7-24-1979

(SNP004) Elmer Atkins interviewed by Dorothy Noble Smith and Jim Northrup, transcribed by Sharon G. Marston

Elmer Atkins

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.libjmu.edu/snp

Recommended Citation
Elmer Atkins interviewed by Dorothy Noble Smith and Jim Northup, July 24, 1979, SdArch SNP-4, Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, 1964-1999, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the JMU Special Collections at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK

NARRATOR: Mr. Elmer Atkins
INTERVIEWER: Dorothy Smith
               Jim Northrop
PLACE: Sperryville (Beach Springs)
DATE: July 24, 1979

TRANSCRIBED BY: Sharon Marston
COMPLETED DATE: June 5, 1980
D.S.: Jim Narthrop and I are interviewing Mr. Elmer Atkins. Now where did you live? when you were growing up Mr. Atkins?

E.A.: I lived in Sperryville, Virginia...

D.S.: Sperryville..up above Sperryville.

E.A.: Beach Springs..do you know..

D.S.: Beach Springs

E.A.: Hollow I lived in. That's nigh in the park.


E.A.:Well, it was a right big house. It was a log bodied house.

J.N.: Log bodied?

E.A.: Uhhuh. And it was five fireplaces and one chimney. That's right.

D.S.: Five fireplaces?

E.A.: On this floor..that floor..that floor..and on up you know.

D.S.: Oh, it was a many story house?


J.N.: And did you heat the house with the fireplace?

E.A.: Well,no. We went to stoves. Taken too much wood. The bottom part of it..that place..the basement..we heated that with the fireplace. But then as we went on up we stopped up the fireplaces and used the stove. You know. Didn't take as much fuel.

D.S.: How many rooms were in this house?

E.A.: Well let me see now. One, two three..five..six..I think about ten rooms in it..ten or 11 rooms.

D.S.: That was a large house. And it was all log.

E.A.: Yea, all log.

D.S.: Do you know who built this house. Did your grandfather or
E.A.: No, that I don't know. We bought that house in 1924. But I lived in the park before that time. We moved out...we moved in 1916.

in the park. My daddy hired out by the year to Willie Wood Clarence Bledsoe, and Woodie Beason. He went to them three different places. From 1916 to 1924 and then he bought 240 acres of that land back up in that park. Old man Addie Clark..he had passed away you know and the heirs sold it out.

D.S.: Uhhum..well before that where did you live?

E.A.: We lived in the park, but down the road just a little bit from where we bought up above. At that time it wasn't in the park.

D.S.: Yea. I know that.

J.N.: So were you born in what now is the park?

E.A.: Yes siree bob.

D.S.: Alright now so you were how old when you moved into this big house?

E.A.: Into the well..you mean in 1924 when we moved back in it. Well I born in 1906 and we moved back in 1924...

D.S.: Alright then your firsthouse that you remember. What was that like?

E.A.: Well now, that there was the one I was born and practically raised in I reckon you would call it. That was about a five room house.

D.S.: Five room.

E.A.: Yea. That one was mostly log.

D.S.: How many were in your family?

E.A.: Oh weren't many..just a dozen.

J.N.: A dozen kids or...

E.A.: A dozen..six boys and six girls.

D.S.: Oh my goodness. What was your mother's maiden name?

E.A.: Claytor.
D.S.: Claytor. There were quite a number of Claytor's there weren't there.

E.A.: Yea.

D.S.: Now the nearest...how far away were the houses?

E.A.: Oh, you mean...they weren't too thickly settled. Let's see in that hollow that I lived in..Now I..now where you want me to go to from here.

D.S.: When you were a little boy.

E.A.: When I was a little boy. Alright. Let me see now when I was a little boy

Herbert Jenkins, Old Mr. Clark......

oh I don't know, maybe ten houses. Along in there.

D.S.: About a quarter a mile apart would you say?

E.A.: Yea. about that yea.

D.S.: Did you use a whistle to call your neighbors?

E.A.: No mam.

D.S.: You didn't. Some people did I was just wondering if you did.

E.A.: No mam. We didn't do that.

D.S.: Okey. What was your particular jobs to do when you were a little boy. I know mostly all of you had a job.

E.A.: Well, I tell you...mostly getting in the wood and having it ready for night. After I grewed up and you know...daddy would cut it up and leave it on a wood pile and he'd tellyou now I want that box full of wood when I come back.

D.S.: Uhhuh. Right. What did you have a horse?

E.A.: In my boy days. No we never had no horse.

D.S.: How about cows?

E.A.: Yea we had cows all my life. Ever since I can remember, anything.
D.S.: And you made butter and cheese...

E.A.: Oh yea.

B.S.: Where did ya keep it? In the spring house?

E.A.: Spring house. You go out there the hottest kind of a day and this butter they had it out in crimps you know and you take the knife with you...the spring house probably be as far as from half way out there to that house you see out there...from the house, and when you cut that butter off you just stick that knife in it and bring it on to the house sticking up there like that...temperature 90°.

D.S.: Oh my.

J.N.: So the springhouse was that cold.

E.A.: That's right.

D.S.: Yea. Did you put a board over the spring so you could put your milk and butter and stuff on it?

E.A.: Well the spring was right here and then you had your milk box and all down in here...didn't get right in the direct spring. If you understand what I mean. You let the water run out of the spring a little bit to cool your milk box. Do it this way

D.S.: Oh, I see, yea.

