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Interview with Hardy Davidson, Swannanoa, North Carolina, June 3, 1972.
Interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri.

Dr. Louis Silveri: Swannanoa, North Carolina. June 3, 1972.

Well, Mr. Davidson, the first question I wanted to ask you is about your family. I understand your ancestors were among the first that came into the Swannanoa Valley, is that right?

Hardy Davidson: There are two families that came in here first which were apparently connected with each other, even before they came into this area before the Revolutionary War. They lived, just before this, about twenty miles from Asheville at Old Fort, which at that time, in pioneer days, was called Davidson Fort because there were so many there. Actually, I don't think there were many people there taken as a whole, but they dominated that particular period.

Dr. Louis Silveri: Where did they come from?

Hardy Davidson: Well, they were known as Scotch-Irish, but they really were not Irish. Apparently they migrated from Scotland to up into Ireland, apparently the northern part. I presume they were having the same trouble they're having even to this day, and they've been fussing and fighting ever since two hundred years. So they migrated from Ireland up into the Chesapeake Bay area of this country, and were known as the Scotch-Irish. Of course, there were actually many thousands. Only a small group got into the North Carolina area.

Dr. Louis Silveri: Was this before the Revolutionary War?

Davidson: Yes. I don't know how long; maybe fifty or a hundred years before, possibly not more than fifty. I don't know if there's any records there exactly on that point.

Silveri: Then they moved from Old Fort down here into Swannanoa, or is Old Fort part of Swannanoa?

Davidson: No. See, Old Fort is beyond the transcontinental dividing line of the waters. There had been a treaty with the Indians before the Revolutionary War (at the end of the French and Indian War in 1763) that they were to have all the land west of the line. When the war ended, the American colonists rejected that treaty and made themselves at home into their territory, and they considered it their land. Up 'til that time there had been no white settlement in it. There had been some of the Anglo-Saxons even as far as Tennessee because there they had the French and Indian War. But there was no, what we call a permanent settlement, and they had no legal right to it at that time.

Silveri: Is Old Fort on the eastern side of the continental divide?

Davidson: It's on the eastern side nine or ten miles, which today in a car you can go in about ten minutes. Coming up the mountain, it would take practically half a day's time or more back in those days.

Silveri: So, the Davidsons then moved from Old Fort down into the Swannanoa Valley after that?

Davidson: Yes. They settled where the Bee Tree Creek goes into the Swannanoa River. That's about twelve miles from Asheville, and about

Davidson: (continued) eighteen miles from Old Fort. That's near where we are located now. That's just, by airline, only a mile. There were two families there: one Alexander and one Davidson. They had married in-laws. That is, the Davidson wife was an Alexander and a sister to the other Alexanders that had settled in that particular spot.

Silveri: So, the generations have been born from that family all the way down 'til today?

Davidson: Yes. Yes. I belong to the last generation. Actually, it's not so far back because I happen to be the youngest of a rather large family, and my father was the youngest of a large family. So, it's not really so far back to the pioneer days.

Silveri: Well, I was just trying to figure out how many generations it has--

Davidson: I think there are about four up to mine.

Silveri: I imagine the early settlers had some trouble with the Indians.

Davidson: Yes. There were still Indians, some in the area. I should go back just a little bit before that, though, and tell about Samuel Davidson. That's a story that's told 'til recently. He was a brother to this other William Davidson, and he came in here and built a cabin about six miles east of Asheville. He and his wife and their Negro nurse, which, doubtless, was a Negro slave. They also had a small child, four of them in all. Now, no one really knows any details about that, but they do know that he was killed by the Indians, and the Indians, more or less, set a trap for him.

Davidson: (continued) He had a horse with a bell on it, which was not uncommon to put on animals then, so they could be found in the woods. The Indians got ahold of this horse and led it out in the woods expecting him to come after it, which he did. While he was looking for the horse, he was shot. That was on a mountain which I can actually see from this window, just two or three miles below here. You can't see the actual spot because it's beyond the top on a ridge a few hundred or thousand feet, I suppose.

His wife, the servant, and the baby walked back to Old Fort, a distance about--I don't know, twelve or fourteen miles through the woods. Of course, the trails then were made generally by buffalo because they did make very good trails in the woods; that was seldom, and that was the only way they had. But they went by themselves, and later it is said, at least according to the information of a small group from Fort Davidson, came over the mountain into the Swannanoa Valley, they had a small skirmish with the Indians.

