10-16-1978

(SNP105) Charles Ross interviewed by Dorothy Noble Smith, transcribed by Alan S. Brenner

Charles Ross

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D.S.: We are interviewing Charles Ross, the son of Charles J. Ross, the son of Dr. Ross who did so much in the mountains for the people up there. Mr. Ross lives now in Criglersville in the home where his father had done his practice.

C.R.: In one of the homes.

D.S.: In one of the homes. Where was the other?

C.R.: Across the street there. There's another one down about 1,000 feet.

D.S.: I see, this was when he first came here that he was down there?

C.R.: That's right.

D.S.: You originally had told me that he came from West Virginia?

C.R.: That's right. He came from Taylor County, West Virginia, which is near Bedford.

D.S.: Do you have any idea why he came down here?

C.R.: Yes, I can answer that question. Ah. Let's take up his education first and that'll lead into that. His full name was Charles Ross and he was born May 28, 1881 and married Jan. 21, 1907 and died Nov. 25, 1965.

He was born in Taylor County, West Virginia on a farm. He married Bessie Irene Rudacille, who was a native of the southeastern part of this county and that is one of the reasons that he moved to this county, you see.

You want to get into his education?

D.S.: Yes.

C.R.: He was educated at a private school on his home farm in his early part of his early education up to the grades and then he attended a school or equivalent of what we have high school today at Simpson, West Virginia, which was just about a mile and a half from his home. Then his father had eight children and he gave them all a years' education at Juniata College in Juniata, Pennsylvania. Then my father returned to the farm and taught school a few years and saved enough money to attend the University of West Virginia. While there one of his professors asked him what he would like to do and he just said "I'd like to be a physician." So he came to the Medical School of Virginia and graduated in 1905. After he practiced a few years
and married, he attended surgical school in New York. So he was both a physician and a surgeon. Now — is that what you want to know?

D.S.: Yes indeed. So then because he married a girl from Madison County...

C.R.: That was the way he learned about this place. It was just about 6 ... about 12 miles from here.

D.S.: Yes. Did he ever say "Why in heavens name did I come here where I have to take care of all these mountain people who can't pay me?

C.R.: No. I don't think I can answer that. Unless it was some of his friends invited him here. He knew some people here, met some people here in Criglersville, uh - at a dance or skating rink or - which he attended - which was his social life in his early days - I can't answer that - uh..."

D.S.: Well he was heart and soul for these mountain people, wasn't he?

C.R.: Yes, that was his life.

D.S.: They would contact him by telephone?

C.R.: Uh - Well, when he first started here, in my recollection, I don't believe it probably was one telephone in this community and maybe one in Etlan, - and those mountain people would come then to those people that had those phones and they would call in. A lot of times they would ride here on horses or walk for miles and miles and leave a message with my mother for him that they want him to come to a certain place. Communication was very difficult in those days. We had a post office here and they had one in Syria. In a few years they had one at Etlan. - practically no roads of any significance - paths, I mean in the mountains, now, paths and impassible roads. But they also had another signal. In these mountains back here, I'm talking about in Nethers' Mill, which consisted of Nicholson Hollow, Corbin Hollow and Weakley Hollow and then we'd come over on this side of the mountain we
had Richards' Town, Dark Hollow and to the top of the mountain Fishers' Gap. And then we had another hollow over on the Rapidan River on the West side of the county that a lot of people lived. They had certain signals for bootleggers - uh... moon....

D.S.: Moonshiners?

C.R.: No, for these revenue officers. When they would come into the mountains they'd have a shotgun - every family had one or two shotguns and they had certain signals. They would start at the bottom of the mountain till they got to the top. Now there was a signal that the revenue officer was in the mountain, then when my daddy would go in the mountain they had another signal. They would shoot that thing up through the mountain and come to the road from their homes to see him - don't you see?

D.S.: Would this be two shots? or four?

C.R.: Uh, yes, they had a certain signal from the shotgun that they would use.

D.S.: Heaven knows! Would he just go up to see how the people were?

C.R.: No, not particularly, unless he'd get word to come to somebody's house. Get a call. Course he would go back if it was necessary for him to return. They'd never know when he, uh, I think it was customary he'd go see 'em and if they were just not desperately sick why he would always return in about three days and see how they were doing. If it was necessary, put it that way - and you're going to have to do these notes over a whole lot.

D.S.: Now he would go by horse, wouldn't he?

C.R.: When he first started he would go - he had a buggy and he'd go as far as he could in the buggy and he carried his saddle with him and then he would ride through the paths - unhook the horse and put the saddle on and he had saddle pockets on one side to carry his obstetrical instruments in and the other side he carried his surgical instruments in and then he...
handbag that he carried his medicine. He had his surgical instruments and obstetrical instruments bag made locally so it would fit the horse saddle.

D.S.: Oh! So the people if they knew he was coming up they would give a signal and people would come out and say "My daughter is sick" or...

