot of people knock or blame Hoover for it. I think that proves itself if 10,000 turned out to hear him, or see him. So . . .

RE: Well, that's, and I had asked Miss Lucy this, and she said that most people around here weren't even aware that there was a Depression out there. I mean that, if you were rural and, and agricultural, you were pretty much self-sufficient.

LG: Well, now, kids, people my age and all, we didn't know anything about it. On a farm, you had plenty to eat. You didn't have no money, but you had plenty to eat, so . . .

RE: Right.

LG: --no difference.

RE: So the, I mean, did the Depression really hit Madison County much at all?

LG: Oh, yeah. I can remember my father and my neighbor shot a bunch of hogs at my place one morning, and that evening went over to his place and shot a bunch of hogs. Didn't have the feed to feed them and you could not sell them. You couldn't give them away!

RE: You shot them and buried them?

LG: Shot them.

RE: So, did you cut back on farming? Did you cut back on planting?

LG: No, I don't think they cut back. But that year most all the crops was a failure. Dry--

RE: That was '30, and you had the drought.

LG: Yeah. Well, it started in '29.

RE: '29 and '30, right.

LG: Yeah.

RE: So the, of course, in the valley, the apple crop was a total bust. That '39, uh, '29.

LG: () our corn crop, two feet tall, something along like that. Just wasn't any rain.

RE: Kind of like this summer.

LG: Yes.

RE: I mean, this corn crop's looking pretty bad out there this year, but thank God we got that five inches last month. But, but then '31--

LG: Umm hmm?

RE: --how long were the effects of the Depression in Madison? I mean, did it get better in '31, '32, once the rain started coming again? [telephone rings]

LG: Yeah, yeah, I would say so. The next year or so, crops started getting better, more and more ().

RE: So, but were, could you sell them? Were the crops saleable?

LG: Yeah, yeah, umm hmm.

RE: So there were no bread lines in Madison County, were there?

LG: Not actually bread lines . . . I can remember on the farm there, we all, as I said, we had plenty to eat. People from the little town of Rochelle would come down to the farm, especially women, in late evening, somehow or another we had a big turnip crop there. Bought a pack of seeds and we got all kind of turnips.

RE: Turnips?

LG: Umm hmm. They'd come down there and my mother'd give them a bag of turnips, this one, that one, everyone, a bag of turnips, And they really appreciated it! This day and time you had something () like that, they wouldn't ask for nothing, they'd just come in and take it.

RE: Yeah, times have changed.

LG: I mean, you know, you know what I'm talking about?

RE: Well, of course, now, I live in Culpeper County and, and without mentioning any names, I keep hearing stories. A lot of the older people tell me about a certain storekeeper in Culpeper County who ran, he ran the general store and he let people run up a debt that they couldn't pay back during the Depression and then he foreclosed on their property. And he ended up making, getting two or three thousand acres of good farmland as a result of that.

LG: I, I 'spect there was a lot of that going on.

RE: But nothing, I mean, you didn't see anything like that down here?

LG: No, no.

RE: Did you see the blimp, the dirigible when it came in?

LG: Yes, sir.

RE: Had you seen a lot of them before?

LG: Yeah, I don't know why but every now and then, I don't know whether it was a, you know, route, across through our area or what, but every now and then one would go through there.

RE: Oh, really?

LG: Yeah.

RE: I wonder where they were coming from?

LG: I don't know.

RE: Well, of course, they used them right up to the beginning of World War II, didn't they? Weren't they going to use them for military?

LG: I think so.

RE: Spy, or something.

LG: Used to, [aside comment] don't you mind him, used to be an airplane go by every evening, at the same time. It was a mail plane.

RE: Going up to Camp Hoover?

LG: No, it was going from Charlottesville area like across to the D.C. area. Anyway, this old colored woman, used to wash clothes for my mother, she was there one day. Somebody said, "Is that the mail plane going by?" She says, "No, sir, that's just the wheels hanging down!" (laughter) That is the truth, that's the truth! (all still laughing) What're you laughing about?