Well, it was about a year later that this other William Davidson that we mentioned first came into the area and settled here at Bee Tree. Then later on he moved to an area down near Biltmore which is a part of Asheville, which is now on the Vanderbilt Estate, and it was in his home there that Buncombe County was first organized. He was the first representative from this area, which was the House of Burgesses in Raleigh, using the British terminology.

Silveri: Well, speaking of the period now before the Civil War, were there any other Davidsons in your--in politics, holding public office and so on?

Davidson: Well, there are some. There was a General Davidson, which was remotely related to my family, who was a general in the Revolutionary War. He was killed at--I believe it was Cowan's Ford down at Mecklenburg County. Incidentally, there was another group, both Alexanders and Davidsons, quite a few that settled in Mecklenburg County now where Charlotte, North Carolina is located. Some of them interestingly enough have the same names because there's three names that was popular in pioneer days: James, John, and William. That's one thing that makes it difficult to dig up the history because they're so confusing with each other. There are three names that appear on the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence that are exactly the same as the names of three men that have lived in the community in recent years.

Silveri: Were all the Davidsons farmers?

Davidson: Well, yes. That was about all there was to do. In the early days they could almost live on the land. There was right much game. The river valleys were fertile because they had been built up for thousands of years accumulating debris, and the land was quite fertile. So, they just cut down the forests and raised fairly good crops for quite a few years until the land finally played out, as the saying goes. But that was practically all there was to do. Actually, industry didn't come to this area

Davidson: (continued) until this century, and even not much until after World War I.

Silveri: I was thinking in terms of owning gristmills and--

Davidson: Well, of course, they had day trades, but that didn't amount to a great deal. They'd have a gristmill, perhaps, and take out a little toll for the people that brought it there. That was something, but it wouldn't mean very much.

Silveri: O. K. If we can move up to the Civil War period, what experiences did the Davidsons have in the war? Were they Confederates? Or were they Union sympathizers?

Davidson: Well, they were Confederates, but they did not have much sympathy for the Confederate cause. In fact, my father was in the war, that was in the army. I do not think he was in any combat. I think he was only about sixteen years old, but he and his family had no sympathy at all with it. In fact, quite a few people in the mountain region did not, and particularly in Tennessee. There are a few cases, I understand, where one was on one side and one on the other, but that's rather rare.

Another interesting fact that is not generally known even in our immediate community! After the war there was a division in their churches, the Presbyterian church. Practically all of these Scotch-Irish were Presbyterians, and there were some of the congregation who wanted to secede from the old group and form a new one, which they did. But some families, the Davidson family, wanted to remain with what is now referred to as the

Davidson: (continued) Northern group. They had quite a fuss about it. They even locked the church doors. It looked like they were about to enter into combat. They even went so far as to have a trial, a military trial, in Charleston, South Carolina because we were under military control at the time of the Northern Army.

Silveri: Did the Davidsons own any slaves?

Davidson: Yes. My grandfather owned probably half a dozen. There weren't many slave owners in the mountains. That's probably as many as one family would ever own, but the relations was good with them after the Civil War, for years after that. The family had a good name with the Negroes because they were well treated, and they would probably, if things could have hung on a little longer, would have voluntarily freed them. We had, there was one that belonged to my grandfather known as Uncle Joe. His name was Uncle Joe Davidson. He was quite an old man. I can barely remember him, but he was said to have lived to be a hundred and ten years old. In fact, he said that for about twenty years, but he was quite an old person.

Silveri: That's interesting. The fact that you can remember him brings me to ask you how old you are at this time, if we can get that straight.

Davidson: I'm seventy-one. I was born in 1900. Incidentally, we were talking just a few minutes ago about Tom Wolfe. We were born in less than a week's time together.

Silveri: That's fascinating, fascinating. You said your father owned six slaves?

Davidson: Grandfather.

Silveri: Your grandfather. Excuse me. You would have to have a pretty large place here to raise six or eight slaves.

Davidson: Well, yes. I don't know how much land he owned. There was land from here to the Pacific coast. All you had to do was ask for it, if you had a little political pull. It was the first G. I. Bill of Rights, and those in the Revolutionary War had first choice. So, the two families acquired much of the eastern side of Buncombe County, including quite a bit of what is now the city of Asheville and some of the Vanderbilt Estate.

Silveri: Did they have the choice of the best land?

Davidson: Yes.

Silveri: Well, they did raise cotton, didn't they?

