

SPOTSYLVAVIA PRESERVATION FOUNDATION, Inc
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript of Interview with Robert and Betty Turnley

November 29, 2000



Interviewer: Mrs. Christine Walsh
Transcribed by: Mrs. Helen Springer

NOTATION: Mrs. Walsh's remarks will be in regular font, Mr. and Mrs. Turnley's in italics

This is Christine Walsh. I'm at the home of Betty Turnley and Robert in Spotsylvania. It's Wednesday, November 29th and the year is 2000. We have some exciting interviewing to do so let's get started.

This is so exciting to be here and thank you so much for allowing me to come into your home.

I really appreciate it.

Mrs. Glad to have you.

Tell me Betty, about you growing up here in Spotsylvania.

Mrs. Well, I came here when I was about 4 years old to a very Christian lady who lived here, Mrs. Emma Sanders. Right in front of the Bloody Angle entrance. It's not there now, but when I was a child it was a lovely entrance. It went up ... and the road was lined with beautiful dogwood trees, and I played in those trenches, of course. The house is still standing, where I was raised there ... the brick house. But we grew up as children in the neighborhood playing in the trenches in the Bloody Angle. Our woodshed was full of cannonballs that came from over there, and some of them had never been ... what do you call? Detonated. And we didn't realize it, and rolled around, and one time somebody said, "Hey, there, watch those cannonballs, there; they'll blow up." You know, but every now and then we'd be playing and we'd feel something, and look, and there'd be a cannonball or we'd find a shell in those trenches playing. We grew up with a history here.

After World War II they built a bunch of camp facilities over here, for the CC's - they came back and they didn't have any jobs, and they put them over there and they worked on the roads and things.

And, when I was in first grade, Robert E. Lee School burnt down, and Robert was going to that school too, but he's four years older than I am. I was in the first grade. But Robert's 71 now and I'm going to be 67.

Well, you look great. Spotsylvania's been good to you.

Mrs. Thanks. But, anyway, the bus rolls down to the courthouse and there was smoke everywhere.

Mrs. Stokely Coleman had a little bitty oneroom post office there on the side of the road across

from what is now Pendleton's grocery, and our bus went there and the children were crying and saying,

"Oh, the school's burning!" So the bus turned around and the school was there, you know, right next

to the Crismond place. But then ... that was just in December, and in two to three weeks ... and

two weeks there at Christmas break ... the CC workers over here, CC boys, were used to build that

tar shack. And when January 2nd came we went back to school and went all the way through grade

school in this tar shack. Which people today, they wouldn't allow their children to go in it.

There was no bathroom, and it just ... it literally had tarpaper with boards holding it down.

Anyway, we loved our school and we learned, and people came out of there and went on to do great things. But that was one thing the CC boys that were put over here in the park were used for ... labor for that school, and they had it up in two to three weeks. We went all the way through school there. And our outhouse almost backed up to the Confederate Cemetery. In those days you had certain times during the day you could be excused, the whole class, and walk to the outhouses. I sound like I'm a hundred years old now! Robert remembers it. And they would get us to take turns to go clean it out. 2

And I remember when I was in the 7th grade, I never had a man living in the house. I was scared of men, because this lady was a widow that raised me, and I had women teachers all through school. When I got to the 7th grade our teacher eloped and got married. I didn't know it, but she sent me to this post office, and I asked her, could this other girl go with me. And we literally took her box of belongings to mail to Minnesota. She was going to elope and get married Her father didn't want her to get married. She was getting to the age, you know, you call them an old maid. But anyway, she left, and we were devastated. And later we realized that when we had walked down there carrying this box was what she was mailing ahead, that she was going to get married. Well, this man came in. And we were scared, I in particular, to have this man. But he turned out he was our teacher and he was our principal. They didn't have secretaries and all in the school then ... he did everything. Discipline the biggest part. He was a wonderful person. The class was very, very crowded I think we had 52. You could hardly walk between the aisles.

Goodness. That's a lot of people.

Mrs. He was the principal, now, and the teacher, and he oversaw anything that came up in the whole school. Today they have all these jobs you know. We had close knit classmates and we had an old pot-bellied wood stove. Did you ever help split the wood, Robert?

Mr. Oh yes, yes, take turns splitting and bringing in wood.

Mrs. And what kind of stove ... they were oil barrels weren't they?

Mr. Oil barrels made into a stove, they would fit together. Metal barrels made into a stove. You could put a lot of wood in there and it would keep the fire going a good while. Somebody would deliver the wood, you know, and dump it out there in the wood shed.

Mrs. And the older boys would split it.

Mr. But we all made out all right. Today, they don't think it's anything unless they've got a fine brick school.

Mrs. And everything. Every kind of convenience.

Mr. But the building is not the whole thing of the school. The teachers are what make the school. To have good teachers I think.

Mrs. I don't think it matters where you go to school as long as you've got the right teacher in there and the discipline. We would not get away with things. You did not misbehave at school. You did NOT misbehave, because you knew...

Mr. We're talking about 50 children in one room! These teachers would go crazy if you put ...

Did the teacher have an aide?

Mrs. No, indeed No. No. The teacher did everything.