C.R.: "I got a headache" or "my foot hurts" or "I cut my toe" or "I can't eat" or something like that, you know - "my children are sick." Let me diverse a little bit now while this is on my mind. This was in his early practice and he had got a call to come to Nethers Mill - in the mountain above Nethers Mill, and to do that he had to go from here to Nethers Mill which was about 15 miles. He was going up the Hughes River early one morning and, uh, a Mr. Pess Jenkins came out. Mr Jenkins lived in Rappahannock County and another doctor was their family doctor at that time cause my daddy hadn't got established in this country. And he says "aren't you Dr. Ross?" Daddy said "Yes." He says"my children are sick, I want you to come over and see them." So he went over across the river there to his house and so far as I remember he had six children, in my recollection, and five of them were sick. And, uh, he examined them and he said "Pess, all your children got diptheria." Back at that time that was a serious disease and he said "I'll tell you what I want you to do. I can't carry - don't have diptheria medicine with me," they gave them an antitoxin or something back in those times, didn't they? He says, " I got to go to the top of the mountain today," - that was a distance of 10 to 12 miles - and "I want you to get on your horse," that's to Mr. Jenkins, "and go to Madison and get some of this diptheria medicine." A round trip of 40 miles, and he says "I'll be back to your house tonight." He came back and gave that medicine to those children - what do you call it? - hypodermic
needle. All of them lived and not a single one of them in that family have ever nothing. I know 4 of them are still living.

D.S.: Diptheria was quite a problem among these people, wasn't it?
C.R.: Oh yes. That's right.
D.S.: I wonder why?
C.R.: It wasn't only here, it was along everywhere back in those days. It was epidemics of it every now and then. I can't answer that.
D.S.: Yeah. Uh - Did your father ever mention that there were families where there seemed to be malnutrition?
C.R.: Oh yes. They lived on fat meat, and cabbage, and potatoes, wild meat, hog meat, - they didn't know anything about a diet. Just the same thing year in and year out.
D.S.: But wouldn't that - that wouldn't necessarily cause malnutrition would it?
C.R.: Well, if they didn't eat sufficient food - Oh, you mean if they didn't have enough - oh they had enough to eat, it's no question about that. Such food as was - greasy - all of it cooked with fat meat you know. All of them had a you know, most of them - butter and corn bread, very little flour. I don't think you can say many of them went hungry, but they didn't eat the right kind of food like they do today. It wasn't varied enough - beans and potatoes and cabbages and fat meat and wild meat.
D.S.: And greasy foods are not good for people.
C.R.: That's right.
D.S.: no. But they weren't fat people, were they? They were...
C.R.: No. A hardy people. Strong, tall, especially the Nicholsons - black hair. Each family had their characteristics. The Corbin family had their own dialect, it was hard to understand. Cut that off a minute. Let me just insert a note here.
D.S.: Yeah.
C.R.: That - uh - My father never kept case histories of any of his patients. He never had a nurse, nor assistant to help him in the office. What I am relating is from my own observations and recollection and nothing that was left in his office records because they were all destroyed - even the account books. But he did keep a detailed account of his visits. The day and what it was for most of the time and the amount that he charged.
Whether he ever sent a bill or not, I'm not able to say. He did all that work himself.

D.S.: That's the thing that has come through so clearly when people talk about him.

C.R.: Let me take while this instance comes to me to show you how he kept histories
of families after he had quit practicing. He got a urgent call one day to come to see a Mr. Charlie Rosson at
Quaker Run. I happened to be at home and he asked me if I'd drive
him down there. I did and he had fallen off the rake out raking hay. We
got him to the house and he examined him. Coming back up the road he said
"Charlie Rosson will never be any better," he said,"he's got the same thing
his daddy died with and one of his brothers," but I never knew what it was.
I just don't know - I never questioned it anymore, and that's all he ever said.

D.S.: He had a good memory and relied on that?

C.R.: If tuberculosis was a trend in a family, why he would look for that. If
heart disease was a trend, he kept that in his mind. And that brings to
mind another instance that I want to relate while we're talking. After he
had practiced here many years, he went to see a family up on Quaker
Run. Her name was Mrs. Weatherall. He said he went to see that woman several
times and he would give her medicine and she never responded at all. He
said just "I just don't understand that." Evidently he kept it on his mind
he said one day he was riding across the mountain from Graves' Mill, he
was on top of Chapman's Mountain, coming down by this lady's home and he
said "I just believe that woman has had malaria." The disease was unknown
in this section of the country. He said he got off his horse and went in
the house and asked Mrs. , I believe her name was. He said,
"have you ever had malaria." She said "yes, when I was a young girl I
visited some of my people in Georgia and got malaria." He said "Yes, and
that's what you've got now, too." He gave her some quinine and in a few days she was alright.

D.S.: Wowee! He was a diagnostician, wasn't he then too? That's unusual. My gosh. You were saying before that the Corbins - uh - most of them were retarded?

C.R.: Well - uh - that's not the word I would want to use. They had intermarried and they were - uh - I can't think of the word now ... degenerative - that's not the word. They had intermarried so much that they had become - were mentally and physically deformed, most of them.

D.S.: Yet there were Corbins that lived in Nicholson Hollow?

