

R. L. BAKER

Interviewed by

Louis D. Silveri

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SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER

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Mr. R. L. Baker Asheville, North Carolina (Haw Creek) 1972.
Interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri.

Dr. Louis Silveri: Let me start by asking you how far back your roots go in this part of the country, and where your family came from.

Mr. R. L. Baker: Well, Old Tommy Baker. He come in from Scotland. He got a state grant for about a thousand acres of land in Yancey County. Well, it was on a stagecoach line, and he built a store and a post office where they got mail once a month. The stage passed through about once a month. He raised eight boys. I don't remember the names of all of them, but there was Milton Baker. That was my grandfather, my father's father. Then there was Sam Baker; he lived up at Arden up here. He got a state grant for land. State grant at that time was fifty cents an acre! He got... I don't know... three or four hundred acres of land and went to raising hogs and cattle. He got to putting brands... you know they branded cattle so they could tell them apart. So, he got to branding other people's cattle. I'm going to tell the good with the bad! So, the law got after him, and he left over night and drove through by Murphy and into Ellijay, Georgia. That's about twenty-eight miles beyond Murphy just across the North Carolina Line over in Georgia.

Well, he bought a farm over there. I don't remember; it was about 1907 or '08 when he left. He lived over there, and he wrote my granddaddy (my grandfather) on Christmas. He wanted to come and spend Christmas with him. The old man made whiskey over there and drunk it all the time. On his hundredth birthday he spent Christmas with my grandfather, and he was going to stay a month. My father had a horse and buggy or rather a mule and buggy, and I went to the Depot to meet him. He came in on No. 10. They called that train Cannon Special No. 10. He caught it in Asheville off of the Murphy Railroad; came up there and stayed two or three weeks, but he went back. He lived to be--two or three years after that. He was over a hundred when he died. My grandfather was in ninety when he died. My father liked from the last day of February to the twentieth of May a'being ninety. They was a bunch of them boys. They's about eight or ten. You know they raised big families back then.

Dr. Louis Silveri: Yes. Did your father come to Asheville in that time?

Mr. R. L. Baker: Yes. He was born up here at Arden in 1872; he lived up there, and he married my mother. She also lived up at Arden on a place called Avery's Creek. She was a Graham, Theodore Graham's daughter. ;

Mr. Baker: The Grahams come from Sweden over here. The old man, Lewis Graham, and I happen to have a piece of furniture that he made down here in my garage. He died in... oh, 1710 I believe it was on his marker at the cemetery, real old. But I don't remember much about my mother's family. My grandfather was in the--I think it was the Confederate War. That was back in 1865. Do you remember if that was the Confederate War?

Dr. Silveri: Yes, that was the Civil War at that time.

Mr. Baker: Civil War?

Dr. Silveri: Yes.

Mr. Baker: Yeah. So he met my grandmother in Knoxville, Tennessee, and married her. She was a Wells. She was a widow of a soldier who had got killed in that war. for she had three children, and he raised seven by her which my mother was one of them.

Dr. Silveri: So, your mother comes from Tennessee?

Mr. Baker: Well, no. Her mother did, but my mother was born and reared up here on Avery's Creek. My grandfather when he come after he got married-- you could get a permit to make apple brandy. You've heard of apple brandy? So, he got a permit from the government and had to pay tax on it, and he had a big apple orchard--oh, hundreds of trees. The law cut him out about 1910; he wasn't allowed to make any more, but he was allowed to make one hundred gallons of whiskey a year out of corn. When the Gators come in (that's what they called the revenue men) to measure his liquor, he'd never have ten or twelve gallons gone out of that barrel. However, he kept it full, you know.

I remember the old still! My sister and I used to play in it. A great big, copper pot. Oh, it had a cap on it! I couldn't describe how it was made, but he run a government distillery and bought a bunch of land. I believe he told me he paid, bought a hundred acres for five hundred dollars, five dollars a acre. That was before I was born, of course. That was in 1870 some; yeah.

Dr. Silveri: So, he made his living from farming?

Mr. Baker: Made his living from farming, and he had this permit. He could make so many gallons of brandy a year and so much corn whiskey and rye whiskey. It was all--he had two barrels: one was rye whiskey, one was corn whiskey, and I remember the old barrels back... I was six or seven years old, five or six.

(Cont'd.)

Mr. Baker: / Then my father moved when he and my mother got married in '98. He moved to Mills River; that's up in Henderson County. Farmed, but before he left, I was born on Brevard Road right at the Henderson County Line in 1899.

Dr. Silveri: Can you remember your father talking about politics at all? Was your father interested in politics?

Mr. Baker: He was a Republican.

Dr. Silveri: A Republican.

Mr. Baker: He was a leader at his precinct, and in his day he had a fair education. No one had a college education then, but he had a fairly--and if I do say so, he was a very intelligent man. He was a Republican, and therefore, I've never let--I've always been a Republican; however, I vote more or less for the man.

Dr. Silveri: It wasn't unusual just to find Republicans up here in the hills then in Western North Carolina?

Mr. Baker: No, no. The Republicans is about--well now over this precinct, I'm the chairman here. We have about two hundred Republicans registered. That's about six hundred registered, and about two or two fifty is Republicans. The rest of them is Independents. I don't know why they register that away, but they most all--the Republicans carried this precinct in '68.

Dr. Silveri: Well, then your father was involved in Republican politics; you said he was a precinct leader.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, out at Avery's Creek out at Arden.

Dr. Silveri: Did he ever run for any public office at all?

Mr. Baker: No, never did. No, no. He was a school superintendent for several years, a little one-teacher school. I went to that school and got through the seventh grade. They wasn't much way to get an education then unless you had money; you couldn't work your way through colleges at that time. We run a corn mill, the real name is gristmill, and we ground graham flour. Back then there was a lot of whiskey being made, and we--I know we'd grind a lot of meal to be made into whiskey, which they'd never tell us. They'd pay the money, and I ran the mill most of the time. My dad done the farming. A lot of times I'd have to start in at eight o'clock in the morning and work all night, keeping the corn ground for the neighbors.

Mr. Baker: Today there isn't a gristmill in this country; they're all gone! All the flour mills are gone; there may be one in Madison County, I believe the Silvers Mill. Everybody raised wheat and raised their own hogs, and there wasn't no refrigerators. They'd kill a steer and hang it up and dry it; call it jerky. Have you ever heard of that?

Dr. Silveri: Yes, I have some.

Mr. Baker: We'd dry beef; it was very good. Yeah, it was the best you could do then.

Dr. Silveri: Well, did your father raise any tobacco?

Mr. Baker: Nothing, only chewing tobacco. He'd--we'd call this Bullface chewing tobacco. He'd raise a lot of it, and make twists out of it and sell it. He used it, but I never did. I never smoked, and I never used it. However, I raised tobacco.

Dr. Silveri: Well, then you were born in Arden, you said?

Mr. Baker: That's right. Born at Arden; I moved here in 1925.

Dr. Silveri: What did you do when you left, when you finished school?

Mr. Baker: What did I do?

Dr. Silveri: Yes.

Mr. Baker: I got a job in a sawmill.

Dr. Silveri: Oh.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, back---I think it was a dollar a hour.

