Interview with Hugh Creasman on August 16, 1976. Interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri.

Dr. Louis Silveri: .... The other gentleman who talked to me about it was Richard Jarrett. Are you a friend of Mr. Jarrett?

Hugh Creasman: Oh, yes!

Dr. Silveri: I interviewed Jarrett about eight weeks ago now.

Hugh Creasman: Oh, Richard! He's quite a guy!

Dr. Silveri: Yes. He mentioned that a number of people from that area had worked on the Biltmore Estate.

Hugh Creasman: Well, that was the main source of employment back then.

Dr. Silveri: Did you know the Moser family, at all?

Hugh Creasman: Moser?

Dr. Silveri: Yes.

Hugh Creasman: No. I know some of the present Mosers, Dave, in the plumbing business.

Silveri: No. This is the other branch. One of these Mosers used to work for the Biltmore Estate, too, but I guess that was before. Mr. Moser is eighty years old now. His father used to work on the Biltmore Estate. Mr. Moser (younger) went to school on the Biltmore Estate, or nearby in Biltmore. So, your father did have a little bit to do with the Forestry school there?

Creasman: Well, no. He was just, what you might call, a laborer in planting. Dr. Schenck secured the seedlings for the white pine groves that they had. Now you see evidence, quite a few of those have been removed for farmlands and things. But I remember when the whole area was completely covered with white pine on some of those dairy farms, now.

Silveri: Where did your mother come from ?

Creasman: She was a native of that area, too, born in the area.

Silveri: So, you have roots on both sides of the family right in that area of Buncombe County. What kind of school did you first go to?

Creasman: I guess the first school I went to was what they called the Bent Creek Church. It was one room. We utilized the church, and that included all grades of that particular area at that time. From there, they had another school down on [Highway] 191 toward the West Asheville area, that we walked to school. That was back before the bus days and before the paving.

Silveri: That was a bigger school, wasn't it?

Creasman: That was a larger school where they had more classrooms.

Silveri: I think Richard Jarrett showed me pictures of both of those.

Creasman: I guess he does have pictures of those.

Silveri: And the students out front, too. So, you started school around 1917, about when the First World War started?

Creasman: That was about right.

Silveri: How many children in your family?

Creasman: In my family?

Silveri: Yes.

Creasman: I just have one daughter.

Silveri: Oh, I mean brothers and sisters.

Creasman: Oh, there were six.

Silveri: Six.

Creasman: Six, and one was deceased. Well, they called it "membranous croup" back then, but it was actually diphtheria. I had an older brother, and then I had twin sisters. Then the one that's deceased would have been next. Then I came along, and then a sister and a younger brother. The younger brother came fifteen years later than my sister, who is about two and a half years younger than I am!

Silveri: (O. K.) How many grades did you go there in Bent Creek?

Creasman: The first school?

Silveri: Yes.

Creasman: Lands, I don't remember. I don't know whether they had one, two, three grades or not. Now, Richard would probably remember that better than I can. But I do know that I must have been in the fourth or fifth grade before I changed to the other school.

Silveri: What was the name of the school you changed to?

Creasman: It was called Venable.

Silveri: Venable.

Creasman: It's held Venable. I don't know what they would call the first school that I went to, just the Bent Creek Church School. Venable School, then, has held its name all the way through, and was a high school when I finished.

Silveri: The Venable Community still exists, there?

Creasman: Yes, and it's growing. I remember the days when there were very few people.

Silveri: You had a chance to finish through high school, at least. What about your father? Did he have a chance to go that far?

Creasman: Oh, no. I don't know how many grades he completed. He could read and write, but as far as going farther than that, he couldn't.

Silveri: People had to go to wars, or some of them had to help the family.

Creasman: That's right. Now, my mother had more schooling than he had, by quite a bit because she was very good. In fact, I was out of school for practically a year with an asthmatic condition, and she kept me up. In fact, she kept me ahead of the schooling. She was a very, very good speller, and she read. Now, I know that she won the spelling bee. You used to have community spelling bees, the older people against the younger people.

Silveri: What kind of books or newspapers did you have in the house ?

Creasman: Progressive Farmer, and a few of those old magazines. I don't remember exactly. We used to pick up some in school, books.

Silveri: Did you get the Asheville newspaper?

Creasman: Yes. We got that on the rural delivery.

Silveri: We are talking about quite a rural area that you were living in, back then?

Creasman: Well, in those days you would call it "remote," I guess, because the highways--you walked, or you had a wagon.

Silveri: What you call [Highway] 191 today, was an unpaved road, right?

Creasman: Oh, yes! Oh, yes!

Silveri: [Highway] 191 was the main thoroughfare through the region (the main road)?

Creasman: Yes, [Highway] 191.

Silveri: Your father did farming there. How many acres did he have, approximately?

Creasman: I wouldn't hazard a guess at the number of acres. We had acreage that he leased, other than what we had, because we had to produce so much to live.

Silveri: Was it pretty near a self-sufficient farm?

Creasman: I would think so. We had very meager finances, but we always had plenty of food. We had hogs; we had cattle.

Silveri: How would the mostly self-sufficient farmer raise the money to pay his taxes?

Creasman: Oh, yes, that was outside labor, or that was probably selling produce or selling a cow or a hog. I like the idea of those days because you weren't dependent. You had to do these things. You had to improvise; you had to have a little ingenuity, or quit. Sometimes people accuse me of improvising and things like that. I say, "Well, what I don't have time to go to the store and get it, I'll fix it until I can get time. " If the plow broke down or something else, you didn't have time to hook up the mules and ride all the way to town to try to find it. You utilized what you had. Now, in my later days I learned to "want" and forget my needs.

Silveri: You learned to "want " and forget your :needs?

Creasman: That's right.

Silveri: Explain that for me, please.

