

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

John McGolerick

May 13th, 2010

Frederick, MD

INTERVIEWED BY Jackie Ben and Dennis Fry

HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



ABSTRACT

Born on September 29th, 1923, John McGolerick describes his life growing up in Weverton Hill, MD during the 1920s and 30s, and his forty-one year-long career working for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Highlights of his high school years include meeting fellow student and later wife, Ruth, and being the catcher for the Brunswick High School's champion baseball team in 1940 and 1941. McGolerick also recounts his contributions to World War II, including making gas masks for the war at Rickter Products in Hagerstown, MD, as well as serving in the 69th Infantry Division at Camp Shelby, Mississippi and overseas in Europe from 1943-1944. Finally, McGolerick gives a detailed description of his years working on the Cumberland Division of the B&O Railroad, running from Brunswick to Cumberland to Keyser. From 1942-1983, McGolerick worked his way up in the company, starting as a shop worker, and finishing his career as a yardmaster, with stints along the way as a night watchman, a brakeman, a flagman, and a conductor. In this interview, John McGolerick is joined by his wife Ruth, and is interviewed by two staff members of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Dennis Fry, who seems to have been friends with the McGolerick's when he was growing up, and Jackie Ben.

PERSONS MENTIONED

Ruth McGolerick (wife), Bradley Larson [?] (Ruth's brother), "Kingfish" Cooper, Dick Markel (co-worker), Eddie Smallwood (from Harpers Ferry), Paul Sullivan (moonshiner), Colter family (moonshiners), Jim Stone and Charlie (moonshiners), Joe Himes (uncle), Kate and Jay [?], Pete Higgins [?], Aunt Maynes [?], Bob and Charles (store owners), Tallia Harrison (store owner), Anna May and George Cabaut [?], Arnold and Caroline, Calvin and Dot [?] Winter

JB [Jackie Ben]: This is May 13th, 2010. This is Jackie Ben and Dennis Fry from Harpers Ferry National Historical Park interviewing John McGolerick. And let's start with, what were your memories of the Salty Dog Saloon?

[00:00:21] JM [John McGolerick]: Well, I was working on the railroad in 1942 and we started to go together I guess in [19]41. We was in high school. And whenever she would wake up early, I would go get her and go eat a meal there. And we would go out together, but we didn't do too much because she was going to school too. And then I would go see her at night.

RM [Ruth McGolerick]: There wasn't too much to do.

JM: And whenever we got a chance, yeah.

JB: What kind of place was it? Do you remember it being very rowdy?

[00:00:58] JM: Yes, right along the canal. I guess it was two stories. Her parents lived there for a while. And every once in a while, it was a rough place. I used to go up there and I would see a fight. I saw a fight there one time that two fellas almost ended in the canal. But outside of that, it was good memories, yeah.

JB: Do you remember her brother ever getting into fights?

[00:01:30] JM: Yeah. Bradley? Yep. Yes he did. Yes Sir. Bradley Larson [?] and "Kingfish" Cooper. They used to meet up there. [laughter]

JB: "Kingfish" Cooper? Was he just a local troublemaker?

JM: He was from Knoxville. Yeah, I guess he was.

JB: And he was just a, I guess the...?

[00:01:30] JM: They get up there and get so much beer in them and everything like that, you know—how it does when you get a little much beer in you.

DF [Dennis Fry]: Did Bradley, was Bradley drinking a lot of beer too that would cause this?

[00:02:02] JM: Ah, Bradley didn't drink that much, no. Bradley was working on the railroad as a foreman at that time. Up on the high railroad. And they hit together every once in a while.

JB: So you worked on the Baltimore & Ohio railroad for...?

[00:02:02] JM: I was working at the shops at the time, Brunswick shops, yeah.

JB: Do you remember—our study is mostly concerned of Harpers Ferry and the area around Harpers Ferry. What do you remember of the town?

RM: Not much. I can't remember...

[00:02:34] JM: Uh, [laughter] I don't remember much. It was over a steep hill. It was on a hill. I used to walk up—they didn't have the bridge there like they do now. And I used to walk over and watch the wild [inaudible], to visit. And I used to watch it when it had a flood. It used to flood quite often. I think in [19]36 and [19]42, I think it was. And I used to see a lot of fish, and all different stuff like that. And things down the river and everything like that. But it was always on a hill. It's not like it was now. They've got different restaurants up there and everything. And I used to play ball up there in Harpers Ferry High School. We used to play the Harpers Ferry Team. I played baseball.