Dr. Silveri: What year was that? Do you remember what year it was?

Mr. Baker: Oh, it was about 1919; I was nineteen years old, and I worked-on up 'til '24--'23, and I went up to New Jersey and worked awhile. My mother had a sister who lived up there, and I stayed with them and worked at a coal company, Lackawanna Coal Company.

Dr. Silveri: Well, by the time you went up there it was 1923, you say?

Mr. Baker: 1923.

Dr. Silveri: What do you remember about the First World War down in that part of the country? Was there very much talk about the war up there in the hills? Did you join?

Mr. Baker: Yes. They got more men--drafted more men out of Western North Carolina per capita. They was all able-bodied men; they didn't turn down any. There wasn't any in poor health. I registered, but they didn't call me in World War I. See, the war was over in 1918, on November 11, 1918. My draft call would have been November 20; so, they missed me. I had two brothers and four sisters.

Dr. Silveri: Well, then you worked in a sawmill for awhile, and then you went up to New Jersey?

Mr. Baker: That's right.

Dr. Silveri: Why did you go to New Jersey?

Mr. Baker: I got to wanting to go up and help my uncle in the ice business. He run a ice business. He'd go up there on the lake in the winter and cut ice. He had an ice house; he'd pack that ice in sawdust, and then sell it. Well, he'd sell it all year 'round because up there they all had ice boxes, and it was coal heat. There wasn't no oil heat at that time. Their vegetables would spoil. We'd carry it up maybe three or four flights of steps, this ice and put in the ice box with their milk and stuff. I worked there 'til about May; then I got a better job with this coal company, which my uncle was very glad that I got it. He wanted me to make money. I left there in about a year, and come back and got married the sixth of May in 1925.

Dr. Silveri: When you came back from New Jersey, did you intend to come back to stay in North Carolina?

Mr. Baker: Yes. My wife--we was already engaged, and she didn't want to move up there. So, the day we was married--the day before I was married, I rented a house on Maple Drive over here. My father lived over on Grassy Branch. We sold our big farm on Avery's Creek; we had a hundred-acre farm out there. He sold it for--at that time it was a pile of money--he got seven thousand dollars for it, and since, it sold for a hundred and fifty thousand!

My wife and I, we married May 6, 1925. The morning I started to get married I had thirty-one dollars in my pocket. Had enough to make a down payment on a little furniture. She had some quilts and dishes, and we moved in a house across the bank from the fire department. Then I bought this two acres over here, built me a small house on it and kept adding to it.

(Cont'd.)

Mr. Baker: / You've seen it; it's over there. now.

Dr. Silveri: When you got married, what job did you have? Were you just farming?

Mr. Baker: No sir, I had a truck, and was a'hauling stone, a'helping build a development up here at Grovemont. They called it Grovemont; that's to the left of Swannanoa, about a mile beyond Swannanoa. It's quite a settlement now. I worked there from '25 to '28, and when E. W. Grove died, (he was a'building that development) they closed it down. Then I got a job with a contractor a'hauling stone and lime for brick layers on the Hall Fletcher School, and they was a lot of apartment houses. I hauled sand then up 'til about '30, and then in 1929 my oldest son was born. Then I got some farming tools and went to farming around here, growing wheat. It was a hard life. I made a pretty good living.

Dr. Silveri: Well, do you remember anything about the Stockmarket Crash in 1929?

Mr. Baker: Oh, I remember all about it. Everybody lost all they had. There was only one bank that survived, and that was Wachovia. The Central Bank went down, and the Battery Park Bank closed, and the First Union National closed. The Wachovia was the only one that was left. You couldn't borrow any money at that time. It was--I don't know. But it was--there was money, but it was--a man like me couldn't get ahold of it.

Dr. Silveri: Well, I understand there was quite a scandal involved in the banks--bank closings in Asheville.

Mr. Baker: Yes. Wallace Davis was the President of the Central Bank and he went to prison for defraud. They was six suicides. The week the bank closed the mayor of our town, Gallatin Roberts, committed suicide, and they was a couple of men in the Central Bank. They was about six or seven suicides in two days after that crash!

Dr. Silveri: I understand the city tried to shore up the banks by depositing city money in the banks--

Mr. Baker: Well, the City of Asheville had some money, and they tried. They knew that the Central Bank was going to close, and they put--I don't have any idea how much, but they put some money in there to try to hold it up, and I think probably that's why Mr. Davis went to prison. But the Wachovia's been steady; it never--

Dr. Silveri: You must have known people who lost money when the banks closed. . . . [inaudible].

Mr. Baker: Yeah, there was a farm over here, about a ninety-acre farm on Willowbrook Drive, turns off about a mile down here to the right. That was called the Carter Farm. Mr. Carter borrowed fifteen hundred on it from the Central Bank, and they foreclosed on him and had an option to sell. It brought four hundred and ninety dollars. L. B. Jackson bought it, a real estate man that lives out on Kimberly Avenue, and also built the Jackson Building there in Asheville. He later made a development out of it, houses now.

Dr. Silveri: How many acres of land did you own by that time, say by the end of '29 into '30?

Mr. Baker: I had two acres.

Dr. Silveri: Two acres. You had no trouble about holding on to that?

Mr. Baker: No, no. I bought it on credit, and I paid seven hundred dollars, and I had a piece of land right here where this house sets, and I swapped this acre in on this down here and paid seven hundred difference because I wanted a corner lot. This Mr. Creasman that owned this property let me pay a hundred dollars a year on it for seven years, kept the interest six per cent, and the payments on the first was about a hundred and thirty dollars, but I had no trouble.

Dr. Silveri: You had no trouble paying that off through the 1930's?

Mr. Baker: No, I worked mighty hard. I would work at Grovemont a'hauling stone, and at five o'clock I'd go up on the river and load up these round river rocks. They were slick rocks, and I'd take two tons of them over on Kimberly Avenue. We built a lot of those houses, and we built them with those river rock. I got four dollars a load, and after I'd eat supper, my wife and I'd go up and get another load, and we'd get in bed by ten o'clock. I'd make eight dollars after I done this work up there. I was hauling stone for twenty cents a ton!

Dr. Silveri: And then you made eight dollars afterwards?

Mr. Baker: Afterwards.

Dr. Silveri: That was good money, wasn't it?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, that was a lot of money, and we lived well. I had money enough to buy me a mule, but the government was putting out-- they called them W. P. A. mules. But I wasn't interested in that. I didn't want to get tied up with them; so, I bought my own mule on credit and paid for it along.

Dr. Silveri: What was a W. P. A. mule?

Mr. Baker: Well, McClure--Mr. McClure here in Asheville was an agent for the government, and he'd order five or six car loads of mules every spring and let the eligible people that didn't have no way of getting a mule have them on credit. Most of them paid for them.

Dr. Silveri: But you didn't want one of those. Well, you weren't eligible for one, were you?

Mr. Baker: Yes, I would have been.

Dr. Silveri: Would have been?

Mr. Baker: Yes, but I didn't want it. Then I went to T. S. Morrison Hardware and bought me a plow, mud plows to plow. I'd be using it when I came in from work; I'd work 'til dark and make my crop. I grew wheat; that was the only way you could get any flour. You had to grow it if you didn't have any money to buy it.