RE: I forgive him!

[woman's voice]: I never heard that story before! (more laughter)

LG: Her name was Mag Turl [sp.?).

RE: Turl?

LG: Turl.

RE: Turl.

LG: She used to help the women folks, like you may have one day up to our house washing clothes and so on, and somebody else's house the next day.

RE: I haven't heard that name. Turl. Did you hear the speech?

LG: Hmm?

RE: Did you hear the speech, Hoover's speech?

LG: Yeah, I was right there, but, you know, at thirteen years old, you didn't pay a lot of attention to it.

RE: That's, that's what I was--

LG: ()

RE: That's what I was going to say! I can't imagine at thirteen you wanted to listen to all those speeches at all. Probably be more interested in the food!

LG: I remember Dr. Clore. I think he was the master of ceremony. I more or less listened to his speech, but he was our family doctor.

RE: Was it a long one?

LG: Hmm?

RE: A long speech?

LG: Not too long.

RE: Not too long? Hoover's speech wasn't really that long, so . . . Was it three pages?

[woman's voice]: ()

RE: Of course, Harry Byrd probably went on quite a bit, so . . .

LG: Umm hmm. Well as I remember, it was kind of an all-day affair, though, you know.

RE: Well, in those days, they just speeched and speeched and speeched. People enjoyed that, I guess, but . . . Was it hot that day? Do you remember?

LG: I remember it was a nice day, () was a clear day. Wasn't bothered by a storm or anything.

RE: You think the weather has changed much, over the last . . .

LG: Very much so.

RE: What, what respect?

LG: Okay. Long when I was this age, thirteen, for example: everybody had an ice house, you know, hole in the ground, you covered it up with sawdust, and--

RE: Where'd you get your ice from? You have a pond?

LG: We had a pond. By Thanksgiving, we already, always had the first cutting off. By Thanksgiving! Three, four inches of ice. Now, now, you don't get enough on a pond to skate off of.

RE: No, you don't.

LG: Right.

RE: I skated last winter. Did you have more snow when you were a kid?

LG: We'd really have a big snow every now and then, just like we have it now. But the whole thing, it would get cold and stay cold.

RE: Well, when could you do your first plowing in the spring, typically?

LG: I think we started around March, like a lot of them do today.

RE: Around March?

LG: Umm hmm. Some of them, you know, plow in the fall of the year.

RE: Your parents ever use the signs, to go by?

LG: No, no.

RE: Didn't plant by the signs?

LG: They wasn't much for signs, but we, we had neighbors, oh, god . . .

RE: I mean, a lot of old, lot of old people told me they used to plant by signs. Had to be done on the cusp of the moon, or . . .

LG: I remember this one old guy, I don't know, my father was planting something in the garden one evening. Maybe some kind of beans or something, I don't know. Anyway, old man John come by, "You're not going to get a thing! They just going to be all vines! The moon sign is not right!" My dad said, "I'm not planting them on the moon, I'm planting them on the earth." (laughter) I'll never forget that.

RE: How many floods have you seen?

LG: Hmm?

RE: There was a big flood in the '30's, wasn't there? On the Robinson?

LG: Yeah, but nothing like this.

RE: Nothing like this one?

LG: No, sir. No, sir.

RE: You know, looking back through newspapers, it seems like the Rapidan and the Robinson periodically, I mean, it seemed like every 20, 30 years there was a big flood, but . . .

LG: Yeah, they'd have, they'd have a, what you call a flood, but those ones was just a drop in the bucket to this big flood we had, what, last year? [1995]

RE: Yeah, it was pretty, pretty incredible. The amount of rock that that moved into, in Criglersville and Graves Mill and Syria was just incredible.

LG: Umm hmm, it's hard to believe.

RE: It's like a glacial stream out in the west. I don't know whether you ever traveled out west, but you see streams in the foothills of the mountains that look just like this one, with boulders, you know, three, four hundred feet--

LG: Well, what, what's your opinion of has changed the climate?