JB: I understand that baseball was very popular sport.

[00:03:33] JM: Oh yeah. In 1940, '40 and '41, we were champions up in Maryland.

DF: Who'd you play for, John? What team?

[00:03:42] JM: Brunswick High School. 1940 and [19]41. We played Harpers Ferry High School. We'd play Boonsboro. We played Smithsburg—different teams.

DF: What position did you play?

JM: I caught, I was catcher then.

JB: What was the lower town like back in the [19]40s and late [19]30s? The lower town of Harpers Ferry, what was it like?

[00:04:07] JM: I can't remember too much about it. You had stores there. There was a jail there. You could walk through town and enjoy it. I don't know. I don't remember much.

RM: There was houses along there. People lived in them. [JM: Yeah] Now they don't live in houses in Harpers Ferry.

JB: Were there alot of abandoned buildings?

[00:04:34] JM: Hm, I don't think so.

RM: A lot of what?

JM: Abandoned buildings. No I think it was all occupied.

DF: Do you remember, John, ever visiting any of the stores in the downtown?

[00:04:48] JM: Yeah. They had clothing. They had different things. Yeah.

DF: Do you remember buying anything in any of the stores downtown?

JM: Did we?

RM: Downtown Harpers Ferry? No, we never bought anything in Harpers Ferry.

JM: Not that I know.

DF: When you would come to visit Ruth at the Salty Dog to go out on a date, did you ever go across the river to Harpers Ferry to spend time on your date?

[00:05:22] JM: Did we? [JM: No] No, I don't think we did. [laughter]

RM: No. We never went to Harpers Ferry.

JM: We'd go the other way.

RM: The only place we went to in Harpers Ferry was above Harpers Ferry, to the movies. To that drive-in...

JM: ...drive-in-theater. Yeah, they had a big drive-in there. We'd go over there quite often. That was even after we was married. See, it's a long time, remembering these things.

DF: What can you tell us about Sandy hook? What do you remember about Sandy Hook from the 1940s?

[00:05:57] JM: Well, it's right beside the railroad. It's only on one side, Sandy Hook. They used to have ball games in the streets. And they had about one, two or three stores. I used to stop by Mrs.—your aunt, Aunt Main—to get ice cream [RM: Main Fay]. They had a church, a Methodist Church. That's where Ruth went.

RM: He don't remember as much about it as I did. I went to Sandhill a lot.

DF: Tell me about your career with the railroad, John. I know you started at the shops, but just take me through your career.

[00:06:54] JM: Okay, I started in 1942 at the shops, in February. Before that—when I got out of high school, I went to Rickter Products in Hagerstown to work, making gas masks for the war. And my brother-in-law was a contractor down in Virginia. In September I went down there, and I was making six dollars and forty cents an hour. I was making two dollars, down at Rickter products. And I stayed down there until I came back and got a job at the shops in February 1942. And I worked the shops when I was going with her. [RM: ...the track you worked for?] Later on in November, I went up to work on the track in Harpers Ferry because they give me a job as night watchman.

DF: Tell us about that.

[00:07:48] JM: A night watchman. Well we would—I had my the territory from Weverton to Harpers Ferry at night time, in case any stones or slides come down. And I would stop the trains if they would have. That's where I was working when I was drafted.

DF: So you were actually walking the tracks from Weverton to Harpers Ferry?

JM: Oh yeah. I was working fifteen and a half hours, making good money.

DF: Tell us, did you ever have an experience where you had to stop the train?

JM: Yeah.

DF: Tell us about that.

[00:08:21] JM: One night they had a storm and a tree fell over. I had to stop the train. I had [inaudible] everything to stop. I had to stop the train. They had to get someone out to cut the tree down. Never done no, stone, no. And during the war they guarded that tunnel.

DF: Did you ever guard the tunnel?

[00:08:40] JM: No, no. That was policemen. They had a policemen there. They had a regular twenty-four hour shift and an eight hour shift.

DF: They were armed?

JM: Oh yeah, during the war, yeah. But no, I didn't do that.

DF: So you were drafted in what, [19]43?