E.A.: Well the most of the springs they was walled up with stone.

D.S.: uhhuh. Yea. Yea. You had chickens?


D.S.: Did you let the hogs run loose...until...oh til butchering time.

E.A.: No mam. We mostly kept our penned up.

D.S.: You did. Then you had to feed them, didn't you.
E.A.: Oh yes mam, yea.

D.S.: Wow! Did you buy piglets in the spring or did you raise your own?

E.A.: I didn't understand that...

D.S.: Did you buy piglets in the spring or did you raise your own pigs?

E.A.: No we...now this was my boy days. We bought ...After 1924 when we
     went back up there we bought them of our own...but boy. I mean we
     raised them of our own. But boy days, no we bought them.

D.S.: You bought them. Right. When did you do the butchering?

E.A.: Oh along about November...last of November first of December.

D.S.: Making sure it was cold weather.

E/A.: Oh yes mam.

D.S.: Did you have a smoke house?

E.A.: Oh yea.

D.S.: Alright now you didn't have a horse so how did you take care of
     your garden?

E.A.: With a hoe.

D.S.: Wow! How big a garden was it?

E.A.: Oh, about a quarter of an acre...not to big...quarter to a half.

D.S.: What did you raise?

E.A.: Oh beans, cabbage, potatoes...most everything grow in the garden.

D.S.: Turnips.

E.A.: Cucumbers.

D.S.: Cucumbers. Did you grow any rhubarb.

E.A.: No mam.

D.S.: Very few had rhubarb.

E.A.: Did n't fool with it back in those days much.
D.S.: Tomatoes?
E.A.: Oh yea.
D.S.: Okey. Now. You had to do all ths with a hoe. That was one of your jobs too I'll bet wasn't it?
E.A.: Yes mam. One of the worst jobs I had was keeping the bugs off the potatoes.
J.N.: How did you do that?
E.A.: Taken a old pan...something like an old washpan..big round..go along hold this down under there take you a little bush or something and knock him off in it like that.
J.N.: Yea. You didn't have any chemicals back in those days...
E.A.: No.
D.S.: How did you keep your vegetables over the winter?
E.A.: Well, most of them was dried. You take beans...snap them...you know like you snap them now. Then you get long thread and thread these things on cotton...you understand what I'm talking about...just keep sticking the needle through and have strings of them that go clear across this room. And then when you get them on that good you dry nails and hang them clear across the rooms in ever direction...you understand what I'm talking about until they dried good and then you take them down and put them in sack or cloth...you can tie them up and then you can do anything with them.
D.S.: Did you call them leather britches?
E.A.: Snap beans.
D.S.: You didn't call them leather britches
E.A.: No mam.
D.S.: Turnips and potatoes and cabbage...how did you keep that?
E.A.: Well, mostly buried the turnips and potatoes...well the cabbage too. Bury them in the ground...dig a trench about...oh that wide for the cabbage. And about so big. And then you take two cabbage and set down on the ground and then one up on the center of them...do you understand what I am talking about. And that's the way you buried the cabbage.

D.S.: Did you cover them with anything?

E.A.: Well to keep the dirt from running down through them you might put a few old weeds or a little grass...a little something to throw on the top. To keep the dirt from running down so bad you know.

D.S.: Did you sell any of your eggs and chickens and hams?

E.A.: Well...I don't remember too much about the eggs...I mean ham...but yes we sold eggs and chicken. Certainly we did. Dried apples, chestnut.

D.S.: Did you get cash when you sold them or did you get credit?

E.A.: Weil we got due bills we called them at that time.

D.S.: Yea. What store did you use?


J.N.: I bet with twelve kids you didn't have two much food left over though did you?

E.A.: Oh, we always had plenty to eat.

J.N.: Yea. Enough to sell all the time.

E.A.: Well, no we never sold no food much...I mean chickens, eggs...that would be to get a pound of coffee or something nother like that. Get a pound of coffee...maybe an old hen...get something else. And then a few frying chickens...they'd bring maybe 30 or 40 of them..sell an old hen you know...two or three old hens.

J.N.: So you used that surplus then just to get other things?

D.S.: Did you buy kerosene?

E.A.: Yea.

D.S.: And sugar and salt.

E.A.: And coffee.

D.S.: And coffee. How about material for clothes?

E.A.: Well, we mostly bought all of our clothes, ready made. I mean for the boys one thing...at that time...they was mostly ready made. Sometimes we bought a bolt of goods and make something. Little...smaller clothes you know. At that time clothes didn't cost much.

D.S.: Shoes. Did you wear shoes all year round?

E.A.: No mam. One pair of shoes a year is all we had. We got them in the fall of the year and we was told...now you can kick them out as quick as you want...but you're gonna kick with your toes from then on out.

D.S.: Did you wear any metal things on your shoes.

E.A.: Well, hobnails I reckon probably you'd call them and then there was a little old on the heel...a little old steel plate that went around like this.

D.S.: Sort of like a pony's shoe.

E.A.: Yea.

D.S.: Did that help you climb the mountains?

E.A.: No. I don't think it did. I don't think...I don't know. It's worse coming down the mountain than it is going up...you know what I mean. I was always slipping and sliding more. Going up than I would coming down.

D.S.: Uhhum. Yea. You would have to carry all these things down to the store didn't you?
E.A.: Yea.

D.S.: How far away was that?
E.A.: Well, I'd say a mile and a half.
D.S.: Mile and a half...that's not too bad.