Dr. Silveri: What else did you grow?

Mr. Baker: I grew hogs; I was in the hog business. I'd raise maybe twenty or forty head of hogs a year. Sell them for four or five cents a pound.

Dr. Silveri: Did you ever have any trouble selling them at all?

Mr. Baker: No. No, the market was in Asheville. I had no trouble selling them. I sold most of them to the City Market. Now, the city built what they called a City Market. They had about forty stalls in there; each man would rent a place. I remember Manley's Market and Jackson (colored people). Jackson had a market; they'd sell meat and vegetables. There was about twenty five or thirty of those in this one building and they was all a'wanting hogs. I'd have to kill them and dress them and take them to them, and get four cents a pound!

Dr. Silveri: Four cents a pound dressed?

Mr. Baker: Dressed.

Dr. Silveri: You were glad to get that, too.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, I remember I killed ten one day, and they'd just got a government inspector. He found one of them's liver was spotted, and he turned it down on me. They poured oil on it and destroyed it. It was about three hundred pounds; it would have brought me twelve dollars. That twelve dollars was a lot of money.

Dr. Silveri: This was during the 1930's you're talking about?

Mr. Baker: Right, the 1930's and up to about '32.

Dr. Silveri: Well, that's an important year, 1932. You remember the Presidential Campaign in 1932?

Mr. Baker: Oh, yeah. In 1928... let's see... Hoover ran in 1928, and Roosevelt beat him. Am I right?

Dr. Silveri: No, in 1928 Hoover ran against Al Smith.

Mr. Baker: Al Smith, and he got beat because of his religion! Because he wasn't a Protestant. Then in '32...

Dr. Silveri: Roosevelt came...

Mr. Baker: Came along, and he done six terms. He done up to '40, about four terms apiece.

Dr. Silveri: Who did you vote for in '32? Hoover or Roosevelt?

Mr. Baker: I voted for Hoover. The reason I did: if they'd have let him alone, he'd have got this country out of debt. But after Mr. Roosevelt got in--he was for the poor man, I think. He started all of these government works: W.P.A.; and later on they got whiskey stores in. Mrs. Roosevelt came to Asheville and made a speech, and they finally voted whiskey in here. All the whiskey you got then was mountain whiskey; they called it blockade.

Dr. Silveri: You voted for Hoover then in '32, and then what about when Roosevelt ran again in 1936 against Landon, a Republican?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, I voted for Ralph Landon.

Dr. Silveri: You voted Republican most of the time?

Mr. Baker: Most of the time except for the man up in Missouri...

Dr. Silveri: Harry Truman?

Mr. Baker: Harry Truman.

Dr. Silveri: You voted for him?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, and I was well pleased with him for the first two years until he done MacArthur like he did: fired him in World War II. I didn't regret it, however, because maybe MacArthur needed firing, I don't know. I don't know too much about that.

Dr. Silveri: Well, let's go back to the 1930's, the early 1930's. You were doing mostly farming in those years, then?

Mr. Baker: That's right. Mostly farming.

Dr. Silveri: Right. You mentioned you raised wheat, and you were raising hogs.

Mr. Baker: And corn and tobacco.

Dr. Silveri: Corn and tobacco, also.

Mr. Baker: Yeah.

Dr. Silveri: And what about the prices you were getting for these? Were they--

Mr. Baker: Well, in 1936--no, I believe it was 1932, I had three acres of tobacco, and it brought me less than a hundred dollars then. That was about six cents a pound.

Dr. Silveri: What are you getting for tobacco today?

Mr. Baker: I got--eighty-nine cents was the highest I got this year in '70 and '71 crop. On the market average seventy-nine ninety, the whole Burley market to eight states. There's eight states that goes Burley; it liked just a few pennies a'averaging eighty cents all over the belt.

Dr. Silveri: You've grown Burley tobacco all the time?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, since 1931.

Dr. Silveri: What is the difference between Burley and what's the other one... bright?

Mr. Baker: Flue-cured? Well, Burley is a air-cured tobacco, and flue-cured, you have to cure it by heat, takes five days to cure it in a barn, air-tight barn. They used to burn wood. Now they've got modern; they burn gas. Natural gas lines goes to every farm down east, and that's the most economical way of curing it. A lot of flue-cured this year brought a dollar and a half a pound. That is, certain grades of it.

Dr. Silveri: Right. Well, the tobacco you grow, does that go into cigarettes?

Mr. Baker: That's cigarette tobacco; yes it is. It's blended with the flue-cured, about half and half. Well, it's about one-tenth of it Turkish tobacco grown over in Turkey. But we do grow a lot of Turkish tobacco here in the states now.

Dr. Silveri: Oh, that's interesting. I wanted to ask you...back in the 1930's did you receive any government subsidies for what you were producing?

Mr. Baker: After A. F. C. S. went in, I don't believe...it went about the time in 1936 when Social Security started, and I did get a few checks. I don't remember how much. It didn't amount to much, but it was a whole lot of money at that time. But they'd pay you so much not to grow--you was only allowed so many acres of wheat, and if you'd been growing more acres than

Mr. Baker: (continued) that, they'd pay you so many dollars an acre for what you'd leave out. Then, they'd give you fertilizer to fertilize your pastures and your grasslands. Now this afternoon I went and got an order for a thousand pounds of fertilizer and the government paid twenty-eight dollars on it, and I have to pay the rest which will be sixteen or seventeen dollars.

Dr. Silveri: Well, do you know what the government was trying to do in the '30's in giving these crop subsidies and making the farmers grow less?

Mr. Baker: The idea was to cut production. In the '30's after Mr. Roosevelt went in, they hauled hogs and wheat out to sea and dumped it in. You've heard of that. They done that... and sugar, down in Louisiana, them sugar plants, the government would buy it and destroy it so the sugar cane people would make more money.

Dr. Silveri: How did you think of that during that time? Did it bother you at all when they were destroying all that stuff when people were very hungry in the cities and couldn't get it, food and so on?

Mr. Baker: Well, they had commodities then through the government, and they was a lot of people on Haw Creek that got those commodities. I never received any of it because I was too industrious. I worked too hard. They was lots of people got-- same as they do today, like rice and grits, and stuff of that type.

Dr. Silveri: Well, how in general were the people living in Haw Creek at that time? Were they pretty bad off or did they--

Mr. Baker: Yes, they was. We had one man, Mr. Berghouser up here, came in from Missouri, Kennett, Missouri. He started a big chicken farm. So he give a lot of people work. He was pretty well fixed. But the chicken business went down suddenly, and he lost what he had and sold it out. Mr. Haun up here bought it, about a hundred-acre farm. It's still up here all intact. Then N.A. Miller Company down here in the '30's had a little store room about the size of your livingroom, about twenty by forty, and they was selling groceries. When the youngest boy got out of the Navy, he built the hardware in that big store as it is now, the feed store. It was a several hundred-thousand-dollar business, and he died in the early '50's. It's still a'going on as it did.

Dr. Silveri: Well, you said you moved into Haw Creek about 1924?

Mr. Baker: '25.

Dr. Silveri: '25? Why did you come here? What attracted you to this place?