Mr. Today these teachers would go crazy with that many kids in one room.³

Mrs. You stayed in at recess and, I mean, they really they paddled you in those days. And you did not ... I know Robert and I, we didn't ... you wouldn't go home with a report card with anything bad on conduct. And the same overflowed from that to our children. That's one thing you can excel in, and that's behavior at school. There were no discipline problems then. You

didn't hardly ever hear ... they would expel a child immediately. If a kid carried on in the bus,
it would go off, it would be expelled. You wouldn't go to school. We didn't have problems like
you have now. We definitely had crowding though, because they talked about how many were in a room.

Once or twice a year the floors would have to be oiled or seasoned ... they'd get dusty or dirty.

We'd have to stay out just about two-thirds of the day. And sometimes that was very hard if the

day they were going to do it was very cold and windy. That was something we grew up with.

I remember the jailhouse. I would stay with this lady down here where this old dilapidated house

on Brock Road is, sometimes. Another one of my babysitters. And we would walk on Sunday afternoons,

just walk by the old churches down here where the museum is now, go by the jailhouse.

And she would say, "Well, that'd be a prisoner sitting in there. " And then she'd say, " Child,

you want to be a good person now, because if you aren't they don't get anything but hard corn

bread and water. " And I'd say, "Yes ma'am. " And Robert, years later, your best friend was Hugh Hewitt...

Mr. Hugh Hewitt, yeah, And his mother fed the prisoners, you know, cooked for them.

Mrs. And she lived in the house where Janet's Beauty Salon is...

Mr. Yeah, right across the road from the jail.

I heard they got fed pretty well.

Mrs. Well, she was a good cook.

Oh, yeah.

Mrs. I gave his phone number to Mr. Wilson ... Joe Wilson, because Robert has his address in

Florida ... of Hugh Hewitt, because he was raised right there and his mother did the cooking

and Robert used to go home with him sometimes. But I remember seeing prisoners in there,

and I was scared to death. Oh, to me it was very evil to be locked in a jail and I didn't like it.

But, uh...

Could you see the prisoners? Actually see them?

Mrs. Yeah, oh yeah. The door would be open and the bars, and you'd look in and they'd be back in there and...

Mr. Sometimes they'd be sitting right in front of the bars, you know, looking out.

Mrs. I'd be scared to get too close. She'd say, "Look, there's somebody in there. " And I'd be scared to walk right there close and ... oh, yeah, I remember.

So, how many did you see approximately?

Mrs. One or two was the most I ever saw. I don't know how big a jail it was...4

Mr. They always said women were upstairs. But I didn't know anything about that. I don't remember.

Mrs. Women were upstairs?

Mr. You know there's an upstairs?

Yes, there are two floors.

Mrs. Well, the worst murders we ever heard, or meanness in this county when we were growing up, was ... Robert remembers ... the Coleman's being put in the well on the Massaponax Church Road.

That one shook the county. And, when I was in the 5th grade, I remember getting to school and hearing about this man going on a drunk rampage in Snell and killing two of our classmates' fathers.

A Gayle man was killed, and a Brown. Lucy Brown's father, wasn't it? And we all cried just about all day.

We just couldn't believe it. They were the two worst things when we grew up that happened, right Robert?

Mr. Yeah. Cecil Pritchett you know, shot those men.

Mrs. And, that's ... you can check back on the details.

Mr. He went to prison for life, he never did get out. He died in prison. But he'd been in trouble, you know, a lot of times before that.

Mrs. He had a drinking problem.

Mr. That's the worst thing he ever did. They always said he was nice man till he got to drinking.

Mrs. Yeah. They were playing cards or something and he got mad and killed those two men.

And then went home and went to bed. But that...

Mr. Slept. Went to bed and slept in his house.

Mrs. Slept in the man's house that he killed?

Mr. Yeah.

Well, he was probably so drunk he didn't know what he had done.

Mrs. But those two children were in school with me and I remember, you know, that was something very sad. And we were crying and ... uh ... terrible.

I just want to tell our listeners and readers that you were an orphan...

Mrs. Yes, I was. I was an orphan.

And you came from ... do you know your background? Do you want to tell us about it, or we could just not talk about it?

Mrs. Well I was born in Fredericksburg. I found out since I was grown. But ... um ... this lady that took me in was a very fine Christian woman. And she had a brother who was a preacher. 5

He preached at Traveler's Rest, Good Hope, Mine Road, and Hebron churches. So he was a big influence on my life, because she died by time I was ten.

Oh my.

Mrs. By the time we got very attached and very, very close, she died. And I was in turmoil. I really didn't come to grips with that until I was thirteen, probably.

Well that's young. You know, you were so young.

Mrs. I wasn't allowed to grieve. A lot of people at that time didn't think children should go to funerals. They didn't think they should show emotion. And I wasn't allowed to go through that grieving process. But she had a big influence on my life. She had a stroke, and in those days ... well, for awhile we had a phone, and Mrs. Hewitt down here ran the exchange. At the time Miss Emma had the stroke there was no telephone in the house. So I stood by the bed and held her hand and talked to her and kept telling her she was going to be all right while her daughter went to the courthouse to get a doctor. But she ... I couldn't understand what was going on ... I really couldn't. She tried to talk, you know, I was too young, but she was trying to talk to me and nothing came out, and then her eyes went bad. So she went into a coma that night and she never came out of it. And in those days, people were kept at home. She never went to the hospital. She probably lived six to eight weeks at home. She had practical nurses. And she never opened her eyes and never said anything. And I would go in her room, sometimes, and tell her, say, "Please wake up. Please wake up. " You know. And she never did. I remember the day the hearse came up. Backed up to the door. I was upstairs watching.