E.A.: No.

D.S.: Did you raise corn?
E.A.: Yea, after 1924 when we went back up there we raised corn.

D.S.: But not when you were little.

E.A.: Not...oh only what was in the garden...maybe grewed an ear of corn you understand.

D.S.: So you didn't have any...you didn't have anything to be ground into flour or cornmeal. You had to buy that.

E.A.: We bought all that that.

D.S.: Humm!

E.A.: It wasn't too bad. Cornmeal...you'd buy for 50¢ a bushel then, and he got 50¢ for his work...now I'm talking about...I've give them old people a many a time...old man Jim, and old man Lloyd Atkins they'd say as long as they'd get a bushel of corn for their day's work they didn't worry...they could raise just animals.

D.S.: Where was it your father worked?


J.N.: And they were all other farmers?

E.A.: All farmers.

J.N.: Right. So he worked for them. Doing what kind of work.

E.A.: Farm work. general farm work.

D.S.: School. Did you have a school?

E.A.: Oh yes mam.
D.S.: Uhhuh! Where was that?
E.A.: Well that was on up the road there about four miles, from where I lived. I had to walk about four miles, to school.
D.S.: Was that in the winter or summer?
E.A.: No indeed that was in the winter. You didn't get to go to school none in no summer. It was about two or three months in the winter was all you got to go to school.
D.S.: Two or three months.
E.A.: Yea. Just when the weather was so bad you know. That you couldn't do nothing else but that.
D.S.: That was a long walk in the snow.
E.A.: Yes it was. But that was what we done. And these kids today...they fuss about having to walk around the corner of the house to get on the bus.
J.N.: Things have changed a bit haven't they.
D.S.: How far did school go.
E.A.: Mam?
D.S.: Through what grade did school go.
E.A.: Oh, I'd say sixth or seventh grade. The school that I went to. It was a little country school.
D.S.: Hum. That was pretty good. How about church? Where was that?
E.A.: Well, church was a little bit closer, to us than that. Big Spring Church that's right up here. Then the church. We went to that right smart. That's been torn down...that was on up in the park a little bit further.
E.A.: Oh Lord...two weeks at a time...two and three weeks. You better believe they did. And you went every night too.
D.S.: Really?
E.A.: Really.
D.S.: So what else did you do for fun?
E.A.: Well, that was about all the fun there was to it...I mean.
D.S.: You didn't get to gether an evening and have songs?
E.A.: Ah, no. We'd get together and shoot marbles. Boys something like that. We'd hardly ever get to gether and have any songs...prayer meeting anything like that.
D.S.: Didn't anybody play an instrument?
E.A.: No, not in my days coming up. Not around where I was at.
D.S.: Oh. Well you made applebutter?
E.A.: Yes mam.
D.S.: Well wasn't that a fun time?
E.A.: Well I reckon it was. I reckon you can call it that. A lot of people get together.
J.N.: A lot of work, but a lot of fun too.
E.A.: Yea.
D.S.: What happened if the paddle hit the side of the kettle?
E.A.: You weren't suppose to let that happen.
D.S.: Yea, and if it did what happened?
E.A.: Well you were suppose to get a big kiss from your friend you were stirring with.
D.S.: Did they do it on purpose sometimes?
E.A.: Oh, I feel sure, yea. I feel sure that happened.
D.S.: How about corn shuckings? Did you have fun doing that?
E.A.: I never was to that. That was a little bit ahead of my time. That corn shucking. I heared a lot of talk about it tho

D.S.: Oh. Uhhum.

E.A.: You run up on that red ear you know, and everytime you do that you reach back and get you a drink out of the jug you had a sitting there.

D.S.: Speaking of jugts..did any of your neighbors make any moonshine?

E.A.: Now that's a question. Sure they did. I've made it myself.

D.S.: You did?

E.A.: Indeed I did.

J.N.: As a boy or a young man.

E.A.: A young man. I was done out on my..at least I thought I was on my own. But I was still staying at home? We'll put it accurately..become of age maybe. Put it that way.

J.N.: Right. So this was after 1924 when you moved up in the hollow.

E.A.: That's right.

D.S.: Did everybody have a still of their own? Or did you loan it back and forth?

E.A.: Well, no. You mostly had one of your own.

D.S.: You did? You were prosperous people. I've heard of some hollows where they just kept borrowing it back and forth. Well they probably did in some places. But you know that's kind of like farming and everything else. If I can get my custom work..people doing custom work. If I could get them when I wanted it done it wouldn't pay me to keep no machinery..you understand what I'm talking about. And that's the same kind of way it would be with a still. He might want it today and I might want it today.
D.S.: Uhhum, yea, sure. Did you sell yours or did you just use it for your own...

E.A.: What... whiskey?

D.S.: Uhhum.

E.A.: You better believe I sold some of it. And I drank some of it.

D.S.: Where did you sell it. In Sperryville, or Little Washington or where?

E.A.: Um... well mostly people would come to you... you wouldn't have to...

they'd come to you and get it you know. Oh, I've sold it to people in Washington and Sperryville, Woodville, Luray, Culpeper

J.N.: Came from all around. So there were a lot of people who did not make their own.

E.A.: Oh yea, out of these mountains. Oh yea, there was plenty of people that didn't make their own.

D.S.: What would you make yours out of... apples?

E.A.: I have made it out of apples. I have made it out of cherries, and I have made it out of grapes. And I have made it out of cornmeal and sugar.