C.R.: No, you go to Nicholson Hollow first...

D.S.: Yeah, but there were Corbins that lived in Nicholson Hollow.

C.R.: No, they lived above it. They lived in a hollow above the Nicholson's. A family all their own, just sort of a tribe, or clan. There were a Nicholson clan, a Weakley clan, a Carlton clan - that's just about the way they lived up there.

D.S.: Were their homes fairly ramshackled?

C.R.: Well, there's a typical home right there, with logs and homemade furniture, split rail fences and boards split out of something, and poles.

D.S.: But now, you had to be pretty strong to build something like that.

C.R.: Oh yeah, they were strong people, physically. Most of them, now. The Nicholsons and Weakleys and people like that, but the Corbins - they were not strong people.

D.S.: Uh - did the Corbins do much farming?

C.R.: No. They would have a patch of cabbage, a patch of corn, a patch of cabbage and beans, particularly, and - uh - they would dry beans and shell beans and corn. They would bring their corn to Nethers Mill or to Browns'
Mill or to Kite's Mill to get it ground into meal. They would carry that back on their back - in the mountains on their back and they would string their beans up on a string and hang it outside their cabin to dry. This was a winter food and for clothes, in the fall of the year, they would pick up chestnuts and sell those and buy their winter clothes. They'd bring 'em to the stores a Nethers Mill and Syria and Graves' Mill.

D.S.: I understand you used to ride every now and then with your father?

C.R.: Oh, I've ridden thousands of miles with him - official gate opener! (laughter)

D.S.: What particularly - if somebody had given the message that he was needed, it would be what sort of a problem? besided diptheria.

C.R.: Oh my. I can remember we had typhoid fever in this country and pneumonia, a lot of tuberculosis...

D.S.: There was tuberculosis?

C.R.: Oh yeah, and - uh - I can't recall - I didn't pay any attention to that part of the thing. He never talked about his patients. In fact, I never knew what they had. He wouldn't tell my brother and I anything about his patients. We'd just hook up the horse and try to ... our interest was in drivin' the horse. Sometimes when both of us would go together with him, one of us would ride in the back of the buggy and have a stick and just put that in the road and it'd look like a snake went along behind us. (laughter) So we had a lot of fun and we met a lot of people that-a-way. While he was in the house visiting, seeing his patients, we were out visiting with the children or playing or talkin' to the old folks. It wasn't any particular problem for us. And that's the way I got to know so many people in the county - is just ridin' with him in the summertime and when I wasn't in school.
D.S.: Ah. You said playing - what would the children play?

C.R.: Oh we played bases and jump over the rope and just sit around under a
chestnut tree or oak tree or by the spring and get a drink of water and
some of them would have a homemade ball made out of rags and we would
throw that and catch, you know. We never had a rubber ball or anything
like that in the early days when I was young.

D.S.: Did they pitch rocks or horse shoes?

C.R.: Yeah, horse shoes, but I don't remember. That was older people that did that.

D.S.: Oh, uh huh. And how about marbles, did they play that?

C.R.: Oh yeah, they played a lot of marbles and some of them could play a fiddle
or guitar don't you see, and I enjoyed listenin' at 'em play those things
when we got an opportunity.

D.S.: Yeah. Well how would they dress? warmly enough?

C.R.: Oh yes. Warmly enough. They had winter clothes. They had boots and they
had leather shoes and -uh - coats, caps to fit over their ears, but they
were not any what you would call fine clothes. They were rough clothes
and I would think on a few occasions that some of the children probably
didn't have enough clothes. They'd have to stay by the fire in the wintertime
and suffer to a certain extent. But in a general way, they had plenty to
eat, plenty of clothes to wear and - uh - enjoyed their social life. I mean
they had their own way of living, singing, music and dances and go to
religious revivals that people would come in and have and that'd be their
entertainment.

D.S.: Did you ever go to any of the dances?

C.R.: I never went to any of the dances in the mountains, but I did attend a many
a one out here in Criglersville when I was young.

D.S.: I imagine they were about the same kind of dances, weren't they?

C.R.: Oh yeah. Square dances. Oh yeah, the same thing.

D.S.: How about when women had babies, was your father called in or did they use midwives?

C.R.: They used both, but then, as time went on, they used doctors— I would say 95% of the time. I heard him say that after — after he quit delivering children, that he had delivered almost 4,200 in his years of practice, and that was, at that time, over half the population of Madison County.

D.S.: My gosh. Have you any idea how much he charged for — uh — delivering?

C.R.: I think — I don't know what his charges were in the beginning, but in his — beginning about 1927 he charged ten dollars.

D.S.: Ten dollars?

C.R.: And when he stopped practicing he was charging $25 — uh — $15, excuse me.

D.S.: Oh my gosh!

C.R.: But in his latter years, he sent 'em — uh — got so he wasn't able to do it and he sent them to Martha Jefferson Hospital.

D.S.: Yeah. Did he have trouble collecting from the people?

C.R.: He never had any trouble 'cause he never tried.

D.S.: He would tell 'em how much?