[00:08:57] JM: Yeah, well I, I got a notice. I was drafted in January, but I got a three month deferment because she was pregnant with Dorian. And then it ended being about four months. And then I was drafted, went into service May 12th, 1943, and went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi with the 69th division.

DF: And then you served in Europe?

[00:09:19] JM: Oh yeah. I stayed a year in Mississippi and went overseas. We landed, I landed, June 13th, 1944. The D-Day was June 6th. I landed in England June the 13th and they already had D-Day going. I stayed there until about September and then I went and joined the [inaudible] division.

DF: And you returned home and then you went back to work for the railroad?

[00:09:47] JM: Yeah, I was a brakeman. [crosstalk] I transfered to being brakeman in January the 17th, 1946.

DF: Describe your job as a brakeman.

[00:10:03] JM: Well, you was a brakeman, you had a fireman crew at the time. You had an engineer, a foreman, a conductor, a brakeman and flagman. And I worked on the Cumberland Division from Brunswick to Cumberland to Keyser, for about ten years.

DF: What types of jobs did the brakemen do?

[00:10:23] JM: The breakman, it's just a the conductor with the train. Anything—you had to set off cars or if he had a derailment, or if he had a hot box or anything, you have to take care of your work.

DF: When you were on the trains, riding the trains as a brakeman, where were you located?

[00:10:40] JM: On head end. Head end with the engineer and foreman.

DF: So you were up front?

JM: Yeah. The flagman and the conductor were in the rear and we had cabooses at that time.

DF: Tell me what it was like to operate a steam locomotive at that time? Just give me kind of how that worked.

JM: Do what?

DF: The steam locomotive. The job of the fireman and engineer and...

[00:11:06] JM: Well, the engineer, he run the engine. And the fireman he put the coal and water in the engine. Usually have to stop. If you left Brunswick, you had to stop

at Hancock to get cold water for the steam engine. You couldn't make a trip right through. If you did, you'd run out of water. You'd have to—blow up.

DF: So you would be able to go all the way to Hancock and then had to refuel with water?

[00:11:32] JM: Yeah, with water. There were certain tracks in Hancock to get the cold water. And when you got your diesel, you would go straight through.

DF: So now after you finished as brakeman, what did you become next with the railroad?

[00:11:47] JM: Well, conductor.

RM: He was promoted to flagman, too.

JM: Well, a flagman is the same thing as a brakeman. If you're a brakeman you qualify as a flagman. But I was promoted to conductor, yes.

DF: Okay. Tell me, what were the responsibilities of a conductor.

[00:12:04] JM: Make sure your train got there safely. Make sure you do your work. You might have set cars off of Martinsburg. You might have set cars off at Hancock. Maybe not, straight through. If you didn't have any work to do, straight through, your train. If you have a hotbox or something on your train, you gotta stop your train and set it off.

DF: Okay. Describe a hotbox and what that was.

[00:12:26] JM: Well, one of the wheels would get hot on one of the cars. We had stuff in that wheel that caught on fire and you had to set it off.

RM: It was packing, wasn't it? Packing or something?

JM: Yeah, packing.

DF: How'd you put the fires out?

[00:12:45] JM: Well, you set the cars off and just let it burn out. Yeah. It would burn out.

DF: So you'd actually stop a train [JM: Yep] and separate the cars from that car?

JM: Yeah, and set it off on the siding. You had to know where your siding is too. You couldn't set it off anyplace. You had to know where your siding was. You had to be qualified to do that.

DF: And did you retire as a conductor?

[00:13:10] JM: No. I was promoted, yardmaster. Well I worked in the yard in 1956. And at that time, they didn't have any—I worked textery. And then they—I didn't have nowhere to turn, so I went on the road for ten years until my turn come up as yardmaster. And I worked the last ten years as yardmaster.

DF: And tell me, what was the job of a yardmaster?

[00:13:31] JM: The yardmaster make up trains, and take care of what your work had to do.

DF: And that was based in Brunswick?

JM: Yeah. I was working as yardmaster when they made the new yard in Brunswick. They build a whole new yard, a whole new everything down there.

DF: When did you retire?