Oh that must be terrible for you. Really awful. But she gave you such gifts really.

Mrs. She did. I remember when doing ... she always worked with my homework, and she always had her hands doing something. And I had a little stool I sat on. And we always had Bible verses. We always had schoolwork, but we always went over some Bible verses every night. And she was preparing me ... I'm sure that the Lord was using her to prepare me for life.

I've always been very close to God And going through bad times, I always knew if no one else was there, He was there. And then her brother-in-law was a big influence on me. I stayed sometime in the summer, or weeks during the year with them, and went around with him visiting the sick and all. So at a very early age a very deep faith was instilled me. She was always, she could do anything. She was a wonderful cook. And at Christmas ... my birthday was Christmas...

Christmas Day?

Mrs. Yes. And she was always making ... Shirley Temple was the star o that time. She would always of get the material ... I don't know where ... and, you know that little polka dotted dress that Shirley Temple wore? Well, she made me one just like it. And they called me little Shirley Temple the second. Got my little buckled shoes. She'd save the scraps and for my birthday all my dolls got an outfit.

Oh. How special. How special.

Mrs. Yeah, it was really wonderful. But I think, back then, and Robert said too, it was the homemade things, and all, and the gatherings, the good food and fellowship that you remember. And Robert's the same way, don't you? You didn't get much for Christmas.

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Mr. Nah. You didn't get much for Christmas back then, and what you got you thought a lot of it.

Oh yeah.

Mr. I remember one Christmas I got a pocket watch.

Mrs. In your stocking.

Mr. In my stocking. That was the only thing. And that cost about ... well ... a dollar ... a dollar watch. You always got a orange, a apple, some nuts, and candy. That was children's Christmas back then. So it's not the amount you get, it's what you get that counts, you know.

Mrs. And, Christmas, oh my goodness, I remember the lard tins. They kept them in the cellar, under the kitchen.

What are they?

Mrs. Lard tins. They called them lard tins. Great big metal cans ... with a top that sealed, And they would start baking after Thanksgiving and, my goodness, they would just fill those lard tins with cakes and baked things, and keep them in the cellar. And Christmas, you didn't have phones then, and you didn't know all during Christmas who was going to drop in. And we did the same thing. She had a large family ... we'd go visit them. And some of them had spring rooms in their home. You would go where Lake

of the Woods is now. Her niece had a home, log home, and downstairs where the kitchen was you'd open this big door and go in, and there was this spring with butter, milk, and anything you wanted to keep cold setting down in the spring. And I used to think that was really neat.

But people back then canned sauces, they fried chicken and they had it and just had an abundance of canned stuff. They made fruit cakes, and plum puddings, and coconut cakes, fruit cakes, fudge, and every kind of sweet you could imagine. And when company came in you said, "Which would you like to have?" and they'd put it out. An abundance of food and plenty of country ham. People had their hams then. Robert, how many hams? Your daddy used to...

Mr. Yeah, he used to kill ten or twelve hogs ... cure them ... make ... sell a lot of it you know. And he used to tell about his mother making a ... having a big barrel. She used to make cakes before Christmas, pack them down in that barrel. I heard him say that his mother never cooked on Sunday, she always did her cooking on Saturday.

Because it was considered a day of rest?

Mr. Yes. Sabbath day.

Mrs. It was the same thing with us. You did everything on Saturday. And, when you came from church on Sunday, a lot of times you'd bring the preacher home, or company home, or somebody'd come. But everything was cooked, all you did was just re-warm it. And it was a big banquet really. No cooking. You didn't do anything on Sunday that you didn't have to do. There was no businesses open, no gas stations or shopping malls.

Right. No shopping malls.

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Mrs. And it was really considered a day a rest.

Really a day of rest. And by that time, I'm sure they needed that day of rest ... after working so hard.

Mrs. Well I remember even ... I'm not a hundred years old and all, but it still was the law. And, of course, people that were very religious, you know, lived by that. Of course, Robert's family farmed, he had to go out and feed. But his Granddaddy bought Black Rock in 1864 with Confederate cash money, and paid cash for it. The money went bad, after how long?

Mr. Well, when the war ended you know the money went bad.

Mrs. And it was contested in court that since the farm had been bought with Confederate cash money it should be voided, but it didn't stand up because at that time everything was legitimate and no one knew. But that was one story that was handed down and that Robert's grandfather had a little trunk with a lot confederate money in it...

Mr. Oh, Yeah ...

Mrs. And it was no good ...

Mr. As children we used to play with it, you know, it was play money.

Mrs. It was in an old ice house. They had an old ice house there at Black Rock and it was still there when our children were little. And Robert can tell you about them cutting the ice off the mill pond.

Mr. Oh yeah. I remember them carrying the ice, bringing it up there, and filling the ice house up. And all the men cutting ice, of course, had gloves on, you know, and built a big fire out there where they were going to cut the ice and stand around the fire and get warm. And after they got the ice house filled, they'd go in the woods and get leaves, you know, just like we got here, and cover the ice up with it. And it would last all summer. We had ice into September, October.

Mrs. And they always had plenty of cider and watermelon.

The ice house. This beautiful painting we see behind you is Towles Mill.
Now was the ice pond around it?

Mr. The ice pond was right around it. If you would have gone through Black Rock Drive, you would have seen the pond where we used to get ice off of it. But you didn't go that road.

Mrs. If you go on to Towles Mill Road, you come to an intersection, and it says Black Rock Drive.