Mr. Baker: Well, I liked it because you could get more work here. Now, I had a team, and I'd get to plow gardens in the spring. Get three or four dollars a garden, and I could plow four or five a day. The rest of the people around were working for a dollar a day. There wasn't anybody hardly had any teams, but me and my father. We had a team a piece, and Mr. Creasman, the minister down here, used to preach at our church. He owned all of this property here, and he persuaded me to move down here and tend to his land; he wanted me to help him out. He had a car and couldn't drive it; he wanted me to drive it on Sunday for him. He sold me this place down here, and later sold me where I'm at now.

Dr. Silveri: It's a beautiful valley, isn't it?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, it's beautiful.

Dr. Silveri: About how wide and how long is it? Have any idea?

Mr. Baker: Well, it's from Miller's Store--the little valley is two miles long, and I'll judge it's--oh, from the foot of the mountain up here... about a mile wide!

Dr. Silveri: About a mile wide. Do these peaks that are surrounding us have names?

Mr. Baker: Yes. Haw Creek...well, that's about the only names any of these branches had. Then over come down the center was branch, and the rest of it was branches. Then we'd call this branch that come over here Carter Branch; Chris Carter owned that big farm. That's toward the center branch; it was just a little--it wasn't a very large branch.

Dr. Silveri: How about these mountains around here? Do they have names? Each of these mountains that surround this?

Mr. Baker: Yes. We have this mountain to our right here; we have Piney Mountain. That at the head of the creeks is Mount Meadows, and the little mountain to my left here is Cisco Mountain. This first mountain you see from Oteen here, that's called Alli son Mountain that Alli son owned.

Dr. Silveri: That s the one where the Blue Ridge Parkway was built.

Mr. Baker: That's right; yeah. He sold them the land where they built the Parkway Road.

Dr. Silveri: I think before you were telling me that when you moved in to Haw Creek there were very few people living here.

Mr. Baker: About twenty-two or three families.

Dr. Silveri: Twenty-two or twenty-three families. How many would you estimate are living here now?

Mr. Baker: Well, I'd say from Haw Creek School up a'counting all the developments, they's about four thousand.

Dr. Silveri: Four thousand people?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, families. Because this little Bowling Green up here's got a hundred and twelve houses, and that's on thirty acres of land; they's alot of developments on up above here. Have you been to the other creek?

Dr. Silveri: Yes, I've been there.

Mr. Baker: I can remember since 1907 or '08, we had--where I was raised up here on Averys Creek, we had about two country doctors, and none of them surgical doctors. We had one small hospital here in Asheville, and I've seen the wagons on Biltmore Avenue in mud, and the horses couldn't hardly go. No cars, I can remember it before there was any cars, and they was only about three general merchandise stores in Asheville. Bon Marché was the first one to build a nice store, and then we had down on the river Chedester's Store. That was a general, one-stop store. I remember when Asheville population probably of fifteen hundred or two thousand. Seen all the hotels built; wasn't no motels.

Dr. Silveri: Today it's about seventy thousand people living in Asheville.

Mr. Baker: Seventy thousand; yeah, that's right. We got interstate roads and expressways, and back . . . it was only dirt roads and no paved roads at all. There next to West Asheville to Asheville, it was all dirt roads. You couldn't hardly go through there. I've seen the mud . . . the axles on wagons dragging the mud. They had two watering troughs where you could water your horses: one on Biltmore Avenue and one on Pack Square. The old courthouse stood on the Square where the monument is.

Dr. Silveri: You are talking about many years before the First World War?

Mr. Baker: Yes. I'm talking about 1908 on up 'til the First World War. After the First World War they began to pave streets. The City got more money to bond elections.

Dr. Silveri: Let's move up again into the 1930's. You said you were farming a couple of acres of land. You bought more during the 1930's, didn't you?

Mr. Baker: I bought the rest of mine in the '40's, the early '40's. I thought this would be in the '30's; no, I farmed about ten or fifteen acres I rented. Paid a third of what I made to the landlord to get it, or the landowner. I'd grow wheat; I bought a machine to cut wheat and tie it. They called them wheat binders or grain binders. I had modern machinery of the day.

Dr. Silveri: You were using mules?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, I pulled those with mules. Then later my brother bought the first Ford tractor I'd ever seen. I'd pull it; it was made on the order of a T-model. It had iron wheels. You've seen the pictures of them in old relics, I guess.

Dr. Silveri: I think so; yes.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, and we used one of those. That's a step up from pulling it with mules because they would get hot, and you'd have to rest them in June and July when you was cutting this small grain. Every farmer here on the creek had a wheat crop, and the people that run these custom thrashing machines--they was so much wheat grown here on Haw Creek, they'd try to beat one another here to see who would get here first. The one who got started down here on the lower end of the creek, he got to thresh it all, all over the creek. The farmers would all get him together and turn the rest of them back.

Dr. Silveri: Was this wheat mostly for--

Mr. Baker: For bread.

Dr. Silveri: For bread of the farmers. They didn't sell much of it in the market.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, wheat never did go under a dollar a bushel. That's a pretty good money crop, but corn got down in the depression to twenty-five cents a bushel. You couldn't get a market for it, no mills.

Dr. Silveri: You said tobacco--you were selling tobacco for four cents a pound.

Mr. Baker: The lowest I averaged was seven cents a pound, and the highest is about eighty-one cents this year. Yeah.

Dr. Silveri: Where did you bring your tobacco to sell it?

Mr. Baker: Well in 1929 they opened a tobacco market here in Asheville down on Valley Street, and the Chamber of Commerce built the building and got the buyers and opened the market to give the farmers a tobacco market. Prior to that, we had to haul it to Greenville, Tennessee. I'd haul several loads over there.

Dr. Silveri: How far is that?

Mr. Baker: About seventy miles.

Dr. Silveri: Seventy miles?

Mr. Baker: That's on #70-North.

Dr. Silveri: Well, when you took it to Asheville, you brought it to the auction barn, is that it?

Mr. Baker: At the auction barns. They had--well, there was Reynolds, Austin, Lorillard, Liggett and Myers, China-American; they all bid on it, and I worked the tobacco market for twenty-five years.

Dr. Silveri: Did you?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, I'd work every night, 'way the back of a night.

Dr. Silveri: You did this during the 1930's?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, on up 'til two years ago.

Dr. Silveri: Oh, really? Well, you had many different jobs during the 1930's!

Mr. Baker: Oh, I worked! I'm telling you! That was of a night that I was working at the tobacco warehouse. But after ten o'clock in the night

Mr. Baker: (continued) when you got back, you could get in the bed and go to sleep; felt pretty good the next day, get up and go to work. I'd get five hundred dollars for six weeks' work! Starting since the '40's and on into the '50's and '60's, they raised me the last year I worked. I got eight hundred dollars for six weeks, and I bought my place and paid for it. I hauled these rock as I was telling you, owning a truck, plowing with a team.

Dr. Silveri: And you were raising four children during that time!

Mr. Baker: Four children. Yeah, two boys and two girls.

Dr. Silveri: How much did you pay for the land you bought all together, the eight acres? Can you remember it all together?

Mr. Baker: I paid three hundred dollars an acre for this down here in '41.

Dr. Silveri: You were telling me the other day what you were offered for it recently.

Mr. Baker: Yeah.