[00:13:48] JM: October the 4th 1983. The last day I retired, he come a conductor from Baltimore. He got on the radio and called me. He said, "Gotta have a new caboose, got to have a caboose with [inaudible] out in this thing." And I said "Mister, when you get to Brunswick, I'll be retired!" [laughter] It's my last day. So it wasn't long, took the caboose off yet. Don't have no caboose.

DF: Do you remember, now this is railroad history, do you remember any kind of mishaps or accidents that occurred between Brunswick and the Harpers Ferry area that were pretty bad on the railroad?

[00:14:28] JM: Oh yeah. Every once in a while, you get the call for the tool corps. I remember there at Sandy Hook when there was a big wreck and it was over in

the canal. We had to clean it up. You call the tool corps and tool corps come in and take care of it.

DF: What caused that Sandy Hook wreck? Do you remember?

[00:14:45] JM: Derailment. A car jumped the track. Every once in a while, they'd jump the track.

DF: Do you remember—did you ever work with passenger trains?

JM: No, I could have been, but I didn't.

DF: Can you tell me anything about the passenger train station that was at Harpers Ferry. Anything you remember about that?

[00:15:06] JM: Well, when I worked on the track, my responsibility was taking care of the fuel and the coal and everything. And in that station there, that was one of my jobs before I got the night watchman. But trains used to stop at Harpers Ferry.

DF: So you actually worked at Harpers Ferry Train Station?

JM: Yeah.

DF: Can you tell me John, at that time, was there a waiting room for whites and blacks? Were they separate?

[00:15:38] JM: No.

DF: It wasn't.

JM: No. And it had an underground path. You'd go underneath there to get to the other train. There at Harpers Ferry you had an underneath, yeah. No, no.

DF: So there was no segregation of white and blacks at that time?

[00:15:52] JM: Not that I saw. No, no. I think that it started in what, about [19]53? When they started separating them? When was the Civil Rights laws?

JB: [19]55 I believe.

DF: Brown versus the Board of segregation [Education] was [19]54.

[00:16:10] JM: [19]54, yeah. Now in the YMCA, a colored fellow come in, he could not go in and sit down at a table. He could sit at the counter and get coffee, or something like that. But that's all he could do at the YMCA in Brunswick. I saw a lot of that.

DF: Did you work with any blacks on the railroad?

[00:16:31] JM: There was none on the Cumberland Division when I was on the road, but later on, they come on the Gonebury [?]. When I retired, I never knew there was a black man on the Cumberland, but there was a lot of men on the Gonebury [?], coming out of Gonebury [?].

DF: Can you tell me anything about what it was like to go through those tunnels there at Harpers Ferry? And especially with those steam locomotives? What was that like?

[00:16:59] JM: Well coming out of Keyser, you had a big tunnel there, coming past the creek. Before you got there you'd had to get waste, and put water on your waste and put it on your nose, coming through that tunnel with a steam engine. If you didn't, you might not get through there. We actually had an engineer die coming through there. I wasn't with him, but it was a long tunnel and that smoke and that dust, you couldn't stand it... if you didn't have waste on your face with water.

RM: What about the one to Harpers Ferry?

JM: No, no. All the other tunnels on the Cumberland [inaudible] were small ones, compared to this one at McKenzie [Maryland].

DF: So you could make it through the one at Harpers Ferry and not have any danger of...

[00:17:39] JM: No. We had no trouble. We had the other ones up on the Cumberland [inaudible]. But the one coming up from Keyser, going down to Patterson's Creek, you had to have—it's a long tunnel. And they always had to

get a hard start out of Keyser to get through there. If they stopped, you...I never got stopped. They wouldn't stop a [inaudible] going through that tunnel.

DF: Did you ever do any train work on what we call the Winchester and Potomac Railroad, which you all referred to as the Valley Branch ?

[00:18:09] JM: No that's not my division. That's the Baltimore [?] Division. Baltimore Division had Millville and all them, yeah.

DF: So you never worked that?

JM: No. I worked on the Cumberland Division. I never worked on the Baltimore [?] Division. You only had certain place you could work. I'll tell you what happened to me as a yardmaster. I had the whole women crew. Before I retired, I had a women crew. I had a woman engineer, a woman brakeman, and a woman conductor.

DF: What year was that?

[00:18:36] JM: Oh, I would say, about 1980. All women.

DF: Was that the first time that happened?