Creasman: Well, I thought needs were automatic, that I was entitled to my needs. I developed that philosophy of wanting. I was always wanting, and more or less, developing trends of getting that, or putting everything together so that the finances would work out until I could get what I wanted. My basic needs, of course, I developed the idea that they were automatic, and that I was entitled to them. That's worked out, I've noticed, in the whole country.

Silveri: That probably began back when you were going to school?

Creasman: That's right.

Silveri: Then you began to read and do other things other than what you had normally experienced on the farm . Your education was very enlightening. . . inspiring you to want to do different things from what your mother and father were doing.

Creasman:: That's right.

Silveri: Well, there's both good and bad in that, right?

Creasman: Yes, there is because I'm really no better, except for survival, I guess you would call it. Self-sufficiency: food and enough clothing, and that was a daily, as a matter of fact. You would go to bed with a full stomach and get up and start your various chores. So, what happens when you find out that other people have all of these other extras, we call it? I know during the

Depression my city cousins used to come out to the farm, and they were, more or less, destitute because they were depending on money alone in the city. We were able to give them produce, milk, butter, and things to fit their needs. So, it's quite a contrast between now and then. The fact is we sit and wait for things to come to us rather than go out and get them.

Silveri: .... [inaudible]

Creasman: Independence is what is important to me. I know when these programs came along (when I started to do public work)—Back in the hills these people were, more or less, independent. If they got short on cash, they would go down and sell a cow or hog. When the "almighty dollar" came in, the program came out in the Depression days. These people gave up and abandoned their livelihood, really, for the little meager dollar. Of course, in those days that dollar would buy things, but it started a new trend with the mountain people, this dollar. They found out they had more leisure time (they could buy these things and have more leisure time), and not have

Creasman: (continued) this drudgery of getting up at four o'clock and going out and milking a cow or feeding the hogs and things like that... [inaudible].

Silveri: .... [inaudible]

Creasman: I guess for a couple of years I worked odd jobs. My brother and I had a little service station out here in West Asheville. trying to get enough money to go to college is what we planned.

Silveri: .... [inaudible]

Creasman: Well, I had that desire. I had accepted that.... I wanted to study law.... I enjoyed that very much, going to the different....

Silveri: .... [inaudible]

Creasman-: .... [inaudible]

Silveri: .... [inaudible]

Creasman: Now I had year of law…that brought me up.

Silveri: .... [inaudible]

Creasman: I graduated in nine years.

Silveri: You graduated in nine years from a twelve year--

Creasman: Eleven years. You only had eleven years.

Silveri: .... [inaudible]

Creasman: I think we bought the service station out for about fifteen hundred dollars, which my grandmother let us have. Gasoline was about eleven cents a gallon. Then the government program came along, and I got a job with the government.... My father went into the Civil Service. I went down to State college and stayed a short time. I had an emergency appendectomy after a period of time there. I intended to study forestry, then, I got into....

Creasman: (continued) .... [inaudible]

Silveri: .... [inaudible]

Creasman: .... [inaudible]

Silveri: You were describing the kind of work you did on your first job with the government; circulation.

Creasman: Well, they had such a variable experiment going on which included your rainfall, intensity of rainfall, the evaporation, percolation, absorption, and runoff. We were, more or less, working on what the forest covers (different covers) influence, or the tree covers influence the terrain flow. Now, of course, long after that, we tried changing the water-sheds as to what would be on certain changes, like roads, trails, burning, and cutting back, and what your (diagonal fluctuation would
be on the streams.

Silveri: This was with the—

Creasman: Appalachian Forest Experiment Station.

Silveri: O. K. Was this in preparation for what later became the acquisition of land for the Carolina National Forest?

Creasman: No, this was conducted on the National Forest.

Silveri: It was already there?

Creasman: Yes.

Silveri: Then what did you do after that ?

Creasman: I made a little progress, got on Civil Service, and got assistant technician, and then came on up. I don't remember the ratings. They came

Creasman: (continued) slow, and a hundred and twenty dollars a year raise and few things like that, that didn't make. I first started in at an annual salary of sixteen twenty.

Silveri: In the early thirties ?

Creasman: Yes. Nineteen thirty-four.

Silveri: Nineteen thirty-four. Sixteen twenty.

Creasman: Which was adequate for a pretty good living. When I transferred to Geological Survey in 1939, I was raised all the way to two thousand dollars a year!

Silveri: Did you have some relationships on the C. C. C., jobs, that were established in this area?

Creasman: Yes, now, at Coweeta Experimental Forest. That's in Macon County. I was out there in the beginning of that, when you had to live in a tent, before they got a road in there for motor vehicle travel. We drew on the three-C camp for so many men, that was located at that time at Franklin. Then later, (I don't know what year) we got a camp within the immediate vicinity of the Coweeta Experimental Forest, which we could utilize all the help we needed.

Silveri: I understand that the Forest Service was in charge of the program of the C. C. C. camps.

Creasman: That's right. That was under the National Forest.

Silveri: The Army ran the camps ?

Creasman: The Army ran them.

Silveri: These were the mountain people coming down out of the mountains, coves, and hollows to work for the C. C. C. camps. Is that right?

Creasman: No. We had people from all locations that would come in there.

Silveri: Really?

Creasman: That was the purpose. Now, we had we called the "L. E. M. men," which were local enlisted men (we would call it). They were, more or less, (I would call them) guides that were native people that knew the terrain and things like that, that would be mixed up. We would have, not a great number of those, in the camps.

Silveri: They were mostly from outside?

Creasman: That's right. Now, when I was between this work in Copper Basin, Tennessee in 1934 or '35 (in connection with this, too) I think the camp out there outside the Copper Basin was called Tumbling Creek, Tennessee. They were mostly from the Boston area.

Silveri: I didn't realize that they transported them around like that!