Mr. Make a right, right there, and you would come by this mill ... and the pond.

It's beautiful. So tell us about the mill. Growing up ... tell us more about that.
When was it built?

Mr. I remember making meal down there.

Corn meal?

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Mr. Uh-huh ... corn meal. In my lifetime they never did grind flour, but I was told that years ago they used to ground flour at that mill. And my father and me, we used to shell corn and carry it down there. Mr. Hall, at that time, ran the mill for my father. Then they would deliver the meal to the country stores.

Did your grandfather build it ... the mill?

Mr. No. That was originally built ... I think, by the Smiths and we know it was in 1792.

Mr. There's a farm, a farm by the name of Towles Place, and that was owned originally by the Smiths. What year was that Betty? That the Smith's owned this mill, do you know?

Mrs. Your daddy bought the mill back in 1917. The Towles's had it then ...Dr. Towles ...

Mr. But the Smith's owned it before that...

Mrs. Oh. That goes way back into the 1800's. The Massey farm came off of it. They owned it all, the Smiths. Robert's grandfather's sister married a Smith that was killed at the Battle of Manasas, and she's buried at the Massey's at Cool Springs. But her husband fought and he had right good rank, I don't know what but ... she married a Smith that originally was a descendent ... you know ... but here's one I decouped of a bag that Robert's father had.

This is a plaque.

Mrs. Of a bag of corn meal. This was a 25 pound one of "Water Ground Corn Meal Manufactured by R. J. Turnley, Proprietor. " Post Oak, Virginia was our address then. And then later, Roy had J. R. Turnley. And last week, I reckon you saw in the paper the Flashback about Jim Turnley?

Yes, yes, yes.

Mrs. Well, that was Robert's uncle. Roy was his son ... Robert's father left the mill to him, and then he gave it back when he died. We looked after him. He didn't have children. And he left it back to our children. But the man written about in the paper was Robert's uncle.

He had been sheriff several terms. His daddy, Robert's grandfather, Ira Turnley, rode horseback. He was Deputy Treasurer of county, and he collected the taxes. And I guess Jim Turnley decided he wanted to run for Treasurer. And they didn't tell it all in the paper ... but he lost by one vote. And it wasn't like he tucked

and ran. He wanted a challenge and to start over. And I have it inhere in the drawer for you. I'll go see if I can go find it. I don't believe he left in 1911.

All of his children had already been born. But an opportunity ... Robert's mother told me all this, my mother-in-law ... opportunity arose and he bought this hotel and big store that sold everything, like groceries and everything, in Cameron, North Carolina. So he went down there and settled, and took his family, and did very well. He went into tobacco and cotton and all that. He came up here and visited, came to their home. His wife was brought back up here and buried at Black Rock. And ... uh ... what year in 1923 ... when did she die?

Mr. He died in '49.
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Mrs. Yeah. But she died a month from when her son was killed by lightening on Black Rock Farm. He was working for Robert's father. Had the horses in the field working corn. A terrible storm came up June the 7th. And he went in this open shed to wait the storm out. Robert's father had the Hall family living at the mill and running it. Some of them walked up the road to visit and when they opened the gate to come through they saw his body. The lightening had hit him and killed him. Robert's half brother and sister, were little. Both of them almost babies, you'd say. It was a very sad time for them. Then Robert's mother was left with these two babies. So his father was the uncle, see, to the first husband, looked after them. Later they were married. And Robert wasn't born till he was about 60 years old, see. So he idolized Robert.

The miracle.

Mr. Yeah.

Mrs. They said Robert was born in November, and he says, "This is the best Thanksgiving I've ever had." Robert was born that month.

Mr. See Betty can tell you all this history better than I can.

Oh I think you're doing a great job. And I want to find out about this baptism ... the baptizing hole. I want you to tell me all about that at the Mill Pond.

Mr. Well, it was like was said, the baptizing hole and when you come through what is now Black Rock Drive, when you got down there, before you get to the Mill, you see the pond.

And over to the right there's a gate down there. Was no gate then. Used to walk- down there and that was the baptizing hole.

And that's where you were baptized?

Mr. That's where I was baptized. There was five or six different churches in the neighborhood that used it to baptize because at that time nobody had a baptismal in the church.

Now, were you immersed fully into the water?

Mr. Yeah, we're Baptists, so Baptists go under the water. I can remember I was baptized in October, and it was starting to get cold, you know cool for October.

How old were you then?

Mr. How old? I must have been about 15.

Okay. So they didn't baptize babies?

Mr. No, they didn't. Some of the churches today, I think, do sprinkle the babies. Back then, no, they didn't baptize the babies.

Okay. So that's the famous pond there.

Mr. Famous pond. A lot of sin's been washed away in that pond

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Mrs. I have one of the originals, but it's coming apart now The original of where he had that sale. And I can give you a copy of it.

PUBLIC SALE

Tuesday, March 5, 1912,

At My Home Place Four and a Half
Miles South of Spotsylvania C. H.

I will sell to the highest bidder my personal property, such as Horses, Mules, Milk Cows and Stock Cattle, Plows, Harrows, Cultivators, Harvesting Machinery and All Kinds of Farming Implements, Ward Robes, Desks, Beds, Chairs, Side Boards, Deaters, and a large Range and All Kinds of Household and Kitchen Furniture. A small amount of Lumber, also Corn, Hay and Fodder, provided this is not sold before Sale.