[00:18:42] JM: That's the only time I had—I had women before that as brakeman and engineers, but I never had them all together. And I had two crews at night, I always had two crews. I couldn't give them only a certain thing because they couldn't knock off breaks like the men could or they couldn't pick up a knuckle, or something like that. So I took care of them, yeah.

JB: Were there women working on the railroad during World War Two?

[00:19:13] JM: They were working on the tracks and at the shops.

DF: What kind of jobs were they be doing at the shops?

[00:19:20] JM: They would be cleaning up engines, and different things like that. And they would work in the car yard. And they would work, mostly cleaning up, doing things like that.

DF: When you say they were working the track, what does that mean?

[00:19:34] JM: I don't know where they would work the track. I only saw them working at the shops and the car yard. I never saw them working on the track. I guess they did. Track is right hard work.

DF: Were these jobs that would normally be done by men, but because of the war women were doing it?

[00:19:48] JM: Oh yeah! Cleaning engines in the shop! Yeah, your engines had to be cleaned. Men did them.

DF: Do you recall any problems ever, John, with the bridge in Harpers Ferry? Any kind of fires or anything like that?

[00:20:09] JM: I think one time, Number thirty-two come out of Cumberland and they reported a fire on the bridge there and they got it out. Yeah, it was only minor and it was the only time I heard about that.

JB: Did you ever have to deal with any emergencies while you working on the railroad as a conductor?

[00:20:29] JM: Oh yeah, we've had wrecks and different things, yeah.

JB: Were you ever in one?

[00:20:37] JM: Yeah, I was in a wreck when we had a derailment with cars, but when the train had to stop, you had derailment in one or two of them, yeah.

DF: Were any of them in the Sandy Hook/Brunswick/Harpers Ferry area?

[00:20:51] JM: No, not with me having a train. No.

DF: What caused your derailments, do you know?

[00:21:00] JM: I think it just derailed, just jumped the tracks. Every once in a while, it'd jump the track. And you're going fifty or sixty mile an hour, you have a big wreck.

[laughter] We had a speed limit on the Cumberland [indudiable], sixty, fifty mile and hour. But certain crossovers and curves, you only have thirty-five or fourty. And it was up the engineers to control that.

DF: John, did you ever aspire to be an engineer?

JM: No. [laughter] No!

DF: Why was that?

[00:21:34] JM: Well, it's a lot of responsibility. It's a tedious job, I mean, it's one of the most important jobs there are.

JB: Did you work very long hours?

[00:21:46] JM: Well, I've been out as high as thirty-two hours in a row.

JB: Wow!

[00:21:51] JM: See we had a sixteen hour law. But if you [RM crosstalk], sixteen hour law and you got in trouble, and you got behind, once in a while you'd get three or four deep coming into Martinsburg. They'd give you an order. Just required the Sixteen hour law. And they were responsible. But you still got paid until you got to Brunswick. I've out as high as thirty-two hours in a row. And overtime after eight hours.

RM: He was always gone when it snowed.

[00:22:22] JM: Yeah. One time me and Dick Markel [?] come into Brunswick. Dick was a conductor and I was a flagman. We got in Brunswick, and I called Ruth and I said "You got any place to park?" She said "No" or something or she hasn't got it done. So me and Dick got a room at the Y in Brunswick. And here come the caller and said, "We want you to go back to Cumberland. We haven't got any men." So we back on the train again. When you work for the railroads you owed your life to the railroad. You're on duty twenty-four hours. And that's all I do.

DF: I know, when I was a kid, I very seldom saw you in church because of your railroad work. [JM: Right] And when we did see you in church, everybody was real excited because we knew it was a very infrequent Sunday that you had off.

[00:23:10] JM: And everytime I'd come to church, between Sunday school and church, I'd called the cars, how'd they stand. I'd say if you need me you gotta call me, let me know. See you used to get about a one hour or two hour call. Very interesting life. Paid good money. And you always knew your check was going to come when it was due.

RM: I used to get his checks. [JM: She signed them!] And he wouldn't know how much he'd made. He always knew how much he was supposed to make, but I'd get the checks and get them cashed. I'd sign his name and then signed my name underneath of it. [laughter]

JB: Was working on the railroad a dangerous job?