C.R.: If they asked him. Sometimes he would send 'em a bill, but he never did anything about collecting it. That was the least of his thoughts was collecting his bills.

D.S.: When I saw you the other day you said something about he would charge fifty cents for five dollars worth of medicine?

C.R.: He'd charge fifty cents and probably give 'em five dollars worth, because
he knew they didn't have the fifty cents to pay. And I might add here that he filled his own - uh - he was taught in those days - uh - he kept his own medicine in his office and filled his own prescriptions. I expect he never wrote - uh - only one per-cent of his prescriptions were ever written. And he made his own medicine [end of side one].

own formulas for making medicine. He'd make his own salves, he'd make his own - uh - formulas for his other kind of medicine that he made and, I'll show you what I'm trying to say. There's the knife that he used to mix his salves. But - uh - after he'd or ... He had different formulas that he'd use on a porcelain plat.

D.S.: Uh huh. Oh, what a story that could tell, couldn't it?
C.R.: Oh my. I know I'm not getting this connected like it ought to be, but I've got to relate it as it comes to me.
D.S.: Yes.
C.R.: After he had stopped practicing and filling prescriptions altogether, they had a lady by the name of Mrs. Bertha Carr, and she moved from Criglersville to Madison in her latter days. My daddy had been giving her medicine for some ailment. I don't know whether it was - I think it was for a kidney ailment. After she moved to Madison and my daddy wasn't able to make this medicine up for her, she went to the druggist and said, "Oh, if I could just get some of that medicine that Dr. Ross prepared for me, I would be so happy." And he said, "Well, do you have any of that medicine at home?" And she said, "Yes, I have some." But he said, "If you'll bring it in I'll send it away and have it analyzed," and he sent it to the laboratory in Richmond. They analyzed it, three ingredients and they couldn't identify the fourth one. So I worked in Madison and the druggist met me on
the street one day and said, "Would your daddy be - uh - give me the formula that he made up for a prescription for Mrs. Bertha Carr?" He said "Oh yes, I'll give it to him." He sat down and wrote it out just in less than no time and I took it back and give the druggist, and he said, "That's all I want to know." (laughter)

D.S.: Gosh, he really had a knowledge. You know, one time I was wondering, did he go along with a lot of the use of herbs in medicines that the people used?

C.R.: No. He didn't go with that at all. He usually kept, in his latter days, about $1,500 to $2,000 worth of drugs in his own office. 'Course as time went on he had to make less medicine because they were makin' - the things that he was makin' they came on the market regular. To give you an instance, he read medicine all of his life, he never stopped studying. He took medicine journals and medical books, and was a student of medicine. That's all he lived for. He never was the first to use a new drug, or the last. When they first come around with penicillin and people would come here to the office and tell him they wanted a cold shot, he says "I don't give 'em." They couldn't understand that - uh - and he never explained it. Except he told me, said that "Penicillin - they haven't proved that sufficient for me to use," and it was several years before he'd ever get it. They had to improve it.

D.S.: Uh huh. You know, speaking of colds, I've heard a lot of them tell about that they used to take, their mothers would give them turpentine with a little sugar in it.

C.R.: Yeah.

D.S.: Well, how did he feel about that when he heard.

C.R.: Well, he said, "If that helps them, give it to them."
D.S.: Really? (laughter) It kind of sounds as though they were trying to commit suicide.

C.R.: Vinegar, and molasses, mustard plasters on his chest - I've heard him tell 'em, "Put the mustard plasters on his chest for colds."

D.S.: Uh huh. Yeah. Now I would love if you can, to recapture that eventful time during, I think it was 1917, when he, from all I have heard, tirelessly went up and down the mountain day and night and day and night.

C.R.: Well, that was about 1918 I think it reached its peak. It was during a flu epidemic. People were dying like flies all over the country. And - uh - cut that off just a minute, let me think about this a little - when this epidemic started, it started out slow and it just kept on increasing and increasing and finally it seemed like everybody in the country had the flu. He got these calls, would come in and my mother would accept them and she would just write 'em down and they were just numerous. And so he worked out a system that he would go up to Nethers Mill and across the Old Rag Mountain and back home and it would take him from two to three days. He'd have enough medicine with him for two or three days to do that.

D.S.: Would he stay overnight at cabins?

C.R.: Never slept. He would have to cut wood and bring it in. Fix a little food for some of 'em so they wouldn't get out of bed and he'd get a little feed for his horse and sometimes he took a little something to eat for him if they had it. Then he'd just keep on going from house to house and then he'd come home and rest for three or four hours, get another horse, a fresh horse, and start out again and be gone for about three days before he'd get back. And that went on for weeks and weeks that winter and the snow was on the ground, as I remember, and the creeks were frozen over and
it was an exceptionally cold winter and he had to ride most of the time — ride a horse. He had three horses at that time and he'd take one on one trip and that horse would come in and lay down and rest before he'd eat. My brother and I, we would have the feed in the horse manger and horse troughs for him when he brought 'em in at night or in the day — when he would come, the feed was there. On some occasions, his feet would freeze into the stirrups. The water from the creeks and slush and stuff. My mother had a tea kettle on the stove, wood stove, and he'd call to her to come out and pour that hot water on the stirrup so that he could get his feet out and get off the horse. And that was a terrific winter.