D.S.: Uhhum, very good. And it was always pure. That I know. It was good stuff. Yea. Christmas. What did you do at Christmas?

E.A.: Well you just mostly... now in my boy days you'd mostly just stay home, hang around.. I mean you hardly ever went anywhere. Weather and all was so bad Christmas you didn't get out much. But then after went back after '24 you'd run around from house to house... set up to maybe 10 or 11 o'clock and eat a half bushel of apples setting around.

D.S.: Did the grownups drink?

E.A.: Most of them did, yea. My daddy and mother... mother never did drink much... but daddy he'd be mighty modest with it. I never did see him
out of the way that I could tell...wait a minute...a couple times in my life. And that was...one time that went back after 1924...and one time when we was down at Killey's barn they was havin' dances at that time you know, and getting down pretty low in the silo you know...he went up there one Sunday evening and he'd been into this drinking you know and old man Killey, you know, he accused him of drinking that fluid down in that silo getting too much of it you know.

D.S.: Did you do much visiting...like on a Sunday?
E.A.: Well, no not too much.

D.S.: Well, weren't most of you sort of related that lived close together?
E.A.: Well, in a way I reckon we was yea. There was some people that lived pretty close to you...now old...let's see that you weren't too closely related to.

D.S.: And you say you didn't visit much. Hum. Say if you did go to visit someone and they were busy doing something like stringing beans...did they stop stringing beans and talk or did you all string beans

E.A.: Well they'd all begin to string beans till they got them done. That is the older people...you know...I'm talking about my boy days.

D.S.: That's what I'm talking about.
E.A.: And then if they was a making a quilt or something in the winter...then four or five women would come in and help to do this quilt. You know...two or three and then they would have it done. That's the way...work things like that out. Closest neighbors you know.

J.N.: Neighbors really helped each other out quite a bit didn't they?
E.A.: Oh yes.

J.N.: You helped each other build buildings too didn't you?
E.A.: Oh yea.

D/S.: You did?

E.A.: Yea.

D.S.: Did you help like if someone was sick in one family..what happened then?

E.A.: Well, now we all had in 1918 or 19..I don't remember what year it was..that flu was so bad..I believe it was 1918..

D.S.: It was.

E.A.: Everyone of us was down..really out with that at the same time, but my daddy. He was the only one that stayed up during that whole time. All the rest was down with it. And old Doc Smith he'd come by every day to see us. And old Willie Wood, that was the old man that owned the farm you know, uh, he wouldn't come no closer to the house than I'd say 200 yards of the house. He'd ride his horse up on the hill and hollar down there to my daddy whether there was anything he needed for that day or not. You know what I'm talking about. He'd do that sometimes twice a day. But he was afraid to come any closer than that that he would get the bug.

D.S.: Right. That was a very very terrible thing. So many people died.

E.A.: I know.

D.S.: And none of you did. And Dr. Smith was a good doctor wasn't he?

E.A.: No indeed. Yea.

D.S.: He lived in Sperryville wasn't it?

E.A.: That's right.

D.S.: Did he come by horse?


D.S.: Did you ever hear of Dr. Ross?
E.A.: Ross? Seems to me like I have, but I believe he was from Madison wasn't he?


E.A.: I think I heared the name.

D.S.: Um. How did you court your wife?

E.A.: Uh, well, wasn't much to that. Very easy job huh.

D.S.: Very easy job huh.

E.A.: Well, it weren't too easy, I don't reckon you call it. We started out a little bit then we had a split up and stayed...never spoke to each other for seven years.

J.N.: How did you start out...when you say you started out how old were you then.

E.A.: Oh, well I'm older now six or seven years than she is. I reckon I must have been about 21 or 22 something nother like that.

J.N.: But you went through seven years of not speaking before you got married?

E.A.: No, we went together maybe six months or something and then had the split up. And then went for seven years and never even looked at each other.

D.S.: Did she live near you?

E.A.: Well, she moved around right smart her parents did. Yea, sometimes we'd be in contact...be in sight of each other.

D.S.: Were you chaperoned when you did call on her? Did people stay around with you like her mother and father or a sister.

E.A.: No indeed.

D.S.: No they trusted you.

E.A.: No when I went back...she was walking up the road one Sunday evening and I had an little ole coup I reckon it was, and I was a
going up the road and she was walking up the road and I stopped
and I said do you want a ride. And man I hadn't said that before
man she was in...she really had moved!