Davidson: Oh no. Cotton's never raised in the mountains. It's too cold. Oh, they just raised corn and wheat. Until recent years wheat has been a big crop. That was the chief source of food, and they had all kinds of stock, cattle, and that sort of thing.

Silveri: And not tobacco?

Davidson: Tobacco was raised in this area at one time back before the turn of the century. Then soon after that, it was quit raising. About twenty-five years ago, it started being raised again.

Silveri: O. K. Then you said your father did get into the war, but he was very young and didn't do much?

Davidson: Yes. I believe he was about sixteen. I think maybe he was a cook, but he was in no combat.

Silveri: Your grandfather was too old, though?

Davidson: Yes, he would have been too old. That's his picture up there, the small picture on the right.

Silveri: What happened to the family and land after the Civil War? Were they still able to hold on to them?

Davidson: Of course, by that time they had sold off quite a bit. You know in early pioneer days, some of these people acquired immense tracts. There was one man who got almost half of Kentucky, but you see taxes would come along, and then they would have to sell it. That was really good in a way. They had no right to keep these vast pieces of land. So, it gradually disappeared. I'm selling a little right now. Of course, I promise that, and in recent years we've sold quite a few acres. We still own fifty or sixty acres of it.

Silveri: Well, was any of the Davidson land confiscated by the Union?

Davidson: No. I don't think any was confiscated. During actual combat they would pass through the area and pick up stock, cattle, and that sort of thing. But after the war was over, as I understand, nothing was really confiscated, although no help came for them like we helped after World War I and World II in the countries of Europe.

Silveri: I seem to remember there was. Or maybe it was at a later time, but will you tell me about the beginning of the railroad building in this region?

Davidson: Well, the railroad had reached Morganton, North Carolina, before the Civil War. I understand it became bankrupt two or three times before getting into the mountain area. It was not until after the Civil War that it came through to Asheville. It gradually came up to Old Fort and across the mountain. Incidentally, crossing the mountain from Old Fort up across the mountain was at that time, I've been told, the greatest piece of engineering in the world at that time because, even today, it's quite a remarkable road.

Silveri: Some of them have many railroad tunnels in order to get through there.

Davidson: Yes. There's quite a lot. I don't know how many. Largest is right up here at Ridgecrest, the first one as you go east. It was built a great deal by convict labor, which in some ways, I guess, was worse than slave labor. They had a terrible time, doubtless. We know very little about it, but it was a terrible condition, which was not uncommon, I suppose, through the world at that period of time in history.

Silveri: Did your father continue farming then after the war?

Davidson: Oh yes. That was really practically all there was to do, was farm.

Silveri: You said you were born in 1900?

Davidson: Yes.

Silveri: How many in your family?

Davidson: There were eight brothers and sisters.

Silveri: Which one were you?

Davidson: I was the youngest!

Silveri: You were the youngest?

Davidson: Yes.

Silveri: So, by the time you were born, the oldest was nineteen?

Davidson: No. That would be almost twenty years old.

Silveri: What do you remember of those early years growing up in this area? Was this the house you were born in?

Davidson: Yes. This is the same house, and we had near here a little one-room schoolhouse, but I never attended it. I don't think I attended school until I was about seven years old, and then we went to a school about a mile from where I am living, at a two-room school. That in time was built to three rooms.

Silveri: Did your father build this house?

Davidson: Yes. Partly, but he had help, of course.

Silveri: What do you remember about working on the farm in those years? Was it hard work?

Davidson: Oh yes. I was very lazy. I hated everything about the beautiful farm! But I worked on it, and I didn't like it. But I do like to live in the country.

Silveri: What did you do? Did you have cattle and hogs?

Davidson: We had cattle. Oh yes, cattle and hogs. We never raised any sheep. Not many people raised sheep, but cattle and hogs.

I remember we raised our own corn and our own food, and near

Davidson: (continued) here was a mill for grinding the wheat. In that way we grew pretty much everything we had. In some respects, the food was really much better than it is now, but we didn't have the variety that it's possible to get now.

Silveri: What kind of food did you have to buy?

Davidson: Of course, we had to buy sugar, coffee, salt, and sometimes a few canned things, but not too many. Of course, we canned a great deal of our own things. People still do that live in the country or even in the city for that matter.

Silveri: How much schooling did you finally have?

Davidson: Well, I later attended what is now known as Warren Wilson College, and later I went to a prep school in Tennessee where I had two years of high school and also had instruction in violin playing. Incidentally, I learned to play the violin by myself before I even had lessons. Then later I went to Oak Ridge Military Institute near Greensboro, North Carolina, and then two years at Chapel Hill.