SALE TO COMMENCE AT 10 O'CLOCK.

Term Made Known on Day of Sale.

If Rainy Day, the Next Fair Day.

JAMES P. TURNLEY.

Oh, thank you, thank you.

Mrs. I found it in going through some stuff But this is where he had ... and you see, uh....

We are here with Betty and Robert. And Betty, we were saying? We were talking about the public sale notice and then we went on to talk about how you two met.

Mrs. After Miss Emma died some time, I had been in 4-H Clubs. The Carvers were here in the county. Hadn't been here too long and she was the County Agent and she had me for 4-H and her husband taught at the high school. And so I ended up living with them up in Wilderness Park. Very lovely couple. They bought this old house and were renovating it.

And while I was there he entertained some of the young men ... he was coach for awhile ... and agriculture teacher. And I helped her serve the refreshments and I had never met Robert or knew who he was or anything. But he was among the young people who had come there and I just ... I don't know ... something about him that night. He looks kinda nice, you know ... so... and I was a junior in high school and there was talk about who you're going to invite to go to the prom.

So I went in town and worked at a job and stayed with a great niece of Miss Emma's. She and I ... she's older than I am ... but we were always like sisters. So on weekends I would go into town and work. And I'd say, "Wonder who in the world can I invite to go to the prom?" And, "I don't know, I might not invite anybody." And then I said to her, I said, "Well, there's this boy up there at the Carver's and he's right cute." "But I said, "I don't know whether he would go or not." But anyway, to make a long story short, I decided ... it took a lot of nerve ... I went and asked, and I just knew he wasn't going to go! But he did!

He came by to see me and I wasn't there. I was back- up in the country. He went up the country to see me, and I was down here! But anyway, we went. I have a picture of us and he gave me a yellow rose corsage to go on my evening dress and we went and had a very good time. As a matter of fact, he asked me for another date the next night, and we were going to have a hayride and a picnic. So, I said, "I don't mean to sound real pushy here, but if you want a date here, do you want to go with me again?" "So we did and we just clicked. We were friends and we seemed to have things

in common and enjoy each other's company. I was a junior in high school, now.

So, anyway, we went together and I went on ... and Maxie, this niece of Miss Emma's, her mother was the city nurse and I was very close to her. She was like a Grandmother. And I wanted to be a nurse so she got me into this nurses program under the umbrella of the hospital ... the hospital before this one was going to be built ... and they had a severe shortage of nurses. So I wanted a job and I wanted to get into something I liked. She got me into this program at the hospital and thirty-three of us went into it and eleven of us passed. We had bookwork and then we had an empty wing of the hospital and dummies in the bed that we worked on and we worked on each other. And then we had O. J. T., on the job training, on the floor and so we ended up doing all kinds of things. Very busy. And so I stayed in town when I was working and I liked it and I was put on the floor.

Stayed in town? You mean Fredericksburg?

Mrs. Yes. And Robert's mother became a patient of mine. She was going into the hospital that summer, and I had her as a patient. The first time I had met her.

Now, Robert's father was 60 years old when Robert was born? And how old was your mother?

Mrs. Well, there was thirty-five years difference in their ages. And he died when Robert was...

Mr. He died when I was eleven.

Mrs. I've got a picture him with Robert. He did an advertisement for a farm magazine and they came to the farm and took a picture of Robert's daddy with him when he was little.

But anyway, I went on and I worked at the hospital and finished my ... I paid all my school expenses ... working, going to school, kept my grades up and on Friday's I ride the bus to town. I'd be a little late, working three to eleven. They let me stay in an empty bed at the hospital there in the unused wing and I'd get up Saturday morning to go to work, seven to three and Sunday. Robert and I dated on the side. I baby-sat also for some very well to do Jewish families in Fredericksburg. And sometimes I'd get off the hospital at eleven o'clock at night and they would pick me up and I'd go baby-sit until two o'clock. And then some nights I'd then if I wasn't working...

They picked you up at eleven o'clock?

Mrs. At the hospital.

Oh. So, from eleven at night until two o'clock you baby-sat?

Mrs. Yes.

Where did they go, that late at night?

Mrs. Well, occasionally they would be at things like the Elk's Lodge, dances and socials. I don't know.

But it seems late.

Mrs. We are talking about the weekend, now.

Right, right.

Mrs. Anyway, I would baby-sit and sometimes when I wouldn't be working at night I'd still baby-sit. And some of these people ... one person was Robert's veterinary when we got married. Dr. Blum was Jewish and he was our vet for years and years and I had baby-sat for him. When I was up in town and on Washington Avenue, I stayed with Maxie's mother and baby-sat for Dr. Blum when they first came to Fredericksburg and the children were little. So everything comes full circle.