D.S.: And that started the whole thing again?
E.A.: That's right.
D.S.: That's great. How many children do you have?
E.A.: Three.
D.S.: Three, Oh that's great. Were you moved out of the park?
E.A.: Yea, yea. Let me show you my three daughters here.
J.N.: Do they still live in the area?
E.A.: Yea. Two of them is in Front Royal. And one of them..let's see,
this one is right across the road here. And two is in Front Royal.
J.N.: Well, it is good to have them so close.
E.A.: This one works in the Safeway, and that one works in the Pentagon
in Washington. This one works in the Welfare Office over in Front
Royal.
D.S.: Well, that is marvelous to have them. Do you recall any herbs your
mother used when you were sick?
D.S.: What was that used for?
E.A.: sick stomach for the baby
D.S.: Catnip Tea..alright and what else.
E.A.: Well we would..every spring of the year we would go out and dig up
sassafrass root and then we would have that to drink on that for two
or three days.
D.S.: Was that for pleasure or for..
E.A.: Well, I don't know what to..just one of those things I reckon you call it.
J.N.: It wasn't for an illness though. Just to drink.
D.S.: Uhhuh. To thin the blood. To thin the blood probably in the
   spring. Yea. Uhhum. Uh..what would they do if you had a cold?
E.A.: Well they'd give you a little kerosene...with a little sugar..
   turpentine. Drop it out on a spoon.
D.S.: Uhhuh. Sounds awful. Did it taste awful?
E.A.: It did.
D.S.: But it worked didn't it.
E.A.: Yea. It did.
D.S.: Yea. How about onion plastards?
E.A.: Mustard plastards they always called them. The way they made them
   at home.
D.S.: Oh. You didn't use any onion plastards.
E.A.: I don't think they used onion plastards. They'd take these mustard
   seeds..beat them all up real fine. Take a hammer and beat them and
   beat them, you know, and then wet them a little bit and stir them
   up a little bit and kinda make a dough out of it like and then put
   it in between couple pieces of like that....
D.S.: Burned didn't it.
E.A.: Yea.
J.N.: Cleared up the chest though didn't it?
E.A.: Yea
D.S.: Can you think of anything else that was used. What happened if
   you got snake bite?
E.A.: Well, uh, that was a very rare thing. I never did...yea...a snake
   bite my daddy, on the finger.
D.S.: What did you do?

E.A.: Well that there was before my time. I don't know...but I know it always left his finger...his finger never would straighten anymore. He was a trimming splinters on the old harp to start the fire with you know. And this little old copperhead was laying there and struck him on the finger.

D.S.: Never knew about using snakeweeds poltice?

E.A.: Uh, no mam...I never did know...

D.S.: Uhhuh. You know all these old herbs the people were using...the people are finding out now they were good. They really were.

E.A.: Sure.

D.S.: Were there any other diseases that you recall aside from the flu? Like diptheria or pneumonnia, or anything of that kind.

E.A.: Well yea. There was some diptheria around but that was a little bit ahead of my time. I mean I was here around, but I don't know...I know several people they said had it. And it killed several people out of Bertha Atkins' family. Several of them children that died out of that family...or that's what they said it was...diptheria.

D.S.: When people died...this isn't a very happy subject but when people died, they didn't have embalming back when you were a little boy did they?

E.A.: No mam.

D.S.: So they...did they keep the body right in the house?

E.A.: Yea.

D.S.: And did they make their own coffins or did they buy them?

E.A.: Well, uh some people made their own, or had them made, but mostly the ones that I remember anything about...they bought them. Old
-20-

man...fella by the name of Jim Hitt...he used to be the undertaker

now down at Sperryville.

D.S.: Did they put monuments up or just rocks?
E.A.: Uh...some of both.
D.S.: some of both.
E.A.: Uhhuh
D.S.: Did they inscribe on the rocks?
E.A.: In some cases they did.
D.S.: Uhhuh. Yea. Let's get on to a happier subject. When you

married Mrs. Atkins what was the marriage like?
E.A.: Uh...wasn't much to it. I didn't think. Seems like...
D.S.: Were you married in the church, or at home.
E.A.: No I was married...oh, no church wedding. No. I was married

I reckon in the pastor's house over here at Front Royal.
D.S.: Oh you went to Front Royal to get married.

D.S.: Oh yea.
D.S.: Uhhuh. What did ya do...elope?
E.A.: Elope? No. That was Model T days. Model A days then I believe,

it was. This was on up in the 30's you talking about, now.
D.S.: None of your family came along?
E.A.: No indeed.
D.S.: You made a very quiet wedding didn't you?
E.A.: They usta didn't do nothing like that...no church wedding...you know

you never hear of them going to either one of the parents home.
D.S.: Uhhuh. Well then did you build your own house? Or move in with your

family or what?
E.A.: Well, no... I lived for two or three, three or four years. I just don't recall exactly I lived in an old park home up there. Up at the Bailey place. You know the people... they let some people live over in that park for several years. You know some people moved out.

J.N.: This was in the same hollow that you'd grown up in?

E.A.: No this was on up the road a little bit, further. This is on up the road a little bit... this is up near Turn Bridge.

J.N.: So how long did you live there?

E.A.: Well, let's see back in 2 or 3. I come out here in '37. I stayed there three or four years.

J.N.: I see. So you actually lived in the park after it was an actual park.

E.A.: Yea. Yea. That's right, after they... yea that's right.

D.S.: Did you see many tourists?

E.A.: Yea. That 211... it... got a right smart traffic on it.

D.S.: What was your reaction to them?

E.A.: Well, now in my boy days the first one of them things I ever saw, my first reaction was to get over the fence and run like thunder.

That was exactly what I did do. The same way with the first airplane ever I saw come up over me. I run under a big tree from that.

D.S.: Yes. Sure that would scare anyone. Yea. Right. How did you all take to strangers? Did you like strangers? Or... accept them or what?

E.A.: Oh yea. A stranger would come through and want a place to stay at night or something or another... sure you would accept them.

D.S.: Well good for you.

E.A.: Feed them. You know in them days there was a lot of... we called them peddlers. Running around with these little bundles on their back and
a stick up over their shoulder you know and if they'd drop by
around night or something or nother and ask you...no...you couldn't
tell people you couldn't put them up. Couldn't nobody do that.

Not near as much as they would do today.
D.S.: When you were a little boy....
E.A.: How many acres did your father own?