Silveri: Well, you mentioned your family. Did any of your brothers and sisters get a chance to do that?

Davidson: Well, yes. I had a brother who graduated from State University in Raleigh.

Silveri: When did you become interested in wood carving?

Davidson: Well, I think I became really [interested] when I was quite young. I used to see some carving down at Biltmore. I don't know. I think

Davidson: (continued) I mentioned about the Arthurs. Did I while I was on the--

Silveri: No.

Davidson: The Arthurs had a school there. Well, let me clear that up a minute. The Arthurs attended a school on the Biltmore Estate, and there was a little shop there in Biltmore, and I used to see it there. I became interested in it. I don't know why, really, but I just--you don't know why you want to play baseball or climb a mountain. You just do. That's all.

Silveri: Did you have instruction there for any length of time?

Davidson: Yes. Well, not a great deal, but I did have some. I took it up really as a hobby, just for the fun of doing something.

Silveri: Well, what did you do? What was your first job? Did you continue to work on the farm or did you--

Davidson: No, no. I worked for a number of years in the post office, and it was a small post office, and my brother was post master. I had a great deal of spare time. That was one reason I took up wood carving because I had a lot of time with nothing to do, and so I did that as a hobby. Of course, I produced quite a few things for my own use. Then in later years it was at least a part profession.

Silveri: What about the First World War period? Did any of your family get conscripted to go fight in it?

Davidson: I had two brothers in it. Yes. They were not in combat either.

Silveri: I would like to talk more about this craft of yours, wood carving.

Silveri: (continued) I suppose you can remember the first piece you sold?

Davidson: Well, actually I really do two types of wood carving. One is the more conventional type you see in furniture, and also a sculpture type of wood carving of objects, of people... [inaudible]. But there is a kind that I've sold to great extent. It has been a bird. That has really started during the Depression, a duck. I experimented over a period of a whole year before I really got them on the market to any extent. Of course, they were very cheap. During the Depression anything you could sell was very good. So, I've sold them since that period up until now, for I don't make any now. I'm more or less retired. I could sell almost any number if I still made them.

Silveri: How big were these ducks?

Davidson: Well, I would say they were--actually they differed in sizes. They were plaques on a wall. You get a certain amount of perspective of ducks flying. They were from about fourteen inches from stem to stern from down to about five or six, and also a variety of wing positions, which makes it interesting.

Silveri: Were they painted?

Davidson: Yes. I used a special method. I developed a special method of painting and finishing, partly a matter of paint and partly in preparation of the wood which gives them a very soft, excellent imitation of feathers.

Silveri: Well, you've mentioned the Depression. That's an area I'm very interested in. What do you remember about those years during the Swannanoa Valley? Were they very difficult years for the residents?

Davidson: They were, but not nearly as difficult as people who lived in the city. In the first place, there were two reasons. In this area here at Swannanoa, a large industry had just come in. A year or two before, the Beacon Company moved from New Bedford, Massachusetts. Then in Asheville, the Enka Corporation, now an immense industry, they came there. Those two things kept up a certain amount of employment, and then people who live in the country always manage to dig out somehow by their gardens, their farms, this, that, and the other. They don't have to spend a lot for odds and ends like laundry, entertainment, this, that, and the other. It wasn't nearly as bad as people that lived in the city, and they never got that down-and-out feeling that so many people have who depend on a job with some industry or group.

Silveri: I've spoken to many people in this mountain region that have ancestors who became Republicans during the Civil War because they didn't go along with secession and so forth, and they've carried that tradition right down until today. Was that found in the Davidson family?

Davidson: To some extent it is. Yes. Of course, the name Republican has been for a hundred years a dirty word in the South, and in recent years it has reversed in the other way, just the opposite, except for certain groups in the South.

Silveri: How do you remember people here in the valley looking upon Roosevelt, Franklin Rossevelt's New Deal? Were they hostile toward what he was trying to do?

Davidson: No. I don't think they were. On the other hand, they were not too enthusiastic about it either. People like to complain about anything. They would complain about it in one way, and they would accept anything coming from it on the other side. That's just part of human nature, depending on who they were talking to.

Silveri: Do you remember who you voted for?

Davidson: Well, I probably voted for Hoover because I had a political job at the post office!

Silveri: Well, did your brother lose that?

Davidson: Oh yes. He lost it. Then that's what got me into wood carving as a profession, which I guess is a good thing for me.