Creasman: Oh, yes. I remember one group that came in from the extreme coast of North Carolina.

Silveri: You would think that a lot of people here in the mountains would have a need, and would be employed in these camps.

Creasman: Well, there were quite a few, but they would mostly be shipped out somewhere else out of their own area!

Silveri: Were there any blacks these camps that you can recall?

Creasman: They had black camps.

Silveri: Oh, they were segregated camps?

Creasman: Yes.

Silveri: Did you have any programs with them? Did you work with them, also?

Creasman: No, I wasn't connected with the black camps at all.

Silveri: Did you know William Nothstein ?

Creasman: Oh, yes! Bill lives over in West Asheville on Bradley Street.

Silveri: Yes. I've had an interview with him. Did you work with him in those years?

Creasman: He was working for the National Forest, and I was in a separate division, but we were together quite a lot, especially in the Franklin area. Bill was stationed out there.

Silveri: How about "Buck" Ray? His name is Landon Ray. Do you know him?

Creasman: Ray?

Silveri: His name was Landon "Buck" Ray, and I understand that he used to work for the camps, too.

Creasman: Landon Ray?

Silveri: Landon Ray.

Creasman: I know Hughlan. I don't know Landon.

Silveri: I think George Stephens worked in forestry back in those days, too. He had Stephens Press, but I think that was before you came along.

Creasman: Yes. That was before I came along.

Silveri: He worked in cruising.

Creasman: He was a timber cruiser.

Silveri: Yes. But you didn't do any of that work/ did you?

Creasman: We did quite a bit of that on the \experimental forest, just to find out what our cover was. Oh, I've done timber cruising!

Silveri: Did you have anything to do with the cruising of the land that later became the Great Smoky Mountains National Park?

Creasman: No. That was done through the National Forest boys.

Silveri: You went down, then, to the east, I think you said, to do some studying. What was the chronology after you got in Civil Service, which was in 1934, I think you said?

Creasman: Yes. I shifted between Coweeta, the Copper Basin in Tennessee, back to Bent Creek. I mostly shifted back and forth from those three projects. We were running stream-closed studies on the whole thing. Coweeta was the hydrologic laboratory of the whole area.

Silveri: Coweeta is the name of a town?

Creasman: It's a section.

Silveri: It's a section—

Creasman: Of Macon County.

Silveri: You mentioned Copper Basin, Tennessee. What was that?

Creasman: That's the denuded area caused by the copper smelting plant there. I wouldn't hazard a guess how many square miles of absolutely denuded area.

Silveri: I've heard about that. I've seen pictures of it. It's unbelievable.

Creasman: You'd like to go there and see that.

Silveri: Someone told me any businessman who was contemplating going into business, should go and look over that desert land, there! How long has that been like that? When was it done?

Creasman: Oh, heavens! That was back when they cut the timber off to smelt the ore.

Silveri: The ore was on the surface, right ?

Creasman: Yes, they found it near the surface, and now they are down thousands of feet in the ground. But my knowledge from local people, the older people, that the denuded condition began when they cut all the timber off and they piled this up to smelt the copper.

Silveri: Oh, they used it to burn, for the to smelter. Then they began to mine the ore.

Creasman: Then the sulfuric acid dissipated in the area, kept any vegetation from coming back, and then, of course, erosion and everything.

We were running studies on the soil removal, and the percentage of run-off, which was terrible. Most of it runs right off. I think the T. V. A. has been in there. We were in there trying to do some plantings. I did quite a few plantings. You couldn't do very well from the inside. You had to start outside, and it has closed in several square miles of vegetation coming in. But the erosion had been so terrific, it was down to no soil.

Creasman: (continued) sulfuric acid. So, during the Depression I noticed there would be car after car of shipment of sulfuric acid out of there. I think the ore became secondary at that time! There was more demand for the sulfuric acid, which they were losing in the air!

Silveri: Other than that, the company has not been very much interested in reclamation of that vast wasteland that they have produced?

Creasman: I don't think they have. I haven't heard that they would be. There are several government agencies that have expressed their desire to, to try to do that, but it would be such an enormous cost to try to have any immediate situation. As I said, the fringe of the area has been closing in with sagebrush and post oak and a few things like that.

[End of Side I, Tape I]

Silveri: You were a young man when you first saw that Did you express feelings of shock or dismay or anger that this was done to the land?

Creasman: Well, I had a seven-day job when I was down there. We had these meteorological stations set up. I think we had five. We had the different locations in the basin, and then we had some in the outer areas to see the different soil temperatures and wind velocities and rainfalls, so we could have a comparison of what was in the immediate area. I was kind of busy on the job. Trudging around there in a rain storm with this clay that built up on your boots, so you'd have to stop and knock it off. Most of the work you had to do was take these silt samples, and all of this data would occur during some of your storms. That would be only time you

Silveri: Were there any significant rivers or streams that went through that area ?

Creasman: The Ocoee River that flows into Parksville, Tennessee. They had a pyram in there. That rendered that dam unusable because of stories from of silt deposits from the Copper Basin. There was one little stream called Potato Creek that ran right through the middle, which was mostly just a silt flow (mud flow).

Silveri: Are they still smelting copper down there?

Creasman: Oh, yes!

Silveri: Is there still a lot of ore ?

Creasman: They told me three or four years ago that they had found the richest strike they had, some five levels down (whatever that means), ahundred-thousand feet.

Silveri: Is this around Ducktown?

Creasman: Ducktown. They have a mine there, and Isabella. A little place called Isabella, Isabella Mine. They have several mines there (or shafts) going into the mines. in the Jackson Building, leave off it (sic), and then go back. Over on Aston Street, there was a boarding house that had a parking lot, and load up again, and go back. Then when I got my delivery made, I'd go up to the post office and deposit my revenue!

Silveri: You got paid in cash all the time, of course?