E.A.: He didn't own any until after 1924.
J.N.: That's when we bought...what did you say...240 acres?
E.A.: 240 acres.
D.S.: In other words you rented this property?
E.A.: That's right.
D.S.: How many acres was that?
E.A.: Well you just rented the house and garden. You didn't have no
land. The land all around you belonged to somebody else.
D.S.: Oh, I see. Uhhum right.
E.A.: It's just like I rent you this house here see. Not the land all
around.
D.S.: I get it. What did you do of an evening? You didn't just have
dinner and go right to bed.
E.A.: Well you just mostly sat around and talked. Among the family and so on.
D.S.: Any ghost stories?
E.A.: Nah! Play a few checkers...something nother like that. You get to make
a little bit to much fuss, Dad would hit the floor like that...now one
more time and them things gonna have to be put up.
D.S.: And you listened to your father didn't you?
E.A.: You better believe we did. He never did have to........That's what he
done.
J.N.: Just tap his foot on the floor and you knew exactly what he meant.
E.A.: Exactly what they meant. Exactly. If you got to making a little too much noise. You understand what I'm talking about...that's what he'd do.

J.N.: Were you close to your dad?
E.A.: What do you mean close to him.
J.N.: Well, I mean were you close friends?
E.A.: Why you better believe I was.
D.S.: What did he look like?
E.A.: I got his picture here...now let me see if I can find it.
J.N.: All these pictures you got...you gotta search for a minute don't you.
E.A.: Well I did keep it hanging in over my bed here...and I begin to having nightmares you know and they thought maybe by that picture hanging up over that wall you know.
D.S.: Well you just tell me what he looked like.
E.A.: Well he was a little short man. He wasn't never very heavy all his life. I don't reckon he weighed over 160...170 pounds his whole life.
Yea. He was a small short fellow.
D.S.: Did he have a beard?
E.A.: Mustache...no beard.
D.S.: And he couldn't play any instrument...like a harp, or a fiddle or..
E.A.: No indeed. No indeed.
D.S.: Oh that's a shame. So you all missed a lot of fun. So you never had any dances.
E.A.: No, there was never any dancing in our home. Old square dancing thing I reckon you are talking about.
D.S.: Yea. Did any of the other people?
E.A.: Oh yea. Around...some of your neighbors around.
D.S.: How come didn't you all?

E.A.: Well, I don't know. I am unable to answer that question. For one reason, I reckon they just didn't believe in it too much. Mama and Daddy you know. I guess that must have been the reason.

D.S.: When you were a little boy, course you had twelve or eleven brothers and sisters, uh, but did you have any other special friends?

E.A.: Yea. Your close neighbors, they were...

D.S.: Who was it?

E.A.: Old man Jake Johnson. That old man you see hanging right up yonder.

D.S.: Okey, alright. What would you play?

E.A.: Well we'd play marbles, and tag and different things.


E.A.: Yea, pitch horseshoes.

D.S.: Did you ever swing on vines?

E.A.: Yea, grape vines, you better believe it.

That was right dangerous too.

D.S.: Yea, if the vine wasn't strong.

E.A.: You go up against a steep hill, the hill be that steep, and you cut that grape vine up off back up here some where and then when you swing out over yonder, you be up in the air somewhere. You understand what I'm saying.

J.N.: Yea. If that vine broke you were in big trouble.

E.A.: Or if your hand just happened to slip or anything you know. They wouldn't allow you. Mama and Daddy if they knew you were doing that they, you wasn't allowed to do that. You had to do that underbeknow-
D.S.: I forgot to ask you. Did you shoot off firecrackers at Christmas?
E.A.: Nah. These little old cap pistols maybe. They'd make a little crack you know. We never had nothing like that. No firecrackers.

D.S.: What was Mrs. Atkins maiden name?
E.A.: What was her maiden name? Uh Maryanna Dodson.
D.S.: Oh she was a Dodson. Her family came from where?
E.A.: Oh right around up in there.
D.S.: There are a lot of Dodson's throughout the mountains and I was wondering if she was any kin to the people that were on the Eastern side of the mountain.
E.A.: No, I don't think so. Just the west side.
D.S.: Uhhuh. Alright. Have you anything that you would like to know?
J.N.: No, I've learned a tremendous amount. It's been very interesting.
D.S.: You know you told us about the fireplaces in your second home. But did you have a stove in that first house?
E.A.: To start with we had a fireplace, but later on we had to stop it up. You know it taken so much wood to burn in those fireplaces. Twice as much, and it put so much more heat out of a stove too...you sitting out...you know, than you could with these fireplaces.
D.S.: But did your mother cook on a wood stove?
E.A.: Oh yea. All my...I think when they started out maybe that they cooked on a fireplace, but after I can remember anything she had a cook stove. She bought this old cook stove...I believe this old stove was bought in 1906...the same year that I was born in. Home-Comfort, Range.
D.S.: Home Comfort--Hum . Those are heavy things, I wonder how they got
it up to the house.

E.A.: I, I wouldn't know.

D.S.: No, you weren't there.

E.A.: I imagine tho with a two horse wagon. I imagine was the way it was brought there. People run through the country and sold them, you know, and I imagine that's the way they delivered them. They had them shipped to Luray and then put them on a wagon. Something nother to deliver.

D.S.: Did you ever go into Luray?

E.A.: Oh yes.

D.S.: When you were a little boy?

E.A.: Yes.

D.S.: How would you go?