[00:23:56] JM: Oh yeah. Working in the yard, I saw people get killed. I saw people lose fingers dividing cars off the hump. We had two humps there, you ride cars off. When you cut the car off, you come over that hump, you got a break on it. You've got to ride that car to where—I saw Eddie Smallwood from Harpers Ferry lose his whole arm. I saw the [inaudible] boy lose his finger. Yeah, I saw—it's a dangerous thing. It's basically working in the yard.

JB: Is it any safer now? At the time you retired had it become safer?

[00:24:31] JM: We don't have any humps. Mostly all pacified in Balmer [?] and they don't do much in Brunswick like they used to. They used to be the Eastbound hump and the Westbound hump, yeah.

DF: What is a hump, John? Describe a hump for us?

[00:24:46] JM: Well, you got a big hump. You got track back in here. Trains come into the yard and you get the engine up, and shove it up on a hump. And you'd pacified. Maybe two cars go on this track, one car goes in this track, and this track here. And you have a conductor that cuts it off. One man's responsible for three cars. If you have four cars, you've got two brakeman. And you take it down there and every once in a while you get a call on a break that is ok on the hump. And it

might not act like its supposed to be. And when you get down there, it just runs away. You get off of it.

DF: So if the car is running away, the only thing you can do is jump?

JM: Yeah, get off, yeah. [laughter]

DF: Did you have to do that?

[00:25:36] JM: Yeah, I've damaged cars. One time I had a car on a hump, and it was a whiskey car, a dangerous car. I said, "Man, I'm going to make sure this is a good break." A lot of the times we had eight jacks which were breaks that you brought [?] up, you had to had to have a brake club for the other ones. And he said "Boy, you got a pretty good break." I said, "Better good, better be." And I got away from it and I went down and damaged it. Whiskey run from every place.

DF: You said it was a whiskey car?

JM: Yeah, a whisky car, yeah.

DF: That was like drinking whiskey.

JM: Yeah. And they filled the gallon jugs with it. [laughter] The breakmen did.

DF: John, and we asked Ruth this question. Do you remember anything from the prohibition period when you couldn't make alcohol? Was there any moonshine going on there in Pleasant Valley?

[00:26:29] JM: Oh my yeah.

DF: Can you tell me who were some of the moonshiners that you remember?

JM: [laughter] Should I name them?

Interviewer: It's okay. It's alright. We aren't going to hurt them. It'll be fine. Yeah, we'd like to know.

[00:26:45] JM: Well the Colters. There were a lot of Colters made whiskey. And let me get this straight... Paul Sullivan. He got caught.

DF: Oh, he got caught? The revenuers caught Paul Sullivan?

JM: Well he was making whiskey in the house I lived in.

RM: In the basement of it.

JM: In the basement of it. My house.

DF: So you're place where you...? Now, is this the place up on Weverton Hill?

JM & RM: Yeah.

DF: This is your home.

JM & RM: Yeah.

DF: And they were making whiskey in the basement?

[00:27:20] JM: Yeah. He got caught and got a year, yeah. That wasn't our house at that time. Let's see. Charlie [inaudible] master of making whiskey. Jim Stone was helping him.

DF: Where was Charlie making his whiskey?

[00:27:37] JM: Right there in the crick, on the Harrytown [?] branch. [RM: Israel Creek] Israel Creek, yeah. I would walk as a kid, once in a while, this is a good many years go. I'd walk that railroad track and they'd be making whiskey. Each hole. They would say, "Here just comes a kid. That's okay."

DF: Tell me, did they have guards out?

[00:28:00] JM: Well, they had watchmen.

DF: Because they were looking for revenuers?

JM: Yeah, but revenue men didn't bother them. The revenue men knew they were making whiskey, but they didn't bother them.

JB: So how would they get caught then? How did Paul Sullivan get caught?

[00:28:16] JM: Well I don't know. Somebody must have turned him in.

JB: So the revenuers would not come out unless somebody called on them.

[00:28:21] JM: No. My uncle Joe Himes sold sugar to them. At Himes' store. He made a fortune during the war, selling sugar. At the end of it, they come around. You couldn't buy over a hundred pounds of sugar at a time. They used to buy all kinds of sugar.

DF: So your uncle was Joe Himes?

JM: Yeah.

DF: And he operated a store even then?

JM: Oh yeah.

DF: Was that where the current Himes store is located today?