Creasman: Um-hum. Yes

Silveri: What were you getting for the moonshine?

Creasman: Three and four dollars--

Silveri: For?

Creasman: A gallon.

Silveri: A gallon. This was during the 1930's?

Creasman: Yes.

Silveri: Money was scarce, but there were always people who were willing to put out hard cash for whiskey.

Creasman: That's right! Some of the lawyers and professional people, they had money, and that was a necessity in their life, I guess.

Silveri: Did you ever deliver any to Tom Wolfe's mother's boarding house?

Creasman: No, I didn't hit that place.

Silveri: How about the sheriff then? Who was the sheriff?

Creasman: I don't remember if it was Lawrence Brown or not. It might have been Mitchell. I'd have to look back on the record.

Silveri: It was after Jesse James Bailey, though. He was '29 and '30, I think, as Sheriff of Buncombe.

Silveri: We are talking about streams in Southeastern Tennessee, right on the North Carolina-Georgia border?

Creasman: Yes. They told me what caused the Tennessee Copper to do something about their air pollution on the stacks of smelting was that the suit of North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee caused them to bring in chemists to try to control the emissions. They found their greatest asset of copper, could gather this data. So, on a nice, sunny day I used to sit in the office and figure up the notes. Then on the very worst days, I was outside. That used to amuse the people there about me gearing up to go to work when the storm would start hitting!

Silveri: Everybody else was coming in!

Creasman: Everybody else was coming in! But that's the only time you had to be out.

Silveri: So, you only spent about seven days down there?

Creasman: Oh, I spent seven days a week working!

Silveri: Oh! Everyday.

Creasman: See, it was a twice daily reading of the meteorological stations, We had evaporation studies. We had maximum-minimum temperatures. We had soil temperatures at different depths, surface on down for maybe eighteen inches to two feet. We kept these daily readings. Then, of course, we recorded the relative humidity and temperature (that was recorded). We had recording rain gauges. That way you could tell what the intensity was by the recording. I was watching the recorder when it rained an inch in ten minutes! That's one of those local storms that hit in this hot basin. It just pours out. (Soil removal) We had plats there with gritted section of pipes (graduated pipes). We've have a frost heating effect; then we would have a heavy rain, which sometimes would remove an inch of this soil at one time.

Silveri: There were no people living in that area, were there?

Creasman: All around. They don't live right in, but Copperhill, itself, is quite the little town. They are stuck around on the edge.

Silveri: That's where the workers lived, who worked in the copper smelting plant and did the mining, right? Mostly?

Creasman: Yes. They lived on what we called the fringe of the basin itself. No, there's no people that live right in the open area. They live back where the trees have grown and what not.

Then McCaysville, Georgia is just across the river, (they have quite a wooded area). Then maybe fifteen miles, we have a large lake, Blue Ridge Lake.

Silveri: In these jobs you mentioned moving back and forth down there in Western North Carolina. Did you have much contact with the native mountain people from that area?

Creasman: Oh, I stayed and ate with them a lot. I enjoyed that!

Silveri: You boarded with them or when you were traveling, you just stopped off?

Creasman: Stopped off. I was out to visit some of the younger ones three or four weeks ago out in Macon County. I was out there on a meeting, and I just drove out in the hills there to see if I could find somebody that I knew. I had a nice, long visit. Oh, yes. The two old ladies that I stayed with for several weeks until I could get some shelter myself. Oh, they took me in just like a son. Of course, I was young then.

Silveri: Down in Macon County?

Creasman: In Macon County. Oat to what they call Otto.

Silveri: Otto?

Creasman: O-t-t-o.

Silveri: Did they have a farm ? [inaudible]

Creasman: Yes, they had a little farm, and they were independent (canned). You'll find that in Foxfire (a lot of those people that I knew). Oh, if I had one of those Foxfires, I could show you some of the people that I stayed with and ate with. Very hospitable people.

Silveri: What kind of board did you pay? How much did you pay? Do you recall ?

Creasman: Oh, I don't know. It might have been three dollars a week!

Silveri: That included the board and the room?

Creasman: Oh, yes.

Silveri: Did you eat good ?

Creasman: Oh, yes! Real mountain food. That's what I call your beans and potatoes and your meats.

Silveri: Could you describe what you would have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, if you were there for those meals?

Creasman: For breakfast you couldn't get by without a very big portion of country ham (that was necessary), and all the eggs you wanted (no limits to that).

Silveri: How were they cooked ?

Creasman: Anyway you decided on, if you wanted them scrambled or fried. Of course, hot biscuits and the country butter. You always had to top the last hot biscuit off with strawberry jam or apple jelly or whatever was there. (blackberry or dewberry)--

Silveri: A lot of coffee?

Creasman: Yes, a lot of coffee.

Silveri: Milk?

Creasman: Buttermilk, sweetmilk. I don't remember running into any tea drinkers, I don't believe. Now, they would have their own teas, like sassafras tea (which I like very much). I like it. Then they had what they called a spicewood tea. It was a spice shrub that they brewed down.

Silveri: All this time we've been talking, I was wondering if you ever did any moonshining through those years. Richard Jarrett told me a lot of interesting stories. He told me how he was involved in moonshine in here.

Creasman: Oh, I made moonshine! But I did have an ulterior motive. I didn't drink it at that time. That was to come later in my life. With the cooperation of another fellow, I was trying to raise enough money to go to school. In that little service station deal, I lost something like seven hundred dollars in bad debts. In those days you couldn't sell chickens or cattle or things like that. People didn't have any money for it, but there were some people in the City of Asheville that still had money and still liked good whiskey, so he told me that that was the better way of getting some money than anyway I could figure out. So, we set up shop, and I made seven hundred and fifty dollars on my part (I mean that's above materials), and I quit because I had enough to do what I wanted. So, I transferred from my postal savings here down to Raleigh , and that's when I went down to school.