E.A.: By wagon. Yea, I went to Luray several times when my daddy... he would go to bring back a load of stuff. The old man Clark that I was talking about. Old covered wagon. Yea. You'd leave in the morning about... oh 3 o'clock... and get back late that evening.

J.N.: Three o'clock in the morning.

E.A.: Oh yea.

J.N.: Still dark out and you'd start out.

E.A.: Oh yea... top the Luray mountain... Panarama... by about daylight or so.

D.S.: There was a toll gate wasn't there?


D.S.: Do you recall how much that was?

E.A.: No, I don't believe that I do. But it weren't much. I don't know if it were a dime or a quarter. It weren't over a quarter and it weren't under a dime.

J.N.: Now, did that depend upon how many horses were pulling your wagon
or just per wagon?

E.A.: Well, I think it depended upon your whole wagon. I don't think it was that much for a buggy..just a horse and buggy..might have been, but I don't believe it was.

D.S.: It was a dirt road wasn't it?

E.A.: Oh yea. dirt road.

J.N.: Where 211 is today?

D.S.: Yea. Did you ever stop in that store of Cliser's that was down further, below the toll gate?

E.A.: Oh yea.

D.S.: Did they really have good food in there?


J.N.: Mylanthum..what is that...

E.A.: That's hishname..that's his first name.

J.N.: Oh, that's the fellow that ran the store?

D.S.: Yea.

E.A.: And then there was a Beahm just down a little bit below there too. Hundred yards maybe..not any more than that was there. Right on the same side and everything.

D.S.: Yea. uhhuh.

J.N.: Let me let her change this tape here. When you would start out at 3 o'clock in the morning in your wagon, what would you use for light. You needed some light to see where you were going. Kerosene lamp? Lantern on the front of your wagon.

E.A.: No indeed. You wouldn't have to have nothing. Them horses could see.

J.N.: So you really didn't need a lantern?

E.A.: Nah. And most of the time going up that Luray mountain at that time,
the stars was shooting clear up there in the sky, you could see.
Looked sometimes like it'd fall right down on the horses.

D.S.: Must have been beautiful.
E.A.: It was.

J.N.: What time did you normally get up? Obviously you got up pretty early that day...the day you were going into Luray, but what time would you normally get up?
E.A.: Well my daddy and mama they normally got up about 4:30 or 5:00
J.N.: Is that right? So you'd go to bed early.
E.A.: Yes. Soon as it was dark. And plenty of times before dark.

In the summertime now, I'm speaking about.

D.S.: Oh, did you ever peal bark?
E.A.: Yes indeed. Yes. Well I never did actually peal the bark, but I've been in the mountains with a...carrying water to them. I wasn't big enough to peal it.
D.S.: They used a spud right?
E.A.: Yea. A thing about like that. And down here on the end someway...

J.N.: They peal the bark right off the tree?
E.A.: Uhhum.

J.N.: How did the chestnut blight affect your life in the mountains.
E.A.: It was one of the best timbers was ever in this country. You could build your house out of it, you could build your fence out of it, you could do anything with what you wanted. You could even put you a roof on out of it.
J.N.: Yea. Is that what the people talked a lot about when the chestnut
started dying? Did they know why they were dying?

E.A.: No, just that blight was what it was.

J.N.: Yea. But you did know there was a blight?

E.A.: Yea. We did know they was a dying too. I've picked up chestnuts many a many a day. That's the way we used to get our winter clothes.

J.N.: Yea. Well that was a cash crop for many of the mountain people was it not?

E.A.: That's right. Well you can call it cash.

I reckon. But that was leading back to the due bill. If you carried more than you were gonna deal out why they'd give you this due bill and you brought it back the next time you wanted something.

D.S.: Did they take the bark then into Luray or Sperryville?

E.A.: Well the tannery at Sperryville had mostly gone out when I can remember anything. Mostly went to Luray.

D.S.: Ah, Yea. Did anybody come and pick it up?

E.A.: No, they would load it on the wagons up there and take it to Luray to sell.

D.S.: Then they got the whole amount of it. Yea. Did you ever pick huckleberries?

E.A.: Yea.

D.S.: Was there lots of them there?

E.A.: Yes. bushels and bushels, of them on the White Rock Ridge up there.

I don't know whether the old vines ever died out up there all of them or not.

D.S.: Did people start fires deliberately so they'd be sure of huckleberries?
E.A.: I don't know. I couldn't answer that question. It's very possible. I don't know, whether they did or not. I have heard... I really don't think huckleberry pickers did it. You understand what I mean. I don't believe they did.

D.S.: Was fire anything you all were afraid of all?

E.A.: No, it didn't appear too much. Well, it was always kind of particular with it around your homes you know you didn't want to mess with it too much. No I wouldn't say...handle it right. I saw a fire get to a certain extent where I was afraid of it now...if you understand what I mean. I also saw it a burning in the mountain and I'd be a trying to help conquer it and would get excited from it.

D.S.: Uhhuh, yea. Didn't people use fire to burn brush down to clear a field?

E.A.: Oh yea.

D.S.: And then sometimes it took off.

E.A.: Yea, sometimes it could do that. I don't think any ever got out from us though. Now I was a working for somebody else one time and it blew out and got into an old rail fence one day about dinner time. We was sitting eating dinner...lunch...and uh, it got in that old rail fence and it went faster than I could run up the mountain. Now you wouldn't think...but the wind was a dropping...you wouldn't think a fire could go that fast.