Silveri: So, you went into it fulltime in the early '30's?

Davidson: To a degree. Yes. Later on I worked. Well, during the war, I worked a period in Washington during World War II, in the drafting there. Then later on I came back and taught at what is now Warren Wilson College, crafts and drafting over there.

Silveri: Well, back in the '30's when you began to do this craft more, there didn't exist in the mountains, the Craft Guild Organization, that exists now?

Davidson: It started about the time I started to work on it. I think when I joined the Southern Highlands Craft Guild there were about thirty members.

Davidson: (continued) Now there's three or four hundred, I understand.

Silveri: When did you join?

Davidson: Why, I don't know the exact date really.

Silveri: Was it in the '30's?

Davidson: Yes. It would be in the '30's. I imagine about 1936.

Silveri: That's when they began to hold the craft fairs?

Davidson: The first fair was in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and the first two or three. Then they finally came to Asheville. Now they are held at both Gatlinburg and Asheville.

Silveri: Was that the way then you were able to sell what you had produced?

Davidson: Yes. But of course, there were other shops though. There were many other shops that were really just as good. If you had something good, you could sell it.

Silveri: I've seen some of your work in the Guild Shop on Tunnel Road. I think some of the birds you make here.

Davidson: Yes.

Silveri: How long would it take you to carve, say, one of these Cardinals in three different sizes?

Davidson: Well, of course, I've carved very few of that type, but of the ducks I sell so many of, I guess a large one would take not more than an hour, and a little less for the others. Of course, they are hand carved, but it's done a great deal by machine. But the wood is entirely finished by hand before it is painted, and then, of course, painted by hand.

Davidson: (continued) But the painting doesn't really take very long. I can do it very rapidly. In fact, ten minutes at the most for the largest one.

Silveri: Is the duck all one piece?

Davidson: No. It's in three pieces: the wings, and then the middle part, which would be called the fuselage in an airplane.

Silveri: Well, while you were carving in the '30's, did you also farm?

Davidson: No, no. As a matter of fact, I didn't. I didn't do anything, but work in my shop.

Silveri: Well, you mentioned there were eight in your family. Did they remain around this area?

Davidson: Mostly in this area. Yes. They lived here. One of them was with the Agricultural Department for awhile, and another one was the manager of another farm. One remained and one stayed on the farm. Then I had a sister who worked in Asheville for practically fifty years, I guess, as a secretary to lawyers over there.

Silveri: How long did your father live?

Davidson: I think it was just a little less than eighty. I don't know exactly, but it was almost eighty years.

Silveri: How about your mother?

Davidson: Well, that was somewhat less. She was about sixty five. I believe it was.

Silveri: Well, then you mentioned before what you were doing in World War II. How did you happen to come to do that kind of work in the designing

Silveri: (continued) you did in Washington?

Davidson: Well, I had had college instruction in draftsman. There was a great demand for it, and then it was a war year. Handicrafts were not too good then because you couldn't get materials for one thing, this, that, and the other. Then I thought it would be an interesting experience to do that and live in Washington awhile to see what city life was like.

Silveri: You were at least forty one. So, you were beyond draft age, right?

Davidson: Well, actually I had to register. You see, they took them quite old in World War II. Now, in the First World War, I just barely missed it. I was just hardly old enough to get in it. I was not quite eighteen. I would have been, if the war had lasted a year longer.

Silveri: So, had you ever been outside of Western North Carolina before that time?

Davidson: No. Well, a short trip around Tennessee and South Carolina and places like that.

Silveri: What were your impressions?

Davidson: Oh well, I've been--you mean--did you say to Washington?

Silveri: Yes.

Davidson: Oh, I've been to New York a couple of times just on a scenic trip.

Silveri: I was wondering what your impressions of Washington were during the war years.

Davidson: Well, it was, of course, a very interesting thing. I lived in a

Davidson: (continued) house there, and I knew the person who had the house because she onced lived here. But there were mostly young people there. Of course, it was interesting in the work, too, and the kind of people you met up with there 'cause there were all kinds of people in the drafting department: mountaineers from West Virginia, people from the big cities, Jews from New York, and just any kind almost you can imagine in one little place.

Silveri: How long did you remain there?

Davidson: Oh, I didn't stay but about three months.

Silveri: Three months, and then you came back home and continued your work that you were doing?

Davidson: Yes. Then not too long after that I became connected with this college near here.

Silveri: O. K. You began to teach at Warren Wilson College?