But anyway, I went on into my senior year and Robert gave me a ring. I had gotten a scholarship to go to nursing school, to see me through. And I kinda wanted to go real bad, but we fell in love and Robert, he said I didn't need to go be a nurse. You know, he wanted me to get married. So, anyway, after I graduated I went to the hospital and worked there that summer. And then, this neighbor... knew me ... wrote in... watched this program, "Bride and Groom, "... and she knew me and she wrote in about Robert and I and our love story. And about me and how I worked so hard, wanted to be a nurse, and she liked me and she thought we had a wonderful love story and all... and, lo and behold, I was at the hospital one day and the phone rings and the head nurse calls me to the desk. And I thought, "Well, what have I done wrong? " When I got up to the desk it was Maxie calling me and said a Western Union had come for me and I said, "What? What are you talking about? " She said, "Well, I don't know, that's the reason I'm calling you. " I said, " Well, open it up and tell me what it says. " And it said, "Bride and Groom, CBS, Bride and Groom, one of the number one shows at that time that they wanted Robert and I to appear and be married on "Bride and Groom. " And I said, "What! I can't believe this! " Well, I was in shock, I was in absolute shock! Well, Robert didn't have a telephone and I could hardly finish the day out working, but I did. Afterwards I said ... well, I don't know if this is sacrilegious or what but it hit me and I was numb. We planned to be married like in August or something. Well, some of the neighbors ... I said, "I have to tell Robert. " And I wasn't going to see him for a while and they said, "We'll drive you out there."

Well, I'm sure when I told him he was in shock, and his mother and everybody.

So Dr. Bob Cavilee was the pastor of the Fredericksburg church then ... Baptist Church ... and he did his rounds at the hospital every day visiting the sick. And I liked him a whole lot. I'd been to his church with people in the family, so Robert and I decided that we would go to him and get him to counsel us and talk to us and tell us if he thought it would be proper to be married on television. I was going to have a small wedding in a small chapel, you know, just something simple because I didn't have any family, you see, and so, anyway, we went to him and he said, "No, indeed, if we were in love and sincere and take our oath before God sincerely, that's what counted." So we went to him several times and just wanted him to talk to us. So Robert talked to his mother and she wanted to talk- to people in the family. Well, Robert's sister didn't very much approve of it and she boycotted it.

Anyway, we did it. We went to New York and we went up several days early on the train. Maxie went. She was my Matron of Honor and her husband and some friends from Fredericksburg.

Robert's mother didn't go, His sister wouldn't go. She didn't think it was right. But everybody else in the family thought it was all right. So anyway, we went up and we were married and they sent us up to Kingston, New York, for a honeymoon in the Catskill Mountains. We had a new Pontiac, they gave us a lot of furniture, a diamond ring, silverware, twelve place settings, a movie of the wedding. And I got up there and I got to pick my preacher ... interviewed the preachers ... and I wanted a Baptist.

They take you in a room with a hundred wedding dresses and you can pick out the dress you want and it's fitted for you and everything. So that was a big deal, me trying all these dresses on. This is a picture that was in the Free Lance-Star originally. And they've done two 'flashbacks. "

That's a beautiful photograph.

Mrs. I have the original picture of us that they did. They had a photographer go everywhere we went and took pictures of us on our honeymoon and gave us an album. But it burnt up. Our home burnt and I lost my movie and my album, but some people had pictures and gave them to me. But anyway, I laugh about it now and say, "I can't believe I did it! " We have been married fortyeight years in July.

Congratulations!

Mrs. Thanks. But anyway, we've been married forty-eight years.

This is definitely... I am so glad I asked the question ... about how you got together.

Mrs. Anyway, we had two children and I went on into real estate after my children got old enough. I was in real estate for about twenty years. I substitute taught for a long time. I've taken classes over the years in Charlottesville and all.

Where did you teach?

Mrs. Livingston Elementary. And then I stayed at home with my children and then I studied and I got my license to be a realtor in '62. And worked in farms. But I didn't sell any to be developed! Country properties ... selling them. And Robert, he farmed ... loved farming. That's the barn. A watercolor of the barn ... his favorite barn on the farm.

You own the farm now?

Mrs. Yes.

And how many acres is it?

Mrs. About five hundred acres.

Mr. Our son farms it.

Oh, your son farms it?

Mrs. The one who lives at the mill farms it. The other one lives in the house.

Mr. This mill is about a half a mile away.

Mrs. It's across the field.

Oh, I'll have to go see it! I'd love to go see it.

Mr. You'll recognize that barn when you go by it.

Mrs. Well, Greg wants to fix this mill up when he gets the money. He's farming. He's going to turn it into ... he's collecting antique farm stuff and when we moved I gave him a lot of antique stuff and he's collecting them and he's going to kinda open it up as a museum like, with relics and different things. He's collecting all...

That's exciting.

Mrs. And it won't be operated as a mill, per se.

Mr. Yes, I don't think it will ever be operated as a mill.

Mrs. The wheel is gone and this is a lost art. You know how these people now that know how to do this type of thing, these mill wheels and all?

It's a shame really.

Mrs. Yes. You have to go way over to the other side of Harrisonburg, and even then it's hard to find anybody that knows anything about mills and the workings of them. So, anyway, he wants to restore that and before Roy died they'd been after him right good while to have that registered as a historic landmark and Roy wasn't for that, too much.

He isn't for it?

Mrs. That goes back to I 700's.

But why isn't he for it?

Mrs. He's dead now. At the time, I don't know. Old people sometimes are hard to change.

Mr. He just didn't think much of it. Nothing wrong with it. Just one of those things.

Well, it certainly is lovely. It looks very inviting. What does your son farm on the property?

Mrs. Well, he farms three or four other places, too. He has cattle on them.

Mr. Altogether cattle. Raises hay and corn, you know, as feed for the cattle. When I was over there, I had sheep, beef cattle and hogs.

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That's beautiful, to still have your son working on the farm.

Mrs. This is a water color of the first house on Black Rock. Marcia Chavas did it and did the barn. This is weather boarding over logs and this picture was put in Rodger's book and this was in 1864 when Robert's grandfather bought it. And at that time, they didn't have lawn mowers, and they let the sheep run in the yard and the chickens. They had a picket fence and a pear tree and some hollyhocks.