D.S.: He went from where to where, pretty generally? Up — uh — he went as far as Dark Hollow?

C.R.: Well, let me put it this way — he went from here to Piney Hollow — uh Piney Mountain in Rappahannock County. That was, I would say, three or four miles north of Nethers Mill. And then he would follow Old Rag Mountain and Haywood Mountain and Double Top and Fork Mountain and — uh — to Fletcher, that was in Greene County. This was, I would say, forty mile length of the mountains there. And then, of course, he had his practice here, he went to Brightwood, he went to Wolftown and he went to Hood and Fletcher, that's in — uh — that was about the extent that-a-way. Sometimes he would go to — in the latter years he would drive to Sperryville and go up to the Drive and drive back on the mountain and walk down to see those people that lived in the mountains. — in his latter years, after they built Skyline Drive.

D.S.: Uh huh. And the bill was all gratis during this, pretty much, wasn't it?
C.R.: I can't answer that. He would make a charge and put it on his account book, but what he collected, I don't know about that. Of course, people tell me that he never sent a bill. I don't know about that. I can't answer that question. But he never said "no" to a call - he'd get there as soon as he could.

D.S.: Uh huh.

C.R.: Another thing, he would - I'll give you this instance - it was a colored man by the name of Will, "Willie" Clay that worked for Wade Daniels and he lived about two miles in the direction of Syria. He lived between Criglersville and Syria. And he went to see him, and he got a call to come up there to see this colored man and he decided that he had a ruptured appendix. He came home, got the buggy and got my mother and went back up there and he told her how to give him the chloroform. He operated on him. When he stuck the knife, when he cut him open, the pus hit the ceiling of the - uh - kitchen, they had him on the kitchen table and they cleaned him out, sewed him up and he lived many years after that. No antibiotics, nothing. No anesthetics, uh - except the chloroform that my mother gave him. Then, on another occasion, he took off the leg at the knee, and had Dr. to assist him with that operation. That was a boy who had got his leg mangled in a sawmill. On another occasion, a colored man by the name of Marvin Allen laid out in the snow all night and his feet froze, and he took off half of each foot. Now who assisted him with that I don't know.

D.S.: Did he have much operations to do up in the mountains?

C.R.: I don't - I wouldn't be able to answer that, but I think he did.

D.S.: He must have had appendix problems?

C.R.: I don't think he did much of that because when I remember, most appendix cases, if they were not too urgent, he would put 'em in his car and take
'em to Charlottesville or Richmond to the hospital. He would go with the patients that he took to the hospital, he went with them for years and years. They would ask and he'd go with 'em.

D.S.: So they trusted him, yeah. How about snakebites? Was he ever called in for snakebites or did the people take care of them themselves?

C.R.: I can't answer that. I can say this, that I've heard him say that he traveled these mountains all of his - practically all of his life and he never saw a live rattlesnake except ones that had already been captured. And he never used a lantern or a light of any kind until his latter years he had a flashlight when they come around.

D.S.: Yeah. Did he ever go to Skyland?

C.R.: Oh yes. Many and many a time. I've been there with him.

D.S.: Uh huh. Would this be for the guests there?

C.R.: No. I don't know, no, not - uh - not for that - another family that lived up in there were the Sisks.

D.S.: Oh yes.

C.R.: Have you heard about Charlie Sisk?

D.S.: Yeah.

C.R.: And - uh - he - uh - had the Sisks, that was a family too - a large family. Charlie Sisk. Uh - Charlie Sisk killed a fellow up there in the mountains and they caught him and put him in jail over here at Madison and he broke out of jail. They caught him again and took him back and tried him and gave him 20 years in the penitentiary. And he broke out of the penitentiary twice. Last time I think he was -uh- got inside of a big box. Got somebody to nail him up in there and they put him in a truck and hauled him out. (laughter) He got out and got back up here in the mountains and one night my daddy got a call to come to see Charlie Sisk's wife and he did go
and when he went in there stood Charlie Sisk in the chair there, and he said "Charlie, I thought you were in the penitentiary." He said, "I was, but I got out," and said, "I'm not goin' back again, either." (laughter) And he pulled back his coat and he had a revolver on both sides. So he waited on his wife and — but they did catch him and took him back, but he didn't stay many years. He's the one that built most of the rock walls on the Skyline Drive. His picture's in that book too, you can read about him. (pause) Let me insert this — that what I'm saying comes from my own recollections and observations and nothing from his records.

D.S.: That is definitely clear that that's the case because, uh — no, we wouldn't — If you had records here we would read off of them but — uh — I wonder why he did destroy them? Was it because he felt they were so very confidential?

C.R.: Well, I can't answer that. I can't answer that question. I think it — see, he was sick for about 16 years and he just — I mean he wasn't able to do any kind of practice and I think he just thought they had lost their significance and he took 'em out here and burnt 'em in that thing you see sittin' out there. He built that thing himself.