Dr. Silveri: For that land.

Mr. Baker: I was offered a lot of money; I didn't see the money, but the man wanted to buy it. I paid seven hundred dollars, I told you, for this down here. Although I swapped this land where you live here now 'cause I don't own the acre here, and I swapped that and banked seven hundred dollars difference because I wanted to be down on the corner. Wasn't nothing but a mud road; you couldn't hardly get up this road in the winter time, and I've had a truck and a car, T-model truck and T-model car. That was all you could get then.

Dr. Silveri: Well, I wanted to ask you what your neighbors thought of Roosevelt and the New Deal, his program in the '30's?

Mr. Baker: As a whole, they didn't like it. They claimed that he was spending taxpayer's money. They'd split wood and drive stakes up in the ground and put straw on it and sow grass on the sides of the road, which it wasn't too bad. It give the people three dollars a day, and they got certificates. They could swap these for groceries; they'd get a little money.

Mr. Baker: They had a camp called a C. C. C.; I don't know what it meant. They built a lot of roads with that, new roads. They'd take and grub with mattocks and axes and saws, didn't have no bulldozers then, just the old way of making roads. The C. C. C. back in the '30's had a big camp, and had four or five hundred boys in this camp and sent the money to their families. If it hadn't been for that, I guess people would have suffered. Back then there wasn't no welfare like there is now, which I think is too much welfare now. It's over done, and elderly people--there wasn't any nursing homes in '30's and '40's; they had to stay at home. There wasn't no hospitals enough to take care of them, and their families had to take care of their old people, elderly.

Dr. Silveri: So on the whole--

{end of Side I}

{Side II}

Mr. Baker: A whole lot less than a billion. Hoover, in World War I, rationed the bread, and they had wheatless days and meatless days, and after the war ended in 1918, they'd build factories here. They'd move in from the North, I suppose to get away from the Unions; that's what they claimed. Built the Sayles Bleacheries over here. Beacon Blanket Company up here, they make the Beacon Blankets. Then there were two cotton mills, textile mills built in Asheville since World War I. There was no jobs prior to that, only farming, carpenter work and stuff like that. There was more carpenter work went on in the '50's, that's when the big boom started in building developments and houses. Then it skyrocketed in the '60's, and today you can't find a carpenter hardly; there's so much building.

Dr. Silveri: You mentioned you were a Republican and were fairly active in the Republican party.

Mr. Baker: That's right.

Dr. Silveri: Did you do any kind of political campaigning for any candidate?

Mr. Baker: Well, I was a judge in the election prior to the voting machine; then I'd operate a voting machine, and my wife would operate a voting machine. It would take a man or woman to operate it. You've voted with machines. Prior to that, we had metal boxes. We'd mark our ballots and drop them in this box. I counted ballots starting when the polls close at six thirty and count 'til ten o'clock the next day many a time in primaries where a lot of people would run.

Mr. Baker: I know in 1952 it took us 'til eleven o'clock the next day to get done counting down here at Haw Creek. We had about nine hundred or a thousand registered, and there was several candidates a'running for different offices. I never got to sleep, but I enjoyed it. That's one thing the county paid me good for! I believe for that day and night I got fifty-eight dollars!

Dr. Silveri: Wow! Can you tell me something about the governors of North Carolina that you remember most, good ones and bad ones?

Mr. Baker: Well, we had Cameron Morrison; he added to Broughton-- to Morganton Hospital for the mentally sick. Then here come Broughton, and he about doubled it. He was a good governor. Governor Cherry came along in the '50's, and he built schools for the deaf and the blind. They've all done pretty well. This Governor Scott has added more taxes than any governor we've ever had, and he'll go down in history for being a tax man. He's added to our real estate tax, beer-whiskey and wine tax, five cents a pack on cigarettes, and highway taxes.

Dr. Silveri: Well, you can buy a pack of cigarettes in North Carolina for twenty-five cents, can't you?

Mr. Baker: Well, fifteen cents back prior to Governor Cherry, and Terry Sanford went up on them some, and Bob Scott has went up tremendous in the last three years.

Dr. Silveri: I've seen some gas stations with signs saying a carton of cigarettes for two dollars and fifty cents.

Mr. Baker: Yeah.

Dr. Silveri: That's very cheap.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, now up North, you'll pay right around four dollars a carton up there.

Dr. Silveri: That's right.

Mr. Baker: I know when my people from New Jersey comes down, they'll get about twenty cartons a piece and take back with them. However, it's agin the law, but they do that. I don't know... in Denver, Colorado they're fifty cents a pack where they're about twenty-eight cents when you buy them by the carton here. Let's see... well, they're hardly twenty-eight. Two dollars and a half... twenty-five cents.

Dr. Silveri: Well, what do you think of the big companies of North Carolina: the tobacco companies, the textile companies, and the furniture companies? There's a lot of furniture made in North Carolina, isn't there?

Mr. Baker: Well, it's the furniture outlet of the world, just about, here. Down east there's more furniture factories than any other country and any other state in the United States. South Carolina is the textile country, state, of the world.

Dr. Silveri: North Carolina is very close to that!

Mr. Baker: Very close. I wouldn't know what percentage, but South Carolina in population is out-growing North Carolina on account of so many factories. Yeah.

Dr. Silveri: Of course, the tobacco industry in North Carolina--

Mr. Baker: Yeah, Reynolds Tobacco Company, Duke Tobacco, Lorillard, Liggett and Myers; they's more cigarettes made in North Carolina than any other state in the Union, and Tennessee comes next. Florida is the cigar state (no cigarettes), but cigars there.

Dr. Silveri: You know western North Carolina is very important for its mountain people. Do you consider yourself a mountain. . . western North Carolina people?

Mr. Baker: I do, yes. I've always said what a mountain man couldn't get, he could do without very easily because he was used to doing without, and if you live in the city, what you can't get, you have to get, you didn't.

Dr. Silveri: Mountain man was able to make a lot of the things he needed himself, right?

Mr. Baker: Yeah.

Dr. Silveri: On what he'd find.

Mr. Baker: Back in the '20's after World War I up where I lived at Arden, a girl and a boy getting married--their father would give them some land, and all the neighbors would go in and build them a house in one day out of logs. You've seen those log cabins. I know they was a widow woman; her husband died up there, and her house burned down, and the whole neighborhood went in

Mr. Baker: (continued) and cut the logs, notched them together, and put the roof on it in one day!

Dr. Silveri: Amazing! Of course, there were a lot of stories of how mountain people made their whiskey.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, a lot of them made whiskey!

Dr. Silveri: Right.

Mr. Baker: That was about the only way you could get any ready money then in the '20's before the whiskey stores come in, a lot of prohibition was in. It sold ready made for twenty dollars a gallon. Of course, down in Tennessee the revenuers would go down there and get it for ten dollars a gallon.

Dr. Silveri: This was corn?

Mr. Baker: Made out of corn.

Dr. Silveri: How was it? Was it very strong?

Mr. Baker: Yes, it was. If it was made out of a copper still and made right, it was better than this... than the best grade of whiskey you can buy at the store today!

Dr. Silveri: Do you remember what percentage of alcohol it had?

Mr. Baker: It was hundred proof!

Dr. Silveri: Hundred proof!