[00:28:51] JM: Well, he had one down below there, a little team, a little small one down below there. And then he built that.

JB: Would you say that moonshining, back then during prohibition, was pretty wide spread?

[00:29:02] JM: Oh yeah, that's the only way—in fact, everybody almost made it. You didn't have no other means. People didn't have no money. They had to make a living.

DF: Did—now your family is Dunker?

JM: Yeah

DF: Did you know any Dunkers that made moonshine?

[00:29:24] JM: I don't know. Maybe they did, I don't know. You say Dunker, I say Brethren.

DF: Tell me about South Brownsville. Tell me about the little South Brownsville church. I know it still stands today. I know where its located there on Valley Road. But what was the inside of that church like? What did it look like?

[00:29:50] JM: Well, we had an organ. We had a platform that the preacher preached on. We had—how many classes did we have in there Ruth?

RM: One, two, three, four, five. About six.

JM: About six. About three on each side. They'd have a class. You could hear what one class was discussing and what the other one was.

RM: If you weren't paying attention to your own, you heard the other one. I can remember one time—what's her name?—Kate, Jay [?]. They lived out there where Joey Himes lives now. Anyway she had a class...[click] Hun?

JM: Do you have the records?

RM: No. She had a small class up on the stage, Sunday school. A when we had church first, she took money off of what the children had put in first. [laughter]

DF: John, when you were living there on Weverton Hill, did you ever go up on Maryland Heights?

[00:31:09] JM: Oh yeah.

DF: By the forts?

JM: Mm-hmm.

RM: No you were never up there.

JM: By Harpers Ferry.

RM: You were on your side of the mountain.

JM: Yeah.

DF: But did you ever go up on Roof-side, there up on Maryland Heights, the old brick forts were there?

RM: No. Not that I know of. No.

DF: I believe we have a cannonball in our possession. [JM: Yeah] Tell me about that cannonball.

[00:31:32] JM: Well, we was building a wall, me and Pete Higgins [?], building my wall there in the front yard. We found this cannonball in the wall. And I finally cleaned it up up and gave it to your dad. So they must have had a—I don't know where it come from. [laughter] It had to be shot there, I guess.

DF: It's in my house.

JM: Is it? Yeah, that come out of my wall.

RM: I got tired of moving it from place to place. It was too heavy.

[00:31:57] JM: I don't know how it got there. Do you have any idea how it got there?

DF: Well, it's a twelve pounder, which means it's a smooth bore, would have come from a smooth bore cannon. Which means, probably it was left there by the Confederates when they were in the Valley during the Antietam campaign. I think it probably dates to that period.

JM: But it was in the wall, the old wall we tore down.

DF: Well, they could have left something behind. It was solid shot which means there's no powder inside of it. It was a solid shot iron. And it's very likely it was a Confederate ball from 1862, that's what I think.

[00:32:37] JM: Yeah, I found it, and I said, well, I know who to give it to.

DF: Well you found the right person when you handed it down to me.

[laughter]

DF: Good. Do you have any more questions Jackie?

JB: Are there any other memories or stories or characters that you can remember from railroad, or Harpers Ferry, or the Salty Dog? Colorful little anecdotes that you think would be interesting?

[00:33:06] JM: Hmm. [laughter] When I was on the track, as a night watchman, I used to make sure I got ice cream up at the store about seven or eight o'clock.

DF: Where was the store located?

JM: What was the first store?

RM: Whose store are you talking about? Aunt Maynes [?]?

JM: No, the one that's...

RM: Yeah. The first store was—Bob and Charles had the first store. Then Tallia Harrisons', then Aunt Maynes' store.

[00:33:38] JM: Yeah, I'd get to Aunt Maynes. Yeah, there's three stores there, yeah.

DF: In Sandy Hook?

JM: Yeah.

DF: John, where did you go to elementary school?

[00:33:45] JM: Bingham school.

DF: And where was that one located?

JM: Right there at Weverton Hill.

RM: It's where Anna May and George Cabaut [?] lived.

DF: That was the school?

RM: That was the school.

JM: Yeah.

DF: Okay. I know where that is.

[00:34:00] JM: I went there eight years. And I was a janitor eight years.

DF: You were a janitor?

JM: Eight years.

DF: At the school?