D.S.: What was the matter with him?

C.R.: Hardening of the arteries.

D.S.: Oh.

C.R.: Some days he was fairly good and other days he was , didn't know anything.

D.S.: That's a shame. By the way, did the people up there have anything like that, in the mountains, hardening of the arteries?

C.R.: I can't — I don't know about that. I'm sure they did. They were a vigorous
people but if you leave 'em long enough that'll finally get you, I expect.

D.S.: I'm afraid it does. Does he - uh - oh, what was I going to ask? About the old people - how did they take - did they take care of themselves?

C.R.: Yes. The old people were taken care of by the young ones. They just stayed in the home.

D.S.: Uh huh, yeah. Did they have any superstitions that your father would have to sort of try and make them realize they were just superstitions and not good for them?

C.R.: No, I don't - I can't answer that question, I don't know about that.

D.S.: Did he ever get any idea of where these people came from?

C.R.: Well - uh - the Nicholson's - uh - I didn't get this from my father, I got this from some other source, they - uh - were courtiers and in the English courts, and - uh - and of course, wait a minute. You take in England and both in France and they would have these religious wars and, and the Protestants would win one time and the Catholics would win another, and they were chopping off each others' heads with the guillotine faster than they could draw the blood off, or - and those that could escape, they - uh - would go somewhere and these Nicholsons left their country and finally settled up - uh - near Nethers Mill here and they were good looking, straight forward, honest, tall, strong, healthy people, but illiterate.

D.S.: Yeah, but that's no fault of theirs. Ah - I'm speaking of that, I've often heard that the people in the mountains used Elizabethan terms. Did you ever hear of any?

C.R.: Uh -

D.S.: You know, spoke using words that, for an uneducated person, they wouldn't normally use.

C.R.: Oh yes. They had their own, I'll put it this way, they had their own language.

D.S.: Uh huh.
C.R.: But what it was now I don't know. I expect it was a mixture of German and English and French and everything else.

D.S.: Yeah. Now if the Nicholsons were so very fine and strong they didn't do the intermarrying then, you don't believe?

C.R.: Yeah, some did, but not too much. But my - uh - to answer your question of where these people come from in the mtns. A lot of those families are - uh - Irish stock and they were brought here in about 1840 when they built the Blue Ridge Turnpike, or better known as the Gordonsville Turnpike.

D.S.: Oh yeah.

C.R.: Or better known as the Petersburg- New Market...

D.S.: Yeah, uh huh.

C.R.: And - uh - to work on that road and the country back in there seemed to be somewhat like where they came from, so they became squatters, owned no land and just built a home and just lived in there. That's why so many of these people had to be moved out, they didn't own the land, they just were livin' back in there, had no taxes to pay, no insurance, nothin'. They were simple. Caves - they were another family that lived back there. They lived right at - uh - right under Fishers' Gap. Hangin' Rock. White Oak Falls - that's where the Cave's lived and

D.S.: Yeah. You don't know how they happened to settle in this...

C.R.: They are some of those - that's what I'm talkin' about.

D.S.: The Gordonsville Pike?

C.R.: Uh huh.

D.S.: O.K. Elsie Cave is a very fine man, isn't he?

C.R.: That's right. Take that off, the record there.

D.S.: How about the integrity of these people? Were they - now like I know there
had been times when they couldn't pay your father, but didn't they sometimes sort of in dribs and drabs pay him?

C.R.: Yes. It would be one dollar, fifty cents, two dollars - they made an effort
didn't they sometimes

D.S.: Yeah. It seemed to me that they were all pretty honorable.

C.R.: Uh, very much so, they didn't - uh - it was nothin' wrong with that now, except they would - uh - they had the feuds, family feuds - the Sisks and the Nicholsons and the Corbins and they'd fall out sometimes, fight and scrap and go to court. They wasn't gonna let anybody run over 'em. But honesty - well - and courage, and - uh - truthfulness, now I wouldn't say that when they went to court to testify that they didn't stretch it some.

D.S.: Did your father ever have to go and take care of gunshot wounds?

C.R.: Oh yes, many a time. To examine a fellow who'd been shot. I'll give you this example. It was a person that lived here in Criglersville and he got shot in the rear from very precarious circumstances and my daddy was called in to see him and the word got out that this fellow'd got shot in the rear. And my daddy's best friend that he ever had in Criglersville asked him one day, "What happened, how'd this fellow get shot," and my daddy said, "You'd better go see him." (laughter) Yes, and he was called in to be a coroner down there in that - uh - and remove the bullet or shot or whatever it was from the person that got shot. I remember that on several occasions. After he had stopped, practically stopped practicing, - uh - a lady came here one night, her husband brought a lady here one night in labor. And he said, "I'm just not able to attend to that," and sent her over to the University of Virginia hospital and they wouldn't accept her and so that man brought this one woman back here that night and "Well," he said, "bring her on in here." And he had an operating table
over there, right in this room, and he went in there and got my wife and delivered that baby right here in the office. Put the woman in the - walked to the car and put the baby in there and both of 'em are livin' today.