Mr. Baker: A lot of them would make a hundred and ten! They had a way of testing it. You shake whiskey, and there will be a bead come on it. You know what I'm talking about. If it stood half way on top and half way on the bottom, that was a hundred proof. That's the way the old timers proofed it. Today the modern distilleries has proofing machinery that they can test it in. But the old timers when I was growing up, they would test it by the bead.

Dr. Silveri: I understand they liked apple brandy very much, too.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, a lot of apples made into brandy.

Dr. Silveri: Was that easy to do? Or was that harder to make?

Mr. Baker: Well, you had to beat these apples up. You had a wooden mallet; it was sawed off at the bottom square and had a handle on it. You would put them in a long trough. People would hew out trees like canoes. They'd pour it full of apples and beat them up. They'd take cheese cloth and put over that to keep the flies and gnats out of it, and it would set there three weeks. Just before it turned to vinegar, when it was hard cider, they'd distill it and make apple brandy.

Dr. Silveri: That went for a pretty good price, didn't it?

Mr. Baker: Yes. It was about the same as corn whiskey, maybe more. They was a lot of peaches grown in this country then, and they would make peach brandy. A lot of people had apricot trees; they'd make a little apricot brandy. But the only apricots I know of now is up at Henderson County. The Gerber people that makes this baby food, they have got a farm where they're grown; they can't buy it.

.... All in the '50's: Gerber Baby Food Company, then Taylor Instrument Company. They make doctor's equipment. . . things that you listen to your heart, those scopes. That's a large one; probably you've been up there.

Dr. Silveri: I haven't seen that yet, no. What about 1940? That was another year Roosevelt ran for President.

Mr. Baker: Things had picked up, but we had a slump along then. Money was hard to get, and the banks wouldn't pay but one percent on the money up until about '59. When Truman came in, the banks paid a little more interest, about three percent, and today if you've got it on say, put ten thousand dollars in, you can get six percent. It's gone up quite a bit.

Dr. Silveri: How old were you in 1941?

Mr. Baker: Well, I was forty one. I was born six months before the century was. This is '72. I'm seventy two.

Dr. Silveri: Right. You were too old for the Second World War, right?

Mr. Baker: No, I registered and got in 1-AH that was with dependents, and they didn't call me. However, they called one of the neighbors that had seven children, my own age. He went in, and his family drew over eight-hundred dollars a month to keep those children up. He went to the Navy; Billy Roberts.

Dr. Silveri: What did you do during those years? Did you still farm?

Mr. Baker: Raised hogs and chickens and farmed. This big chicken house down here--I'd raise fifteen hundred chickens in there and clear fifty cents a piece on them, seven-hundred and fifty dollars in nine weeks. I'd just grow one batch after another. Feed them ever night, work of a day, and my wife would help me. I can't leave her out; she worked as hard as I did.

.... More judges and lawyers come out of that one county than any other county in this state. Leading men: Zeb Vance, the one with the monument on Pack Square. He was a governor and a judge. Jeter Pritchard was a governor [sic] at one time and a lawyer. Just numbers of them, if I knew their names, I could name them out of these mountains. They believed in education, and they had very good colleges in Tennessee, and Chapel Hill at that time was the closest. Now you see, this university is not over fifteen year old here, sixteen. We have a lot of educated men here.

Dr. Silveri: Have you ever done any hunting in these hills?

Mr. Baker: I used to deer hunt.

Dr. Silveri: Did you ever go after bear?

Mr. Baker: I've never been on a bear hunt; no. But I've been on a lot of deer hunts. We used to--in the '20's and '40's racoons and opossums, the skins were valuable. You could get seven and eight dollars a piece for a racoon hide (skin), and you could get a dollar and a half for a opossum skin. Opossum, minks, and muskrat, they'd go along the creeks. A muskrat skin would bring three dollars. I know when I was a boy in the... around World War I, the fur buyers would come here, and I've sold fifty and seventy-five dollars worth in a season of skins I'd trap and hunt.

Dr. Silveri: Just here in Haw Creek?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, and up in the mountains on Avery's Creek up at Arden. Most of my hunting was up there at Arden; there's a lot of coons, bear, and deer up there. People wasn't too interested in killing the deer back then. They'd kill one to eat and that's all they wanted. They'd have to dry it; there wasn't any refrigeration.

Dr. Silveri: As you mentioned food, maybe you can tell us something about what the people ate around this area in the past few years.

Mr. Baker: Well, back when I was young, they ate as good or better than they do now. They raised their own turkeys, their own chickens, produced their own eggs, had their own milk and butter, and raised their potatoes, their corn and their beans. In the stores back then, there wasn't cereals like there is now. There wasn't but a few items they sold in stores back when I was a boy.

Dr. Silveri: And of course biscuits!

Mr. Baker: Yeah, they'd eat biscuits which I haven't had one in a long time, and they're really not good for you.

Dr. Silveri: They're so delicious.

Mr. Baker: They are delicious, but they are heavy on your stomach. Why, we use to set a good table. Mother, when we were looking for special company, we'd have chicken, ham. She'd roast a whole ham, and my Dad knew how to cure them. They were delicious, and better than these hams you get out of the store. They called them country hams.

Back when I was a boy there wasn't no peanutbutter that they sold at the store; there wasn't no cereals. Little oatmeal was the first cereal I ever heard of, and if you got any ice cream up until the '20's, you had to make it. You took your vanilla flavoring and your ice cream salt and so on and put it in a freezer. You've seen it made, I guess.

Dr. Silveri: Yes. How about the special greens they eat down in this area?

Mr. Baker: Well, turnip greens, mustard greens; I used to grow beets for greens and sell them to Oteen Hospital. Yeah, they'd pay me. I'd get a dollar a bushel for the turnip greens; I'd get two and a half a bushel for beets. Beets--they'd feed them to these sick people; they've got a lot of iron in them. The doctors recommend them. Oh, I made good here when I first moved to Haw Creek. My father and I growed vegetables for the government hospital. The eggs I produce today I sell to nursing homes. I get a premium for them; they have to feed them a lot of raw eggs at a nursing home. We have good eggs, and they're fresh.

No, people eat as good or better in the '20's, them that worked, than they do now. My Dad--in the wintertime, you poured your ashes. You sawed down a tree that had a hollow place in it, and you set that on a flat rock. You cut a groove; you'd pour water on those ashes, and that'd drip out, and it'd

Mr. Baker: (continued) be strong lye. You had to wear gloves; it would burn your fingers off, if you didn't. But you could pour that lye into about a bushel of corn, and it would take the skin off the corn. Then they'd boil it about eight hours and called it hominy. You've seen hominy here in the stores. Well, we always made that. Mother made her own soap; didn't buy no soap. Made our own butter; sold butter instead of buying butter. Had three or four cows; we'd take the milk and fatten hogs.

Dr. Silveri: You mentioned you used mules before. I guess that's what most farmers used in this area.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, mules.

Dr. Silveri: They are supposed to be stronger than horses?

Mr. Baker: They are; yes. They's a lot of horses, but most everybody prefers mules. Of course, they are obsolete now. They are no more; I'm the only man--there's one more mule in this country, and that's all there is in Haw Creek.

Dr. Silveri: Three of them now.