Silveri: You didn't set up your still in the gas station, did you?

Creasman: Oh, no. I set that up back of Bent Creek, down below where the ranch is now. They call it the Bent Creek Development. They called it the ranch lands then.

Silveri: How long a period of time did you make it in order to make that money?

Creasman: It was only a few months!

Silveri: A few months.

Creasman: We had everything getting ready for the next one while this one was going!

Silveri: No trouble with the law?

Creasman: No. Well, in fact, I think the law expected some of the mountain people to do that as a livelihood. They weren't causing any trouble, and they weren't the type that were putting this out a pint at a time to all the people around. They were selling it in gallon lots to somebody that wanted it for home use. We only had a very few what we call local drunks, and they were excused. They weren't troublesome. We didn't have all of this--

Silveri: How did you market your moonshine? Did you just have contacts?

Creasman: Oh, yes! The professional people in Asheville. This fellow had a '29 Chevrolet touring car (something like that), and I would put it in shopping bags and carry it up into different offices. There were four half gallons. Your jars were two in each shopping bag. I would go up

Creasman: I saw Jesse James the other day.

Silver!: He Ts still around. He's eighty-eight years old!

Creasman: He looked pretty good! He had been sick, I understand.

Silveri: You made enough to carry you down to go to school. I wanted to ask you about these mountain people. You've been associated with them. I suppose, strictly speaking, that's the category that you fall into. You were born and raised up here in these mountains.

Creasman: There has been an awful lot said about mountain people, an awful lot of stereotyping, an awful lot nasty, bad things said about the hillbillies and the Appalachian people and so on. Anybody, who takes a chance at a close observation finds some sterling qualities among the people of ,the mountains, and a lot of things that they could teach a lot of other people.

Silveri: I wonder if you would comment on how the mountain people got stereotyped , and how they deserve it or don't deserve it.

Creasman: I think that was from misconception of intrusion of people coming into this area. I had sometimes three or four college students that would come into Coweeta for the summer, working. They seemed to resent — I don't know whether it was the independence of the people. I had one boy that came down from Syracuse University, and he stayed around there. He was always criticizing the way people lived, and the clothing they wore, the way they kept their house. So, one day I said, "Maurice, I've lived in a lot of areas. I always found at least one road leading in and out of the place. If I didn't like that particular location, I would take that road and leave it! " So, I never heard anymore comments

Creasman: (continued) out of him, but I used to be very resentful to the , just outward comments of these people because I knew that these mountain people were independent, and that they weren't out trying to exploit somebody.

If a neighbor got sick, the first thing they did was go care for that sick person. I know back when I was growing up, if we had a farm neighbor that was ill or injured, everybody threw everything else down, and went over and assisted him, and plowed his crops out and harvested his fields or whatever had to be done. There was no idea of compensation. But that was the era, I think, when compensation was the big item: I don't do anything for you, unless you pay me!

Now, my job afforded me pretty wide travel, and I used to have a hassle with the New England people, occasionally, when I would be up in that area. They used to hit me up for the integration that we had down here. The old widow lady that I lived with up in Hartford kept the divinity students for divinity college here. I said, "How do they avoid having integration? It's the law! (Of course, that was up in the '50's)'

She said, “When they come to the door, I just tell them I don't have any room! The room has been taken!” I said, "Down South, we don't do that sort of thing. We don't lie about it. We just tell them we don't keep them! We've been that way, but we don't lie! " Well, we used to have quite a discussion (She was a sweet thing.) about my mountain living and what not. I said, "It was wonderful! We didn't have to worry about the

Creasman: (continued) next-door neighbor!"

Silveri: I wanted to ask you about the church. What role did the church and religion play among the mountain people that you have observed?

Creasman: Back in my day you were supposed to go to church. You didn't have an alternative. Sunday morning you got up and turned the cookstove eyelid upside down, and got you a rag and polished your shoes out of it, and got ready. Sometimes you would go three times during the day. On Wednesday night you went to church.

Silveri: It would most likely be a Baptist church, right?

Creasman: Baptist church, or we had an Interdenominational in that area because there wasn't any other denominations. Then it turned into the Baptist. That's where the Bent Creek Baptist Church started. I've seen some feuds in the church as I've seen them in the one we have right here. These factions that we have today were there then, but they seem to, more or less, get their difficulties straightened out, and it's always back.

Silveri: It's a claim that the mountain churches have been other worldly. In other words, they were exclusively concerned with salvation, and not very much concerned with what's going on around them in social causes and so on, that churches produced a kind of fatalism among the people back in the mountains years ago. Everything was in God's hands, and so no use trying to do anything . . . [inaudible]. That's the way life was.

Creasman: That's what I got away from, religion. Of course, when you get out in this wicked, old world, you change your ideas fast from what you were used to! What I call back in those days we had the fear religion. I developed the idea that God, as I was told, was a god of wrath, and anything that you do, he was standing there ready to club you! It was many years later that I changed my thoughts on that, but I couldn't see that as having fear of living because everything I figured by the time I finished high school that I had five thousand years in purgatory for the things I had done and probably another ten thousand on things I intended to do! So, you see, that's not good! That's not good.

Now, I like the broader sense of religion as living a day by day basis and making that as comfortable and happy as you can.

Silveri: What about politics back in those days through the T20's and '30's?

Creasman: Oh, that was heated!

Silveri: Did your family take part in politics very much?

Creasman: No. Not to extent. Of course, they were biased in their thinking (the Democrat was the only thing). You make some remark to my father about Republican- -oh, heavens, you don't do that!

Silveri: He was strict Democrat?

Creasman: Oh, yes.

Silveri: Did his ancestors fight in the Civil War? Did you ever hear about that?