Davidson: Yes.

Silveri: Why don't you tell me a little bit about the Warren Wilson College? I know it's a Presbyterian school, right?

Davidson: It was. Incidentally, only recently the Presbyterian church itself has given up support of it for the most part. So, it's really on its own now. But actually I saw in yesterday's paper where deeds were made over to Warren Wilson College which means the church has abandoned it because simply they couldn't afford it. They just didn't have the money to keep it running.

Silveri: It owns quite a bit of land.

Davidson: They had a big farm, about a thousand acres. Some of that they've acquired in the last few years.

Silveri: It's a very unusual school from many different points of view. One of which I've noticed is the work requirement of the students.

Davidson: Yes. Our students are required a certain amount of work as part of their tuition, and it's considered also a part of their education.

Silveri: They have quite a large farm, you might call it. What is their main activity? Raising cattle?

Davidson: Cattle is the main thing now for food, and of course, they raise, at this time, some garden crops that you could use in the garden. But the main thing is cattle which they use for practically all of the-- cattle and hogs, I guess, furnish all their meat.

Silveri: I thought that was, perhaps, also a cash crop for the students--

Davidson: No. They occasionally sell maybe some. Someone wants some stock for breeding, but actually they sell very little of what they raise, almost nothing as far as actual purposes.

Silveri: Do the students slaughter the--

Davidson: Oh yes. They have a special room. They're very strict on slaughtering now, and it's all painted up like an operating room!

Silveri: I've also noticed there are a lot of students from foreign countries.

Davidson: Yes. There are students from literally all over the world. Quite a few--I don't suppose there are--South Pacific and in that area. A few from

Davidson: (continued) China.

Silveri: Some from Africa.

Davidson: Quite a number of native Africans. Of course, quite a number of native American-Negro students, too.

Silveri: Was this because the Presbyterian missionaries funnelled them in?

Davidson: I think it's partly that. There are other sources to get foreign students though; I think maybe the State Department. But through the church is one way.

Silveri: It's just recently become a four [year] college, I understand?

Davidson: Yes. I don't know--three or four years.

Silveri: So, when you became associated with it during or after the Second World War, you taught some particular crafts?

Davidson: Yes. Some wood-work crafts and some wood carving. I also gave instruction in drafting. Of course, I had a work crew, too, that did a lot of repairs and small jobs around on the buildings and furniture, things of that sort.

Silveri: Well, I wonder if you could give me kind of a check list of the kind of things you've been doing with your own craft. You mentioned you do make furniture, chairs, and tables. I noticed that tray you have up on the wall there, which is a beautiful thing. These figures in wood of mountain people, but yet mostly you do the ducks?

Davidson: That's practically all I do for sale because the other requires so much time. It can be quite expensive. Of course, if you had an outlet

Davidson: (continued) where you would deal direct to the customer, you could sell them and probably make a reasonable profit. But, see, a gift shop usually makes from forty to fifty percent profit. So, the ones who take a lot of time put it out of price range for most people.

Silveri: You've done work on commission directly from people--

Davidson: Oh a few, not too often. I've made a few for churches. Then out at Warren Wilson, we made some quite elaborate furniture with the wood carving, and we did a lot of signs and things of that sort. Incidentally, I have a piece over in the university in the library. It's the plaque there for Ramsey, mostly lettering, giving information.

Then I've had pieces in quite a few places. Plaques in State University at Raleigh. I made a plaque for the Forestry Department, and a few churches, here, there, and yonder. Just small pieces, nothing very elaborate.

Silveri: Do you have any pieces elsewhere besides in North Carolina?

Davidson: None of that type. Of course, the birds I've made have been in quite a number of places in Europe, in nearly every country over there. Just by accident I found out about it. In fact, one student I happened to know at school, happened to be in Norway and thought he saw one, and picked it up to see. The proprietor was about to knock him down over it. He wanted to see if my name was on it, and it was. I've had one little carving that's been sent to France. That's not a bird, but some other type of carving, the piano player and conductor. I think there's one or two in

Davidson: (continued) New Zealand.

Silveri: People just hear about you from other people, is that it?

Davidson: Well, no. Mostly through gift shops. At one time, some years ago, the Southern Highland Guild had a shop in Radio City. Of course, people ~~all~~ over the earth stopped by there and picked them up.

Silveri: You've never put out a catalog or anything?

Davidson: No. I did advertise in The State magazine published in Raleigh. I got orders from all over the country, direct orders, 'cause they was mostly people who had once lived in North Carolina because State's magazine was mostly pertaining to something of this state's interest.