J.N.: Was that an old chestnut fence?

E.A.: An old chestnut rail fence. You know what we was a trying to do. We was trying to run up and through out two or three pounds you know so it would stop.

J.N.: Couldn't catch up with it?

E.A.: No sir. Sure couldn't. That's just how fast it went through there.
J.N.: Did you use mostly split rail fences? Or did you use the wire fences?

E.A.: No, mostly rail.

D.S.: Stone fences?

E.A.: Well, yea, a lot of stone fences.

D.S.: Cause you had a lot of rocks didn't you.

E.A.: Weren't too many stone fences on the farm that I was on. Some, but

Willie Wood, Clarence Hite.

J.N.: I find a lot of wire fences up in the park when I walk through the

woods..when did they start being used as opposed to the split rail fences. Or were they used just gone now?

E.A.: Well the rail business has been out for a right good while. There is

a few around here ...

J.N.: Yea, there are some.

D.S.: Was it name..were there a lot of trees still there when you were

living there in the park.

E.A.: What chestnut trees?

D.S.: All kinds of trees.

E.A.: Oh yea.

D.S.: It wasn't mostly cleared off then?

E.A.: No just little patches here and yonder. The whole side of the mountain

wasn't cleared. I think most of our friends..we had wooded land and we

..three or four acres in a spot was all you ever had cleared and less

than that.

D.S.: And you had your orchards?

E.A.: Yea. An acre or two of orchards.

D.S.: You grew apples, cherries, pears?

E.A.: Pears, yea. Cherries grew themself at that time. You didn't have to
fool with no cherries...they was there...just like the chestnuts.

D.S.: That's what I've heard. Why I wonder?

E.A.: I don't know. But oh Lord, I've saw some of the prettiest cherries ever I saw in my life in that park. Well, in around...they just grewed that way, I don't know. I got one story I want to tell you about, the cherry tree though. This old man Clark that I was talking about ust a plow corn a lot. Usta put four or five men in the corn field plowing corn. They had twenty five .. thirty acres in a field. They was in there plowing this corn, and on up on a hill right in the edge of a corn field there was a beautiful cherry tree there .... oh man, great big cherries on it..bigger than the end of your thumb.. red hot...one evening come a little shower of rain and all these men that was a plowing this corn ... didn't have to go nowhere..probably drove the horses right up to the cherry trees you know. All these men let the plow stop you know and to this cherry three and was a eating cherries. So Mr. Clark, the old man, he happened to ride out about that time. He rode on up to the cherry tree and never said nothing you know. They kept on..eat several of these cherries..maybe more than several..but don't you know that winter when time got slack..every one of those men that was up in that cherry tree carried a grubbing hoe back to that cherry tree and grubbed it out. That's what he told them to do.

D.S.: Why?

E.A.: Well it looks to me like, he must not have wanted them up in there eating them cherries. And him paying them time for it.

J.N.: So he cut it down.

E.A.: Lifted it up by the roots..grubbed it out. He wouldn't let them cut
it wasn't work enough to it, that away. Made them grub it up.
D.S.: Wow! One nice cherry tree gone. Did your mother have any flowers and plants around?
E.A.: Oh yea. She liked flowers.
D.S.: What did she have?
E.A.: Well about the same kind as we got now. I never was much of a...
flower business hasn't changed too much.
D.S.: Lilacs, boxwoods
E.A.: Yea. Snowballs
D.S.: Every now and then as you walk through the park you see lilacs—
blooming. Daffodils .. you know that somebody had planted these.
J.N.: Where did you get your water for your house? Did you have a pump outside your house?
E.A.: Spring.
J.N.: You got it from the springhouse that we were talking about earlier.
E.A.: Yea. Oh you didn't have water in no house at that time.
J.N.: There were some people that lived in the park that had to get their water from a cisturn?
E.A.: No.
J.N.: No, most everybody settled near a spring.
E.A.: There wasn't no cisturns. Not on this side. I don't know about the other side of the mountain. Wasn't none over on this section.
D.S.: I have never heard of a cisturn. Do you know how the people felt when they were moved out? How did they react?
E.A.: Well, it hurt some of them pretty bad. Some of them...
J.N.: Hurt in what kind of way Mr. Atkins?
E.A.: Well it hurt their souls...heart...
J.N.: That's what I thought you meant.
J.N.: They had really learned to love that land hadn't they?
D.S.: But do you think they have done better since they moved out than if they had stayed there?
E.A.: Well, now that's hard to answer. I wouldn't hardly know....
If I had that 240 acres of land up there where it is at I feel like I would be just as well off or better off than I am now. Do you understand what I am saying.
J.N.: Yea. That was good land?
E.A.: Well, it was mountain land. But you know mountain land now is something pretty valuable.
J.N.: Yes it is.
D.S.: Right, but it was rocky...it was hard to work it.
E.A.: Well, yea...it...there isn't many people looking for that kind of land today...noway...something to work.
D.S.: Yea. I'm talking about if you were there trying to work it...it would be a lot harder than working it here.
E.A.: Oh, I'm not sorry...I mean that I come out here. I don't regret it. I had a chance not to come. I didn't have to come. I had a choice I could have made about it, but now I'm proud I come. Yea I'm proud I come.
D.S.: Well You have certainly told us a tremendous amount. You don't know how we thank you. This is invaluable.
E.A.: Well
J.N.: A lot of these things seem very common to you, but to myself who
is a lot younger, it's fascinating.