D.S.: University of Virginia to the hospital and back again? I wonder why they wouldn't accept her?

C.R.: They had a rule that they had there for the doctor, you know, to make arrangements before time - I know - I think that's what happened, and this fellow didn't do anything.

D.S.: Well, if you're relying on a particular doctor and he's no longer practicing then you're sort of lost.

C.R.: Yeah.

D.S.: Now he really did practice from what year?

C.R.: 1905 until about - uh - actually it was through '45 and then it just - I can't fix a date that it just stopped all at once.

D.S.: Yeah. Uh huh.

C.R.: I would say he was sick for 16 years, about 1953 was when he stopped altogether.

D.S.: O.K. Well as far as the mountain people go they were pretty safe by then, they were most of them out of the mountain, and so...

C.R.: As the people moved out of the mountains, his practice went toward the other end, the central part, of the county. Oh he had a tremendous territory that he covered. It's just almost unbelievable that he could do the work that he did. He was a - he had a staunch constitution, strong. This might be foreign but I'll tell it anyway. He told me one - when he was a boy, before he left the farm to go to school, he was probably about - uh - 15 years old. His daddy called him one mornin' and said "Charlie, go out there and hook the horses up to the wagon and go down to the station," which was
about a mile, "and it's a pair of cattle scales down there. Bring 'em home and put 'em over yonder at that other barn." He said he went down there and loaded those cattle scales out of the car, freight car, into that wagon and then took 'em over to that barn and unloaded 'em without any help at all. He was a strong person in his shoulders and arms and back. If he hadn't have been he couldn't have stood it - uh - ... D.S.: No. Huh uh, he surely couldn't. C.R.: He never had any office hours. He just between visits and office calls D.S.: I keep wondering how your family existed, really

[End of Side 2]
D.S.: and people, people didn't have the money in the mountains to pay him? I know he took care of people around here and they probably paid him, but...
C.R.: Well, that's what he relied on.
D.S.: Yeah.
C.R.: He wasn't an expectant person. He didn't care whether they were rich, poor, sick or healthy, or what their religion was or whether they were infidels or pagans or what their politics was - that never crossed his mind. He never got mixed up in anything like that.
D.S.: No. Uh huh. By the way, do you know if there was ever much - uh - I have heard that the na -uh - let's reword it - I've heard that the men were very protective of their wives up there in the mountains - uh - so do you think there was ever any fooling around with another person's wife.
C.R.: (pause) I - uh - I just can't get into that - I don't - uh - I can't - uh - I can't give you a definite answer to that question. Not to my knowledge, I'll put it this-a-way. Not to my knowledge.
D.S.: It would seem, that would seem to make a lot of sense to me that there
weren't. But you know I think we have really done tribute to your father.

C.R.: Let me tell you this instance. In his latter years it was - uh - the Boy Scouts from Washington used to come in here to camp. They ate at a certain home, I mean, they lived in a certain home and places around and - uh - he was called up there to see the son of one of these - uh - where these Boy Scouts were staying, after several days of being sick and he said - uh - "This boy's got scarlet fever," and he said, "you'd better get these Boy Scouts away from here," and they didn't like it. So they took the boy up to the University of Virginia Hospital and they looked at him and he stayed up there said "That boy hasn't got scarlet fever." And so, few more days this boys' mother got sick and - uh - called my daddy up there and he looked at her and said, "She's got scarlet fever," and said, "you'd better get her over to the University." They took her over there and they said, "Yes, she's got scarlet fever," and said, "that boy had it too." That's just what a diagnostician - he was good at that.

D.S.: Uh huh, yes indeed.

C.R.: We put a - gave him one Christmas a - what do you call these lights that ... 

D.S.: Flourescent?

C.R.: What's that?

D.S.: Flourescent?

C.R.: Flourescent light. Sat it over there on his desk and he kept it a couple of days, says, " Take that thing outta here, it changes the - uh - appearance, you know? 

D.S.: Uh huh.

C.R.: He said he had a doctor at the Johns Hopkins University that taught him and said always look at your patient three times before you diagnose his case.

(laughter)
D.S.: Uh huh.

C.R.: Well, that's all I have, let's see if I got any notes here. (long pause)

I don't think it's anything that I can tell, I've been talkin' long enough.

D.S.: No you haven't. If we have missed anything I don't want to ...

C.R.: It was very poor schools and roads in the county when he came here and -

uh - he was a strong supporter of schools. The first recollection I have, it was two schools in Madison County that had as many as two rooms, in this vicinity. He decided that he was goin' to do somethin' about the schools, and he went to the Superintendent of Schools and said - uh - "Mr. Miller, we've got to do somethin' to improve the school system in Madison County and said, "I suggest that we get - send out some wagons and haul these children to school." And Mr. Miller said, "Dr. Ross," said, "if I do that I'd lose my job." And then they went on for several years and nothin' happened, just the same thing, same - politics entered into appointin' the schools and teachers and location of the schools and so forth. They had a Board of Trustees that was just fixed in their ways - politicians. And my daddy found out that they were not appointed accordin' to law. He went out to Madison and talked to the Commonwealth Attorney and said, "Now Mr. Payne," said, "this school board hasn't been appointed accordin' to law," and he said, "if it's not a change made in the next few weeks, I'm goin' to take it before the grand jury." Boy it really shook the town up - shook the town up you know?