Mr. Betty had the original picture, and they had the front door open and when she painted it, she put the door in. I think there was a chicken standing in...

Mrs. On the steps ...

Mr. On the steps, yes.

Mrs. This is a millstone, here, for the steps ... and that's in the collection for the mill. But anyway, that was the first house and she did it...Are you saying this is in Roger's book...

that he speaks about the house? That's James Roger Mansfield, The History of Early Spotsylvania,
who is a double cousin of yours?

Mrs. Yes. Now his sister lives in the Orange Nursing Home. Right here. The door was open.

The chicken is not there now, the chicken's in the yard.

Yes. This is a photograph of Black Rock Farm.

Mrs. But the artist did that from this old picture that we had. Robert's father had that pulled down before Robert was born, he was born in 1929. And they lived in a little temporary place while a huge house was built. It was beautiful. Six bedrooms, columns all around - That's the house that burnt when our children were babies. This was the first house there. There were logs underneath. And the kitchen was separate, wasn't it? We have the original meat house that was there then.

You do?

Mrs. Yes. It was in the front yard and was moved. It's still therewith logs underneath and it's to the left of the house in the field.

Black Rock Farm, Circa 1864 (pic)

Mr. It has boards on the outside.

Mrs. It used to be in the front yard and all the meat was in it. Off to the left, here.

Mr. It still has a shingle roof on that old meat house.

Mrs. Wood shingles.

Well, you certainly have good memories, I mean, not of it burning down. I'm sure that must have been Dreadful, you know, when it burnt.

Mrs. Yes. Our house burned December the thirteenth. It was cold. I had washed baby diapers that

morning. Greg was about three months -- old. And Robbie was seventeen months old You see, we had two young children. And all the clothes that were saved were his little frozen diapers.

Was it a stove fire? A log fire?

Mr. Upstairs we had an oil stove in the children's room upstairs. Something made it...

Mrs. At that time Robert had this man working on the farm with him and they cleaning out the barn. And they had been in and we had had lunch and I put the children down for naps.

I ran outside and it was really cold. I ran outside to dump some potato peelings and I smelled smoke. I really didn't think anything of it but as I turned to come back I noticed this smoke was seeping around the windows and I said, "Oh, my God!" And then I saw flames and I just started screaming and screaming and I thought about the children... and disbelief and shock ... and Robert came and Ernest. You heard me screaming and you all ran.

And we were on this party line and he had to ask this lady to please get off the phone so he could call the fire truck!

The Meat House (circa 1800) at Black Rock Farm (pic)

Well, in those days we didn't have the sophisticated fire trucks we have now and when they got there, it was ice in the line and they could not pump water. So, I had taken these two babies and had gone to a neighbor's house, you know, by myself, and left Robert.

And people started coming and helping and our dining room furniture was saved It was all.

My table, the leg was broken off. That was made out of walnut off the farm that Robert's father ... my corner cupboard with all my china and crystal in it was turned back ... and every dish in it ... set in the wheat field and not a single piece of crystal or china got chipped. Then it was set upright and carried over a rough road to another farm we had and put in this old house with dishes still in it. And they still ... the dishes were there and none of them got cracked. So somebody was watching over it. But anyway, Robert was there and we had this huge oil tank on the back of the house and three hundred and fifty or five hundred gallons of fuel had just been delivered the day before. They tried to shoot it to let the oil out and it would ricochet and it just wouldn't go through. And the heat caused that to explode and fed the fire ... and it went under the truck Robert had this farm truck and they were putting the

dining room furniture on it. And when he got in, the truck was flooded and wouldn't start. And they screamed for him to get out. The fire and oil was going under it. And he said I'm going to try one more time and that time the truck started and he got out.

But people came and they told me, they said, "Betty, we think they'll save the house " because it was a huge house, six bedrooms and all. We'd just had the floors sanded and the walls papered and a door cut between two bedrooms upstairs. It had really beautiful woodwork in it and all.

We went through a tough time there. Robert stayed ... went to ... had a friend ... I went with the children ... and we went to Richmond and we got a trailer real quick, within two or three days, and put there because we had sheep having lambs ... we raised eggs for the hatchery for baby chickens and it was very cold and the eggs would freeze and they'd bust. And the lambs can't take being cold, so Robert stayed up on the farm several nights with no heat and he nearly froze. And he lost lambs, we had eggs freeze and bust, but he tried to stay there on the farm to keep an eye on the livestock.

So, it was a right tough time and it was right before Christmas. I'd done my Christmas shopping. Had the packages wrapped and on the bed. They all burned up. All the decorations and everything ... people told us, "Don't go back. " And I said, " Well, I can't hardly do it! " They said "Don't go back and Christmas shop anymore. "

But we realized then that material things are not all that important. But when night comes and you have no toothbrush, you have nothing to feed your baby, your formula has burned

up in the refrigerator and you're at the mercy of other people. People really helped us. They came in and just brought things children and for us ... and people gave me showers ...

it was unbelievable. But we got through it and lived in the trailer. They started building the house ... they cleaned all that mess up in January and on April the fifteenth, on Robbie's second birthday, we moved into the house. The third house on that spot so ... you realize, when you look back, though, that if he had been where I usually put him to sleep he would have easily burned up. So you look back and you know it was bad,

but you realize that, really, you were blessed that it was no worse than it was. You can always replace material things.