Mr. Baker: They're obsolete now; you don't never see any more. The tractors and machinery has took their place, and I'm very glad of it because I'm not able to follow them like I used to.

Dr. Silveri: Quite a few of them were blind. Blind mules were pretty common.

Mr. Baker: Well, back in then, when they'd log with them, they'd pull them so hard they'd go blind. Hard work will run them blind, but we never did work our mules like that. When they got tired, my Dad would make them stop.

.... People needed homes, there wasn't no theaters to go to, wasn't no radios. I can remember when the first gramophone or talking machine they called it at that time came in, in 1917. Had a great big horn on it. At the end of school, we'd have commencement, and that was a two-day celebration at the end of our schools. They'd get some man that had one of those. We called them talking machines then, people here in the mountains. They are consoles now. They'd put on--they called it an exhibition then.

Mr. Baker: The churches used to meet, and they called them homecomings and exhibitions.

Dr. Silveri: What did you do for social life? Was social life mostly around the church?

Mr. Baker: Well, a lot of times, or at homes. The girls and boys would meet at a home. Mothers and fathers were much stricter on the girls than they are now. They's always pretty loose on the boys, but the girls had to walk the line. We'd meet and play games. Oh, different games, and on Saturday afternoon we'd have ball games, the boys and the girls. A lot of mountain boys have made the big leagues. Yeah.

Dr. Silveri: How about dances? Were there any dances?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, I used to be a square dance fiend! I used to go to a lot of square dances. My wife didn't like it; so, I found out it wasn't setting too well with her. So, I had to quit. I enjoyed them. I want you if you're here in August to go to the Mountain Jamboree over here at the auditorium.

Dr. Silveri: Yes, I 've heard about that.

Mr. Baker: That's a wonderful thing. The New York people, a lot of them, has took that over. There's a lot of that up in New York and Pennsylvania now. It's mostly Jewish boys and girls that makes music. They all are.

Dr. Silveri: Mountain music was supposed to be a special kind of music. What was his name? Bascombe Lamar Lunsford?

Mr. Baker: Yes, he's the minstrel of the mountains they call him, but he's ninety years old. I doubt he'll be at another one. His boys took his place.

Dr. Silveri: He was the most famous mountain man from here.

Mr. Baker: Most famous mountain man! He was a lawyer, and he was a collector of songs and poems. Why, he's got a half a million dollars worth of stuff at his home today!

Dr. Silveri: Did you ever see him sing?

Mr. Baker: Oh yes, I've been to his home, and Lamar, Jr. and I used to work together with the Farm Bureau. We traveled together; he was the field

Mr. Baker: (continued) man, and I was a director over here of our Farm Bureau. We've got a Farm Bureau over here in this county with about thirteen hundred members. We get our insurance cheaper.

Dr. Silveri: When did you become a director of the Farm Bureau?

Mr. Baker: Oh, about twenty years ago. I was a charter member, and they made me a director and still am. Tried to run me this year for vice-president, but I told them I was too old; didn't want it. My wife was sick, and I couldn't go to Raleigh, Washington, and Chicago to these big conventions. If she could stay by herself, I would, but nobody'll stay with her. I've lived with her forty-seven years; I've got to stay home and take care of her now.

Dr. Silveri: That's a long time to be married! Forty-seven years!

Mr. Baker: Well, it'll be forty-eight the sixth of May. We'll be married fifty years in 75. That'll be three years from now. Yeah, we've been married forty-seven years.

Dr. Silveri: You've seen a lot of happiness in this country.

Mr. Baker: Oh, I've seen this country go from little old trails to these paved roads you see today and these beautiful homes. I've seen it back when I was growing up, you'd cut chestnut wood five feet long and haul it out here to Canton, and they'd make paper out of it, you know, a paper-mill. I've helped cut a' many a cord of that. You could haul one load a day to Canton, or we'd load it on a car usually out here on the railroad. A car load of it at five dollars a cord. . . we would put twenty and twenty-four cords in a car, would be. . . we'd get a hundred dollars out of it.

Dr. Silveri: This was another one of your jobs you did?

Mr. Baker: That was another one of my jobs I did. I know the year I was married I bought a boundary of timber on the head of the creek. Me and another fellow went in together. We might have made a dollar a day out of it. I had a truck, and we got money enough to buy groceries with what we had. Didn't have to buy much because we grew most of what we had. We had our own eggs, our own milk and butter. I grew my own wheat; we had biscuits. Grew my own corn; if we needed cornbread, we had that. Fed the mules and the hogs corn. I'd go to hotels and get some swill and fatten these hogs. I didn't have no trouble paying for my place. I'd sell enough hogs every year to pay for it. You've got to look ahead though.

Dr. Silveri: Raising tobacco. You always raised it for cash crop?

Mr. Baker: That's cash crop.

Dr. Silveri: Right. About how many acres did you usually raise?

Mr. Baker: Well, used to you could raise all you wanted, but they've got it down now. I'm not only allowed twenty-two hundred pounds.

Dr. Silveri: Oh, that's acreage allotment.

Mr. Baker: That's my allotment poundage. I can grow all I want, but I can only sell twenty-two hundred pounds. I like two hundred pounds having my poundage this year, but it's held over for another year; so, I've have two hundred more on my allotment. You never lose it.

Dr. Silveri: Is there a price support on tobacco today?

Mr. Baker: Oh yes. Yes, if it don't bring what these government graders marks on it, they take it and pay you for it, or the warehouse man does. That's the best thing that ever happened to tobacco although it's costing the taxpayers a lot of money.

Dr. Silveri: How much of a government subsidy was there in the last price you got for your tobacco?

Mr. Baker: The government subsidies this year on top quality was seventy-one cents.

Dr. Silveri: Seventy-one cents!

Mr. Baker: If you didn't get that, they'd pay you.

Dr. Silveri: I see.

Mr. Baker: I've got a card down there I wished I had in my pocket to show you the subsidies on it.

Dr. Silveri: Are you going to plant tobacco this year? Aren't you, right?

Mr. Baker: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you, I've got to pay a lot of tax, insurance.

Mr. Baker: Well, I could pay it without tobacco; I wouldn't have no trouble, but it saves you checking your money out when you get this check in December.

Dr. Silveri: About how many acres do you put in tobacco?

Mr. Baker: Well, this year I had over a acre to make the twenty-two hundred pounds. We average about twenty-two hundred pounds a acre here. I had about a acre and a half this year, but the drought... we had a dry summer, and it didn't grow heavy. It was a light grade of tobacco.

Dr. Silveri: You do all the work yourself?

Mr. Baker: All except cutting and hanging. I have to hire help, and that's hard to get.

Dr. Silveri: Now, you know to me this soil around here looks like it's red clay.

Mr. Baker: A lot of clay; yeah.

Dr. Silveri: Do you have to put a lot of fertilizer on it?

Mr. Baker: Well, I do. This year I put too much fertilizer, I think, but I'm getting soil tests through the State. I'll know exactly this year what to put on them. I have got one acre of low land down here where I grow sweet corn, potatoes, and beets. I don't try to grow any garden crops on my clay land, but all this bottom land up and down the creek is lowland. It's good for any kind of vegetable crop, and also for tobacco; it grows well in it. You grow your heaviest tobacco on clay if you get a rainy season, but if you don't, it don't grow too big.