Silveri: I'd like to ask you a little bit about the mountain people, and certainly you're one of them. Has the character of these mountain people changed much in the recent years?

Davidson: Well, I imagine it has. Of course, this area here being near Asheville, which is a tourist center and a cosmopolitan town in a way, even though it's a very small town 'cause there has been tourists coming here, even in stagecoach days. There's so many communities a little different from what you hear about the remote sections even in Western North Carolina. Particularly in parts of Tennessee and West Virginia where you hear these tales about folk songs and folk tunes and folk talk which are true, but you don't know just how much truth is in them. They refer to the Elizabethan Age and all of that. Doubtless, there is some truth in it. How much is hard to say, really, 'cause it is difficult for even an expert to figure it all out.

Silveri: Well, Asheville is a city of about seventy-thousand people. That's a fairly large city, and its locale was the center of the mountain area of Western North Carolina.

Davidson: Yes. Yes. Solely because it calls itself the capital, which it is in a sense.

Silveri: So, big city experience came very rapidly, and the people in the mountain region have had access to that scene.

Davidson: Well, there's no question that life has changed a great deal. The coming of the industries, the first industry. Actually, one of the first big ones to come to this area was this Beacon Company here at Swannanoa. It came from New Bedford. After World War I, they started moving, and an article in Fortune Magazine said they were moving mostly because of cheap labor.

Of course, it was true. Labor unions still haven't got a big hold in the Southern area yet. That's located at Swannanoa, for example. They came in from the mountain coves which some years ago they worked in the lumber industry. The timber being cut, they were out of a job. So, they come to these other industries most of which are textile in nature. Of course, in time they received far more than they ever received in their lives. They acquired cars, they acquired homes, and some acquired elaborate homes. Actually, the company has been here since 1925. In a way, in some respects, it's just showing up because people acquired enough money to build and own homes, maybe twenty or thirty-thousand dollar

Davidson: (continued) homes.

Silveri: Do they make blankets, exclusively, at Beacon Blankets?

Davidson: They did originally, but they make, I think, several different things now. I know, actually, the Beacon Company has been sold. It's part of one of these new--what do you call them when they all go in together?

It's really part of National Distilleries, which own many different things, like so many of our industries going in together. Actually, though the company was originally organized, I believe, in New Bedford, by the Owen family. They held that for about, I don't know, for fifty or sixty years. But a few years ago, they sold out for--I don't know why--business reasons. Because doubtless, they thought it was the best thing to do. One reason, I was told, there were so many heirs in the family, the best thing was to sell it and give them the stock instead of deciding who gets what.

Silveri: About how many people work at Beacon?

Davidson: Oh, I don't know. There's more than a thousand!

Silveri: Things have been going pretty well ever since.

Davidson: It started in 1925.

Silveri: I've heard rumors that Beacon determines what goes on in Swannanoa.

Davidson: Well, that was true in the past, but there are so many more industries now, and after all nobody cares. Let them determine it. There's nothing right in the little village of Swannanoa, so they can have it. Those who live there don't care. At one time there was a man, cousin of mine, who

Davidson: (continued) had a good deal of political influence in the local elections. But I think that's died out considerably now, partly because there are so many more industries, and the place is growing up so rapidly. We are really a suburban area now, really part of Asheville in a sense.

Silveri: On the way to your home, I passed a new mill being built. I don't know, maybe it's in operation now, the Wamsutta?

Davidson: Yes, and it's on that location we started first, out of our first settlement. It's exactly that location where the first settlement was made, in that very spot.

Silveri: There's Beacon and this mill. Are there any other industries in Swannanoa?

Davidson: Yes. Kearfott, above Swannanoa. It's a part of the single industry, you know, our great immense industry, old, very old. Then there's several other smaller ones. Of course, these industries in recent years have sort of been shopping around and changing, selling. They used to, for example, the Owen family kept it fifty, sixty, seventy years, and they've traded. Everywhere, this plant you mentioned, that property there is in the Alexander family for a hundred and fifty years. The house didn't change in the industry three or four years, but different industries taking over.

Silveri: We had been mentioning the Presbyterians before in conjunction with Warren Wilson College. I understand the Presbyterians are not that strong in the mountain region.

Davidson: No. They never were really. Of course, Warren Wilson and the Southern Presbyterian are entirely separate or have been. There weren't too many Presbyterians even in this area in the South. The largest group is probably the Baptists and then the Methodists, and of course, the many other denominations. Then in the larger cities quite a few Catholics are mostly in the cities, used to be and probably still are.