Creasman: Oh yes. Yes. I never did go back and dig into those things. I was digging ahead. I never was interested in my back life too much. I have a

Creasman: On the national ticket.

Silveri: He wouldn't vote for the Republican, though?

Creasman: No. Under no circumstances. No. Absolutely.

Silveri: There was quite a discussion in 1928. Do you remember that?

Creasman: Oh, definitely!

Silveri: Was it one of the topics in your debating in high school, that you mentioned before?

Creasman: No. We tried to debate on national issues, the Congressional, because I used to use Zebulon Weaver's Congressional Digest to get my materials out of, so we could pick the most pertinent points out of the senators' speeches and combine them, and have a pretty strong; argument. I didn't like to lose. I was always that way; I didn't want defeat. Sometimes it causes a little anxiety and troubles if you can't except defeat.

Silveri: Did you vote for Roosevelt during the 1930's ?

Creasman: Yes.

Silveri: You thought he did a good job?

Creasman: I didn't know really what I thought. I knew this country had to do something or collapse. I thought that I could force the complete collapse of the industrial and economic United States. That was my thinking. I was too young to know what I was thinking, but anyway I thought of that. Any program that I thought would feed the hungry or give them clothing and comfort, that was the man I wanted, regardless of who it was, Republican or Democrat, because I had seen this very severely myself. Although our friend that lives over on the other end of this street that wanted to look up my family tree. I said, "I know of enough skeletons in my closet, and I don't want any more drug out! He said, "Well, o.k. "

Silveri: What's interesting is that a lot of the mountain people were Republicans, not Democrats!

Creasman: I know. I know. There were quite a few, and that's what causes a lot of the dissension.

Silveri: Your family was Democratic. Your father always voted the Democratic ticket?

Creasman: Oh, regardless.

Silveri: Regardless of who it was.

Creasman: Knowledge of the candidate didn't make any difference at all.

Silveri: Let me ask you about this, if you can remember. While you were in high school in 1928, Al Smith ran.

Creasman: Oh, that was the greatest discussion around the mountain section of being a Catholic. Oh, that was terrible!

Silveri: What happened? Did it change your father? Or did he still vote Democratic ?

Creasman: He still voted Democratic

Silveri: Still voted for Al Smith?

Creasman: I don't remember whether he voted or didn't vote! He might have canceled his vote that year. I don't know.

Silveri: He might not have gone to the polls.

weren't what you would call hurt on the Depression,

when you don't have anything, you don't lose anything, except for food and comfort.

Silveri: There's one thing that you were talking about earlier, and it was during the Depression years that the dollar came into the mountains, so to speak.

Creasman: That's right.

Silveri: And began to change the ways of working, or learning, or operating, and so on, which you think was largely bad.

Creasman: I think it was bad the way it was introduced. I feel the same way about some of these programs now. I think that a fellow should work, and have some good reason why he should receive a compensation without work. I'm very much against it. When I read some of the articles they had in the paper about the Battery Park Hotel: Two hundred and thirty three-dollars a month for a one-bedroom apartment. The renter would pay eighty dollars, and the government would subsidize the remaining. I can't see subsidizing able-bodied people, or putting that difference into somebody else's pocket. Now we as a middle class-I have been looking at this situation, and it seems like the middle class of people are being eliminated. I’ve read histories of other countries, and I've seen that. Haiti is one of them right now that the middle class of people is completely eliminated. If you go over there with church work and try to help out, they are either rich, or they are poor (extremely poor). Now, if we eliminate the source of our income (that's my thinking; everything I say is my thinking) then we have divided between rich and poor, and the poor can only get what the rich allows them. Now, when you see that economic breakdown>which I think if something isn't done or headed off, we are headed for that particular thing and will cause this change of government that we ought to have.

Silveri: I’m very interested in the changes that took place in the mountains and the mountain people. When the New Deal programs came in, they did put people to work. They did train mountain people, and the money found its way into the mountain area. I don't suppose it had as much impact as say coal mining has in the Appalachian region where it's attracted people off of their farms completely and moved into coal towns and so on. Then when there was a lesser demand for coal, these people had no jobs or employment. They didn't even have their old farms to be self-sufficient on, so they created a class of landless industrial proletariat, I suppose, who were subject to the money market.

When somebody uses the term "Appalachian”, what is your reaction? "Appalachia"? Do you consider yourself an Appalachian?

Creasman: Not to the point to which I think you are thinking. I think the Appalachian is further north .than we are here in what we call the Smokies. Now, we would probably be the tail-end of the Appalachian range, but to me, when you go over into the coal mining areas of Kentucky and places like that, We have a different people than we do on this side of the mountains.

Silveri: Do you see, however, a common bond among people who live in the mountains? Certain values that they have that are different from others, like these two women you lived with in the f30rs, ‘way down in Macon County. Did they have different values than what you might call the average American then?

[End of Side II, Tape I]

[Side I, Tape II]

Creasman: Yes. They had a sense of value that we don't have now. You see, the little things were of value because they constituted the whole ball of yarn, and everything had a value. What we would call discarded things now, they valued it from some source or the other, whether it was for their use or somebody else's use.

Silveri: People in the mountains were very much attached to their land, right ?

Creasman: Oh, yes! That is being brought out to me now, how valuable they determine those corners to be. Where the old rock is or the oak tree, that is the corner. My grandfather and my father told me it was!

Silveri: What did he do? Surveying?

Creasman: Yes.

Silveri: Can you tell us a little bit about the mountain people you lived rich, or they are poor (extremely poor). Now, if we eliminate the source of our income (that's my thinking; everything I say is my thinking) then we have delighted between rich and poor, and the poor can only get what the rich allows them. Now, when you see that economic breakdown, which I think if something isn't done or headed off, we are headed for that particular thing and will cause this change of government that we ought to have.