Dr. Silveri: I think you told me it doesn't take too much work while it's growing to take care of it.

Mr. Baker: No, I plow it with my mule one time, and then I take the tractor and plow it about three times. Then I buy this MH-30, costs six dollars a gallon, and it takes two gallons to the acre. I spray it, and I don't have no suckers. If you let the suckers come out between every leaf, it cuts your poundage down and makes it cure out green. It don't make a good-quality tobacco; so, we spray it with MH-30. The government tried to outlaw that, but they found out it didn't hurt the tobacco. So they let us remain as we did, spray it.

Dr. Silveri: Well, when the tobacco is ready to be picked, do you do it yourself?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, cut the whole stalk down. Then you've got a sharp spear that fits on the end of the stick, and you just put seven stalks on a stick. Let it stay out in the field if it don't look like raining for four days, and it lightens up. A lot of that water gets out of it; then you can handle it easier and put it in the barn. However, I have to hire a lot of help, and you can't hardly get help in this country. These won't work that's on welfare; they think it'll take their welfare check away from them.

Dr. Silveri: Well, now do you have a barn in which you hang the tobacco to dry?

Mr. Baker: Oh yeah. Yes, my barn holds an acre and a half.

Dr. Silveri: How long does it take to dry?

Mr. Baker: Well, I cut it the first of September, and then October I go to classing it, pull it off in three piles. The first thing you stalk is lug. That's what they want most for cigarettes, and middle part of it is--they make a lot of chewing tobacco and cigar wrappers, and the tips is made into snuff. There's more snuff used in this country than you think.

Dr. Silveri: Snuff?

Mr. Baker: Oh yes.

Dr. Silveri: Fixed the way they used to?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, in their lip. Yeah, there's a lot of it used. You'd think they'd get away from that.

Dr. Silveri: By the time the leaves are dry, they're very tender and fragile, aren't they?

Mr. Baker: Well, if it gets damp or comes a moist spell, it gets tough, and then you can pull them off the stalk. But in dry weather you can't touch it; it's just dry, and it shatters.

Dr. Silveri: How do you load it for market then when you carry it away?

Mr. Baker: Well, I've got plywood. I pack seven hundred pounds on each basket. I've got hooks and I get another man, a man can load a seven hundred pound basket, and I've got iron pipes you put under those baskets. You can put it pretty easy on those iron pipes. Used to be we tried to lift it; didn't think about those pipes, but me and another man lifted a loaded pile that weighed six eighty, I believe it was.

Dr. Silveri: Did you get it up on your truck?

Mr. Baker: Get it on my truck.

Dr. Silveri: And take it down to the market?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, I can haul five-thousand load on my truck without setting it on top of one another. Yeah, when I get down there, they weigh it off, and you can get a ticket for what it weighs. Sale day you go back and get your check.

Dr. Silveri: Are you there when it's sold at the market? Are you there when the bidders come through and bid on it?

Mr. Baker: Oh yeah! I always watched my tobacco sold, and when I worked these twenty-five years at this warehouse, when we'd have a sale, I worked down here on the river. There's a bunch of Jewish people got that now; they keep cotton in there. But I'd go back and check out the back room sale days. We sold three days a week. Take 'til about two o'clock in the day to check it out, but of a night I'd sleep. Sleep, maybe five or six hours.

Dr. Silveri: When the bidders come around and bid a price for it, you don't have to sell it at that price do you?

Mr. Baker: No! no, the way you do if you don't want it, you just--the ticket is put in. There's a fork--there's a stick. Say this pen was a stick here; you just put this--say put them down in there so they won't lose them. Then if you reject the price, you just double that up and put in there, and the man that marks the price and puts the money on the card, he just passes that up. So you sell it again, or move it, or anything you want to. It's your tobacco 'til you get the money out of it.

Dr. Silveri: Did you ever refuse to take--

Mr. Baker: Yes, I have.

Dr. Silveri: What did you do with your tobacco then?

Mr. Baker: I hauled it to another house. I refused on five piles at one warehouse, and took it to another house. Sold it the next day, and made a hundred and eighty dollars.

Dr. Silveri: More than you would have made?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, more than it brought. Yeah, I moved it. I didn't see any moved this year; everybody was happy. But that was back when it was dragging, and the bids wasn't too crisp. But every company wanted it all. Why, Reynolds would have bought every pile in Asheville if they could have got it. But they had to divide it among eight companies.

Dr. Silveri: Do you think that most of the tobacco growers are small growers in this--

Mr. Baker: They're small growers. We have an A. G. Ledford at Barnardsville that has twelve acres; that's the biggest grower in the county.

Dr. Silveri: I can see how very important it is for the individual farmers, small farmers.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, if it wasn't---we're taking Madison County and Haywood County, and back in Mitchell County and Yancey County, and also Carter County in Tennessee. If it wasn't for that little tobacco crop, these little children would go barefooted in the winter. I know that to be a fact because in Carter County, Tennessee it's a pauper county, and those men may grow their little albtments for their tobacco. They buy their children clothes, shoes, and school supplies. Yeah, there would be a lot of barefooted children in the winter today if it wasn't for this Burley tobacco.

Dr. Silveri: In spite of what the government says about how injurious it is to health, people are smoking more than ever before.

Mr. Baker: Well, they are banning the television ads; they didn't let that out. Of course, the magazines got all they could. Lorillard that makes Phillip Morris cigarettes and Raleigh Cigarettes and other brands that I don't know, they had the biggest year this year in history, and the government knocked the televisions out. I read where the American Broad-

Mr. Baker: (continued) casting Company lost fourteen million dollars they would have got if the government hadn't. They took the cigarettes out of Oteen Hospital there for awhile, I seen where they put them back.

Dr. Silveri: You mentioned you raised vegetables, and you sell most of that stuff that you raise.

Mr. Baker: Yeah, I do; yeah. We use what little dab--not much, we don't use much. We 'll fill our freezer with vegetables and meats, and the rest of it I sell. I have no trouble. People call me every night 'til ten o'clock when corn's in wanting me to save so many dozen corn for them, to go in their freezers. I've been out at daylight and in the dew and get plumb wet a'getting corn. I know one morning this summer in August, I had a hundred-dozen orders for the State San; they wanted a hundred dozen. About fifteen women called wanting five or ten dozen apiece, and I had to get this corn to the State San by eleven o'clock. I just had to let some of the women go 'til the next day. Yeah. Oh, it's a rush on when I have vegetables. Everybody wants them!

Dr. Silveri: What was corn selling for this past year?

Mr. Baker: Fifty cents a dozen.

Dr. Silveri: For sweet corn? Up where I come from it's ninety-five cents a dozen!

Mr. Baker: But the State San--I'd get fifty cents here from the neighbors, and they'd State San pay me sixty and sixty two because they'd call Pearce-Young-Angel, a big wholesale house, and whatever they said the price was, State San would pay me that! You'd get your cash; they won't give you checks. You get your cash everyday, if it ain't over two hundred dollars. They're not allowed to pay over two hundred dollars to any one man in one day. If you have over that, you'll get a check at the end of the month through Raleigh down here--through the State.

End of Interview