Right. That's right. Well, this has been really interesting. Knowing that you are both long time residents of Spotsylvania, is there anything we haven't touched on that you feel the readers or our listeners would want to know about before we come to the end of the interview? We've spoken about your growing up and when you were younger...

Mrs. I think one thing I remember from when I was little ... outside of family and socializing ... the church ... the church was your social ground.

Of all the interviews I've done that seems to be what the people are saying ... that church was important.

I remember the church during World War H. We had boys missing and prisoners of war ... didn't have telephones, but the word always got around about the fighting, or severe illness or something. And people pulled together and somebody would go into the church and get the old wood stove going and we go in and have a special prayer services.

And you'd meet around at the homes. I remember when I was little and Women's Missionary

Circle met in the homes. And when we got married, I told Robert, I said, "I want to fix some London Smoke. " And he said, "What are you talking about?" And I said that when I was a child they used to serve that at the Women's Circle Meeting in the homes and homemade cookies. And he said, "Well, what is it? and I said, "It was homemade vanilla ice cream and you poured ginger ale over it and you thought you were in uptown New York!" London Smoke!

I've never heard of it.

Mrs. It started back when I was a child and that was a big deal. And homegrown cantaloupes with a dip of homemade vanilla ice cream in it was quite the treat back then. Your Christian friends ... neighborhoods were very tight then, too. And even when Robert and I were married ... it isn't like today ... that people running off to work and they don't know each other ... you knew your neighbors. It was nothing to leave in the morning after you cleaned up after breakfast ... and walk, or go somewhere and spend the day with your neighbors. Had quilting parties. Women would have quilting parties and the children were in school and the ones who weren't would play outdoors and all. But they were close knit communities. You knew what was going on even without ... and no television. We played games...

And listened to the wireless? Did you call it the wireless or the radio?

Mrs. Yes, we had radio. Robert had a battery radio.

Mr. Yes, we had a battery radio.

Mrs. They didn't have electricity at first and your daddy had a delco plant.

What is that?

Mr. It was a lot of batteries and they would run that and charge the batteries up. And we couldn't

have a refrigerator, but we had lights. Bright, you know just as bright as you've got today. And it took ... you know, you would buy five gallons of gas probably every week to run your delco plant. But we thought we were ... you know, uptown. And I think, about 1935, we got electricity back to the farm house.

Mrs. See, if you were back off the road then, they ran the lines up the main road and you could hook on. But if you were back you didn't get it for awhile because I went to Preacher Sander's and they had kerosene lamps. I got a lot of kerosene lamps here. Four or five that are very old. Did you see the lamp as you come in the hall? I inherited it. It's from way back in the early 1800's still got the oil cradle in it, but it's fixed for electric. They had oil lamps in every room and when you went to bed at night and they walked out of that room with that oil lamp, that darkness was final. You'd go down under those homemade quilts. That was another...

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And didn't want to come out?

Mrs. You had so many of those homemade quilts on you, you could hardly turn over!

Mr. I remember that!

Mrs. But they were beautiful. And we had to take naps when we were growing up. You had to take a nap.

Mr. And if you didn't take a nap, you'd rest.

Quiet time.

Mrs. And I would hate it, so I would sit in the bed and work on the pattern that that quilt was, and finally, it would just make me so sleepy I'd gone to sleep and didn't know it.

Mr. But you don't dare get out of that bed, you know. Lay in the bed whether you go to sleep or not.

Mrs. I remember the first epidemic of polio that hit the county. I was quite young and it was scary. The movies shut down ... of course, we didn't go to the movies in Fredericksburg ... but the church didn't even meet. Five children in the neighborhood

got polio and two of them today are limping. And that was scary. Polio, you know.

Roosevelt

went in and they said he had it and that was the first people really started talking about it. Next thing you know, polio was going through Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania. It was a scary thing, And I wasn't allowed to go out in any crowds at all. I reckon it was a form of isolation that they used back then. To keep from getting it. But that was scary.

Hearing

about that and children being crippled. And several were taken somewhere and put in an iron

lung and I know it scared me to death when they were talking about that. I don't know about you, Robert, do you remember it?

Mr. I don't remember a lot about polio, to tell you the truth. We lived back ... about a mile

off the road. We went to church on Sunday and went to Fredericksburg once a week.

How long did it take you to get to Fredericksburg?

Mr. Oh, in my time we had automobiles and it took a half an hour, three quarters.

Mrs. Robert's daddy never drove, but he always had a car. And he cranked it in the front, right?

Mr. Yes. An old model T. My mother always did the driving.

Mrs. And before that, the men drove it.

Mr. Yes. Roy used to drive him a lot. He had an old model T truck, so they always said, that he
hailed the livestock to the market in.

Mrs. Oh, something you should have told her about, too, Robert, was your daddy used to have to drive
the cattle from here to Richmond because....

Mr. Yes, that's right.

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On foot?

Mrs. Yes, that's what I'm telling you! They walked them! On foot.

Mr. You see, number one highway was then a dirt road and they always told me that you could get them as far as Ashland the first day. He had a friend down there who was a farmer and he would let him put his cattle in a lot there and feed them. And they'd go on in to Richmond the next day.
And that was his way of getting the cattle sold at the farmer's market.

Well, I really appreciate you both for your contribution to SPFI's Oral History Program. Thank you very much.

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