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Silveri: with? Can you tell us a little bit about their character, about their mountain speech (which I've heard is so very expressive)^ storytelling , their oral traditions that they have, and music ? Did you see many mountain people playing musical instruments, for instance?

Creasman: Oh, yes. They had to have the five string banjo and the violin (fiddle). I guess the fiddle was the most important. Of course, they didn't have the variety of things now that they have.

Silveri: Did you ever hear people sing without musical accompaniment, singing ballads, songs, and so forth?

Creasman: Yes!

Silveri: These two sisters that you lived with, did they sing songs when they were working?

Creasman: Oh, I’ve heard them back in the kitchen, or when they were canning, singing little ballads of different types without music. They were just happy.

Silveri: It was very common, then, for mountain people to be singing. It was very much a part of their life.

Creasman: That's right.

Silveri: There has been talk that there are pockets in the Southern mountains where they still speak the Elizabethan English. Did you ever come across any of those people?

Creasman: No. Now you will run into a section where the pronunciation of the English language varies quite a bit. It was interesting. North Georgia

Creasman: Out in Oregon, and the State of Washington had several.

Silveri: By that time the T. V. A. system had pretty well been built so that flooding along the Tennessee Valley was fairly well controlled, although I understand Chattanooga was still getting some.

Creasman: Well, that might have been caused by the drawdown on the reservoirs. It's very seldom that can ever happen, but sometimes when your drawdown curve of your anticipated flood periods is not sufficient, it won't take care of it. If you've been familiar with some of the dams, they have set draw-downs on the reservoirs so that that will, anticipating a rainy period or a flood period, which we had flood frequency reports on all the streams, say your five year maximum, your ten-year maximum, or your hundred-year flood, which hits pretty doggone close.

Silveri: You came in after the floods had receded and did some work?

Creasman: Did flood plain studies in flow, and what we call indirect flow studies.

Silveri: Had you got into eastern Kentucky a number of times when it flooded?

Creasman: That's right.

Silveri: The Cumberland River.

Creasman: Cumberland River, and I spent two years on the Potomac River basin. We made an extensive study of the floods on the Potomac River, and suggested the remedial solutions for a lot of those.

Silveri: How about the Kentucky River?

Creasman: and just across the mountain there in North
Carolina you find a difference even in the English expression of
everyday talk (what we call everyday talk).

Silveri: What were you doing when the Second World War broke out?

Creasman: I was with the Geological Survey, -and I was with the Division of Surface Water.

Silveri: Where ?

Creasman: Well, I was kind of a traveling man in the short time I spent in the Navy in the Yards and Dock, Division in California, and then I came back from San Francisco, and went back to Geological Survey. In my latter years with the Geological Survey, I spent most of time chasing down these floods in the different areas.

Silveri: All over the country?

Creasman: Yes. Like the New England states.

Silveri: Connecticut River flood? Connecticut Valley flood, I mean?

Creasman: In '55.

Silveri: In T55, the big one.

Creasman: That's encompassed New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. I guess Massachusetts and Connecticut were the worst devastated areas.

Silveri: You must have been into eastern Kentucky?

Creasman: Oh, yes!

Silveri: There were plenty of floods there, (flood areas) and the Cumberlands.

Creasman: The other crews usually did most of that. There would be some from each district of all over the United States who was going to these areas. Sometimes one crew would be in another area at the same time on a different project.

Silveri: But you lived all the time in Asheville during these years? Is that right?

Creasman: I lived in Winchester, Virginia two years when I was on the Potomac, but usually my base headquarters after that was here, and I would be traveling out of this area.

Silveri: That's the work you continued to do. Are you retired now?

Creasman: Yes, Except my surveying business.

Silveri: How did that start? When did you start doing surveying?

Creasman: I surveyed all these years with Geological Survey. We used the method of area surveys.

Silveri: So you had all that expertise already, and you just went into private business yourself when you retired?

Creasman: Well, I worked about eleven years with the City in the Water Engineering Department. I went down to North Carolina State and got a State Board of Health Certificate for treating the water as a water treatment operator.

Silveri: This was after you retired from the Federal Government ?

Creasman: Yes. I guess I was the only one in the area at that time that had a State Board of Health Certificate for treating the water.

Silveri: What do you mean treating it? Do you mean putting the chemicals in?

Creasman: Yes. It's a chemical operation. Now, I understand that two or three have had to go take that course of water treatment.

Silveri: Why is the Asheville water so bad? I'm talking of the experience of what comes out of my tap on the north part of the city off Merrimon Avenue.

Creasman: Well, I contribute that to a lot of things. We have excellent water It's its source. There's no doubt about it. The biggest mistake that I saw in the building of that dam was not incorporating a filtering plant.

Silveri: Are you talking about the North Fork?

Creasman: North Fork It should have been incorporated in the original construction, to my knowing Because there is a lot of silica in suspension. There is suspended matter in there that comes through your tap. Just take the little screen off your tap sometime. We have decayed leaves and a lot of things.

Silveri: That gives the water a kind of yellow appearance or color?

Creasman: A brackish taste. We have a high acid area. We have hard wood forests. All right, that makes the acid. We have an old distribution system, which was neglected. I’ve seen pipes taken out of there that are fairly recent with tuberculars as big as your fist! You can knock them off with a hammer! We had improper treatment. We were putting in too much chlorine, for one thing. The reason why we. are putting too much chlorine in it: Our distribution system is such that we can't distribute it equally. Now, when I was there, I wanted to set up eleven or twelve more auxiliary stations for dispensing chlorine, which we have to have. It is a State law. But not in the quantities—as long as we have a residual of a trace, that's sufficient to me, but then we add hexamethophosphate, We add caustic soda, and I refused to administer fluoride.

Silveri: Why?