D.S.: Yeah.

C.R.: Nothin' like that had ever happened before. And he said, "When you get a proper school board I want to make a recommendation for a school trustee from this district," they had three districts at that time , and he got Mr. - under those circumstances he recommended Mr. John R. as trustee for this district. And at that time was a two room school at
Aylor, which was about - between here and Aylor - which was about two miles from here. The mountain people couldn't get there, it wasn't convenient for them and - uh - under his supervision and motion they got together and decided they were going to build a four room school here in Criglersville. And through the work of the community and daddy's guidance, they got the four rooms built, teachers hired and then - uh - that went on for a few years, then they - that was just through grades - decided they needed a high school, and so finally we got a high school, built on four additional rooms and qualified for two years of high school. And then by 1925 they had qualified enough for the first graduating class. He was instrumental in seeing that this school was designated here, and he had one purpose in mind. He was accused of building a school convenient for my brother and I to go to school, which was natural - politics, they said.

D.S.: Sure.

C.R.: A lot of these politicians was mad. But that never - politics never bothered him a bit. And he went to - uh - and - they sold box lunches and they had community affairs and - uh - May Days and raised money to get it started and - but his idea was gettin' a location that he could get those illiterate mountain - get the children started to school, where they couldn't do anything with the old people, and - uh - they would come in here on horses and buggies and tie 'em all over the church lot and all - uh - the barn over there and that's the way - that was the first real school that they had in this community.

D.S.: Wonderful! Oh, how wonderful!

C.R.: And then, at Syria, his daddy was a Brethren preacher and a county surveyor in West Virginia, and he was supportin' the Brethren Church
and they decided to build one at Syria. So he was instrumental in building a Brethren Church a mile above Syria for those mountain people. But it never did prosper very much, they didn't take to religion.

(laughter)

D.S.: They liked more of a revival type?

C.R.: That's right, a little like that.

D.S.: Yeah. Did you ever attend any of those apple butter boilings? Do you know anything about trying to to them?

C.R.: Oh yes. Put a penny in the bottom of it and keep it stirring all day and all night and keep the stick in the bottom of the pot. Yes indeed. Apple butter, cider makin', - I don't know what you'd want to use you can cut out - I don't expect for you to use all this stuff, but - uh - I drove my daddy to the top of Mountain, that was back of Syria - North of Syria 'bout three miles and - uh - tied the horse and here was a person that I knew down in the orchard makin' cider. His name was Joe and I said, "Dad, I'm goin' down here to the cider mill while you go in the house and when you come out you call me." So I went down there and it was hot all day, and sat down and watchin' Joe turn that cider out of those apples and he said, "Here's a cup, help yourself." So I did - sweet, hot cider, and you know what that was, I think I drank two pint cups full, if I remember correctly, and sat there a while and the longer I sat there the sicker I got. When I got back up to the buggy I couldn't hold my head up - I was sicker than the person that daddy went to see!

(laughter) That's one thing I remember.

D.S.: Ever get any of their moonshine?

C.R.: Oh yes.
D.S.: They made good, pure moonshine, didn't they?

C.R.: Here - uh - I'll give you this instance. I went to visit some friends of mine up in the hollow - you're talkin' 'bout Fisher Finks, I was up in the hollow a little further'n that...

D.S.: Uh huh.

C.R.: - uh - these people - Mr. Tom Finks' family, which was Fisher Finks' granddaughter, were close friends of our family - just as close as could be. I was out there on the porch overlookin' this valley, talkin' to Lilly Finks one evenin' about - just about dark - and - uh - I looked up and here was a great big flash of fire over there in the barn and I said, "Lilly, your barn's on fire!" "Oh," she said, "that's not on fire," she said, "Jim Finks and - uh - Miller and - uh - Smith are over there runnin' off a bubblin'." (laughter) Switched - there was a still in the barn that had the water from the branch switched all around so it would run through there. (laughter) And they would - and one person would have a still and they would sign up or have an understanding when they would borrow it from each other to run off a bubblin', don't you see?

D.S.: Uh huh. (laughter)

C.R.: And in later years - that's during prohibition days - but when the chestnuts gave out in 1922 if it hadn't been for prohibition, I don't know how those people would have made it 'cause that's the way they made their livin', makin' bootleg. Straight up and down, all of them were into it.

D.S.: Well, they had to. They had to have some means of survival, and that was a darned good way of doin' it. Well you why not?

C.R.: They didn't think they were doin' anything wrong.

D.S.: No. I had one of them to say to me one time It's
about the same thing. Well, this has been absolutely just wonderful, you don't know how I appreciate all of your help.

C.R.: I hope I haven't been egotistical, my daddy wouldn't like that.
D.S.: Oh, you were not egotistical. You have been telling us things that we have needed to know so very, very much. Oh, it's wonderful...

[End]