RE: Well, I'm not sure it's not true about this greenhouse effect stuff they're talking about.

LG: Something has definitely changed.

RE: And the severity of storms and the frequency of storms just seem to be getting, they're close together, they're bigger. This summer, I mean, we're having a drought. Last year we had 84 inches of rain in the summer, didn't seem like it'd ever stop raining last summer! So, just seems we're breaking one record after another. And it's a little bit scary. Wonder how many...

LG: Yeah, one thing I've noticed this, this summer so far, we've had very few electrical storms, thunder and lightning?

RE: Yeah, that's true.

LG: Very few.

RE: Last year, I mean, last year it seemed like every single afternoon, 4:00, we would--

LG: Current go off and all like that, my current hasn't been off the whole summer.

RE: Yeah, we did lose it, about two weeks ago we lost it for about five hours. You Rappahannock Electric? Or are you . . .

LG: Yeah, yeah, uh huh.

RE: When did electric get through to Madison? When did you first get electric?

LG: I think in the area where I lived, about the last one.

RE: Was it, I mean, '30's? 1930's?

LG: I would say close to '40.

RE: Close to '40?

LG: Yeah, umm hmm.

RE: Of course, you had a hand pump up 'til then, right?

LG: Umm hmm.

RE: Because I know when we've talked with the interpreters up in the Park and, and I saw some statistics on Rappahannock County that in 1972, 40% of the families in Rappahannock County still didn't have indoor plumbing. 1972. Which, to me, was a pretty amazing statistic.

LG: I left home when I was 20 years old, went to Northern Virginia. Went to work. At that time, they still didn't have current in my area.

RE: Really? that would have been '36, 1936.

LG: Yeah, somehow. And I think E.R.A., I don't know, was it E.R.A. or something? They ran a line through there, that's when they got current. About the last part in the county.

RE: Emergency, something-Authority.

[woman's voice]: I don't know that one.

RE: Yeah, there were so many, [telephone rings] there was so many Roosevelt, Emergency, Rural Electrification Agency, Rural Electrification Agency? Or . . .

LG: I don't know.

RE: What'd your family think when Hoover lost and Roosevelt won?

LG: Didn't hear a whole lot of talk about it. My father was always more or less a Democrat.

RE: Hmm. I thought Madison was mostly Republican, but . . .

LG: Still, still is. (laughter) Yup.

RE: I don't think they would have gotten 10,000 people out for Roosevelt!

LG: You don't think so?

RE: Do you?

LG: ().

RE: I mean, do you think it was just because he was the president, not because he was Hoover? That the president had picked Madison County and that was such a--

LG: That's a big question. If 10,000 people . . . they was not all Republican, in my opinion, and only about a third of that was from Madison County, so, there you go.

RE: I mean, now what, did your parents get, what, *The Eagle*? Did that come to your house?

LG: Yeah.

RE: Regularly?

LG: Umm hmm.

RE: So, I mean, people were well aware of what Hoover, what was going on nationally?

LG: Yeah, I would say so.

RE: So, it was interesting. I sat down and went through three months of the Page County newspaper after the stock market crash in 1929. It never happened, as far as Page County, it was never in the newspaper! (laughter) It just didn't attract any attention whatsoever in Page County. I mean, it was like, never happened! So, I mean, was, was anybody even aware that there was a stock market crash? Of course, you were thirteen, so you wouldn't have known.

LG: That's right.

RE: Probably wouldn't have known anything about that.

LG: No. [long pause] I don't know what else to talk about. What do you want?
() That's enough, I guess.

RE: ()

[woman's voice]: I'm just listening.

LG: She's still blushing! (laughter) I didn't know it would be ().

RE: You want to go to the ceremony?

LG: Well, well, I want to hear some of it, yeah.

RE: Well, then, we'd better let you stop.

LG: Okay.

End of Interview