Creasman: Because I know it's a deadly chemical, and I know that the distribution system in Asheville is not to my liking to ever be able to to distribute that to exactly one part per million. I know that the flow in the pipes in this city reverse themselves during the day sometimes, maybe two or three times. Until we have a distribution system where we can maintain pressures and flows constantly, then you can administer chemicals accordingly.

Silveri: Well, the other two or three that you mentioned are deadly chemicals in themselves, too, aren't they?

Creasman: That's right.

Silveri: Chlorine is deadly.

Creasman: That's right.

Silveri: It's mainly then la distribution system that's at fait?

Creasman: That's right. We can't administer these chemicals at one or two points. We're sending water into Henderson County. We are sending it miles and miles west The terrain is such that you just can't maintain constant flows and pressures. Now, you take in the flat country where you've got auxiliary pumps along the line there that just boost it up if the pressure drops a little bit, just boost it up a little, Everything works fine but you'll notice in your the faucet there that the accumulation of chlorine when you open the faucet the first thing in the morning may make you think that somebody has been bleaching in the sink with Clorox!

Silveri: It would take hundreds of millions of dollars to change that delivery system overnight. I know they are working on it. They've got a bond issue that has been approved.

Creaman: But by no rhyme or reason should that water have been taken from that reservoir without a filtering plant. That is the key. Now, when I was in Geological Survey, we worked in cooperation with cities and states in their water problems. I used to go in and set up a gauging station so they could have a daily record of their inflow, say into a reservoir. We would run a certain number of years' study on that, and we knew what the minimum and what the maximum flow would more than likely be. We noted that there would be periods in September and October that the flow would be at its minimum, and they had better have adequate storage to take care of that period there. I know of a lot of the cities that take their water from very polluted, mud-flowing, streams and can produce it into better water than we have here at a cheaper figure! The city of Gastonia, for instance, has beautiful water. They had filtering beds; all their treatments there, just perfect, can produce that water into millions of gallons (whatever their need was), and produce a clear, palatable water. I think their rate was about two thirds of what ours is, and we were getting a gravity flow. So, a lot of these things have changed since I was a mountain boy. I don't know of any much for the better.

Silveri: "Since you were a mountain boy!" You're not a boy any more, but you are still from the mountains, right?

Creasman: Yes, sir! I still hold to my heritage.

Silveri: I have often heard that you can get the man out of the mountains, but you can't get the mountains out of the man!

Creasman: That's true, I think. I'm not ashamed of my hillbilly label, not a bit ashamed of it!

Silveri: But you're mad at people who use that term to determine division, like Al Capp and his-

Creasman: Oh, that's ridiculous! That's ridiculous! Dog Patch. I don't think Dog Patch has any part in this Appalachian region! Now, where Dog Patch is, I don't know!

Silveri: What do you see in the mountain way of living that you would like to see preserved, that hasn't already changed?

Creasman: You know, I really couldn't answer that! I'd like to see the - old basic honesty return. You know, basically the mountain people are honest.

Creasman: That was one thing. When you hear that expression "their word is their bond,ft that's true! I know this from experience. You didn't have to go to an attorney and write all this thing out. He gave you a little slip of brown paper. You kept that. If you had a due date on there and you couldn't you always made arrangements to satisfy that fellow some way. We don't have that wide-spread any more, I don't think. I think the mountain people are losing that particular thing. This word of trust which I developed as a no-trust—back in my younger days I think I trusted everybody, but sometimes the outside world, as I call it (when you get out of this realm and start going to other places) sometimes you have a tendency to lose your trust You develop a sense that people are out to get you, and you can't be the old, easy-going type of person that you could in that environment.

Silveri: I think we are probably talking about the differences between an industrial-urban life and a rural life. The people in the rural life are really more tuned to nature (to their surroundings) that they have a greater sense of identity with where they are and who they are. The city's life is ruthless, and they are not so sure. In rural areas I think you tend to have a better feeling about where you have been and where you are going, and who you are. They call it a sense of place, I guess. I think that’s one of the reasons why you still live in the mountains. You were born and raised here. You've been around the country constantly, but here you're back living in the mountains again. Although it's in the urban area of Asheville, it's still mountain living.

Creasman: Well, the fact is: Sometimes we think of the climate. We still have some roots that we have to maintain.

Silveri: You can see kind of a contrast here where we're living in the urban area of the mountains, and I don't see very much in the newspaper about it, but I think since I came in here there is a lot of pollution in Asheville. What about you? Do you think that's the case? Sometimes I wake up in the morning, out there off Merrimon Avenue, and there is a terrible stench.

Creasman: I would say the Asheville area is one of the greatest polluted areas in this whole region. We've always considered Canton and Enka, but we have a depressive area that seems to hold pollution in here. That's why we've been having all the pro's and con's about the open cut or the tunnel around here! I'm for the open cut because I've seen those open cuts that can be landscaped and made beautiful. I realize that the claustrophobia that people have (I don't care if you have a tunnel as big as a cut, they are still going to stop in there). Something about people, I don't know. I've been all over the country, and every time you run into a tunnel, you've got to come to this halt, and it blocks the traffic. Then I think it would help the pollution.

Silveri: Where does the pollution come from here in Asheville?

Creasman: We are getting it from as far west as Canton. I'm sure the prevailing winds are northwest anyway, and I think we are getting an accumulation right here against these hills. Now, I've been out in the morning here when it was just almost unbearable, but you get out of the immediate area of Asheville, it's not too bad.

Silveri: It's eleven thirty, and you've given me almost an hour and a half of your time, I've been very interested in what you've been saying. ... I've found it very helpful.

Creasman: I'm a little hesitant saying that, but I don't know what the person wants in the first place. If there's anything that I have said that he wants to incorporate it into something he wants to say, then that's o. k.

Silveri: Thank you very much for your time.

Creasman: I'm very happy that we finally got together here.