[00:34:07] JM: Right. I made the fire. The county furnished the wood and coal. I was responsible for making [the fire in the] pot belly stove. There were eight classes in that schoolhouse, one room. I was responsible for making the fire, and keep it going during the day. After school I swept out the building. And during the day, I carried water from the next door neighbor and put it in to a jug so they would have water.

DF: You did this while you were in high school?

[00:34:36] JM: No, I did it in below [?] school. I started at six years old. I was janitor, eight years.

DF: Did you get paid for that?

JM: How much do you think I got?

DF: Ten cents a day.

[00:34:48] JM: Two dollars a month. Now once in a while, when it was cold, my dad said, "Just sleep in, and I'll go down and make the fire for you, and you can go down later." When you were six-years-old, you needed a little help. My dad didn't have a job. He looked at WPA, didn't have any work, or anything like that.

DF: So you would walk down the hill? [JM: Yeah] And then walk back home?

[00:35:11] JM: Oh yeah, it was only—not very far. I lived right at the top of the hill. This is the middle of Weverton Hill.

RM: He knows where it is at. Anna May Cabaut's [?] house.

JM: Yeah.

DF: And your house was located at the top of Weverton Hill?

JM: Yes, right at the very top.

DF: Is your old house still—does your old house where you were—were you born there? Is it still there today?

JM: Yeah it's still there. Yeah, mm-hmm.

RM: Arnold and—well Caroline is dead now—Arnold and Caroline lived. It's where Calvin and Dot [?] Winter moved the first time. Before they built that new house, new brick house.

[00:35:48] JM: I always had a complaint against the education system. I worked eight years at Bingham School and went to the ninth. I went to Brunswick, and had to go back to the eighth. Frederick County only went eleven years. We went twelve years. I hollered, "Discrimination" right away. Didn't do no good. I had to go twelve years. My cousin same age, he come out a year ahead of me.

DF: So you don't think that twelfth year did you any good?

[00:36:14] JM: No. I passed 9th grade and then had to go back to the 8th. But they changed that. In 1949, Frederick county had to go to twelve years. We have a reunion of [inaudibles] [19]40s. We only have the classes that go to [19]48.

RM: [19]49! That when they stopped graduating them.

JM: Discrimination! You can talk about that.

DF: What was your best subject in school?

[00:36:44] JM: Sports. [laughter] Sports! I played soccer and I played baseball. I wasn't big enough for—I did not have enough ambition for basketball. I played soccer and middle linebacker.

RM: I liked history and geography.

[00:37:07] JM: Hey, Ruth was on the basketball team. They were champions one year.

DF: At Brunswick?

RM: Yeah, in [19]42.

JM: 19[41]? [19]42. Yeah, your last year.

RM: Yeah, I quit in [19]42.

DF: What position did you play?

RM: I was guard.

[00:37:23] JM: She had guard. They didn't play it like they do now.

RM: We used to play half the floor. I had seen upon half. Couldn't get over in the other half. As much as I wanted to, I couldn't do it. And they had three forwards with me, and well, there's three guards and three forwards and three guards and three forwards at this end.

JM: Now they play all over the floor. You didn't know that did you? [laughter]

JB: Now did the two of you meet in high school?

[00:37:58] JM: Yeah.

JB: So it wasn't just a random stop in the Salty Dog Saloon?

[laughter]

DF: Well John, you would have been....Ruth said that her dad stopped his operation their at the Salty Dog in [19]43. How old were you in 1943?

[00:38:20] JM: Ten, twenty?

RM: No you wasn't twenty.

JM: No, not in [19]43. I was born in [19]23.

DF: Okay, so about twenty.

RM: You'd have been twenty in [19]43.

[00:38:32] JM: I was in the service when they stopped it.

DF: Are you both the same age?

RM: Yes.

JM: Five days different and I'm the oldest. [laughter]

RM: His is the 29th of September and I'm the 4th of October.

DF: Both of you Libra?

RM: Yeah.

[00:38:53] JM: When I retired she retired. I waited till her birthday to retire on. She retired at sixty years old at thirty years service. And after I retired, they put it up to sixty-two. But I got out ahead of that. And now it's back to sixty on the railroad.

JB: Well, that's it. Thank you very much John and Ruth.

DF: Fabulous.

[End of interview]