Silveri: I thought the Anglican Church was rather strong in the mountain area?

Davidson: The what?

Silveri: The Anglican Church or the Episcopal Church, excuse me.

Davidson: I don't think in terms of the numbers of membership.

Silveri: But I've been reading recently where they held their convention in Asheville, I think. They talked about rather rapid growth of the church in Western North Carolina.

Davidson: Well, maybe they are comparing with what it has been, and it's possible. For example, forty or fifty years ago, they were very few.

Silveri: But mostly Baptists. Are Baptists the strongest?

Davidson: I guess that's the largest they are out here, and in the entire South, at least they have been.

Silveri: Yes. But I've noticed there are so many different Baptist churches.

Davidson: Yes. They are broken up, but still there's one main big Baptist church. They have a number of "spin offs," they call themselves. Then there are a few Seventh-Day Adventists, a very large church down at the

Davidson: (continued) edge of Asheville out there in the Biltmore area. In the Swannanoa Valley, which is just a small area, there are about fifty different churches.

[End of Side I]

[Side II]

Silveri: [What do you think about T. V. A. and it's plans for new dams in this area?]

Davidson: [Roosevelt's project got off to a big start and did some good.] It's a big-time thing. He spent immense amounts of money over there, and then did bring them up from many areas in poverty into prosperous areas, but they get bigger and bigger.

That organization's so immense that there's almost no control over it. That place I told you where they used to build down next to the French Broad, one on the Swannanoa River. Well, a great many people objected. They think they're useless. Well, it scarred this beautiful land, and it didn't help. But of course, now I'm not at all familiar with life on the French Broad, but I think in some cases it would be nice to build some of the dams. But they just want to go overboard and build everything in order to keep themselves employed, you know.

Silveri: Where is the proposed locale for the Swannanoa Dam?

Davidson: It would be above Oteen by Gudger's Bridge a few miles, and it would extend the water in Sled Pond. That's as far as our pond here, and then cover a great deal of Warren Wilson College property. It would do more damage to it than any other, actually.

Silveri: How far along are those plans?

Davidson: Well, they've been planning for years, but they're having trouble; nothing's for certain now. There's a tremendous amount of resistance against it. I believe most of it will fall through. I don't know, of course. That's just a guess. Here the landowners are probably, if the access'll go through, they feel they'll get a lot of money for their land. But in most cases I don't think they would, especially in this particular center of our area.

Silveri: What would be the reason for building--

Davidson: Well, the object is for flood control. You see, the dam--you might say they are in two sections. There's a small dam that holds the water up into a small amount of acreage. Then there's another dam that will let the water through to a certain extent during floods. If it's an extremely large flood, it would dam up for several miles, but would protect the property down around the Asheville-Biltmore area, naturally. That's the object of it.

You see, in 1916 we had a very terrible flood, which did immense damage, not only in Western North Carolina, but much of the Appalachian area as far as that's concerned. It did immense damage in Asheville, but there's a question in many people's minds that these dams will really help much, probably help some, but I'm afraid if we had that kind, it would still be a flood because it would fill them in.

Silveri: I remember seeing pictures of that, the way that area around the

Silveri: (continued) French Broad was flooded in Asheville. The Swannanoa River also rose?

Davidson: Oh yes! Even our farm here, it did considerable damage. It washed out nearly every bridge from Black Mountain to Asheville, except a railroad bridge near here. It didn't wash it out. That's a railroad that ran to a lumber industry up here. There was immense damage to the farms and all sorts of things.

Silveri: Obviously the rain started after a very heavy winter snow?

Davidson: No. It was up in July. I understand at this time there were actually two storms that came together and met in this area here. One out of the Mississippi Valley, and one from down on the coast. It just happened to come together, and it had been doing considerable rain for about a month. Then they all came together, and it was just immense... [inaudible].

Silveri: All the tracks along the French Broad must have been [interrupted].

Davidson: The tracks over here east of Black Mountain. Some were hanging up in the air for thirty and forty feet. Nothing beneath it, just hanging there like a rope.

Silveri: Well, while we're talking about natural calamities, are there any other kind of natural calamities in the mountains that affected the people, such as this flood?

Davidson: That flood is the only thing of great importance. We don't have earthquakes. We're too old for that, although they do shake occasionally. I don't think they's ever been a total failure of crops for one year like in some place in the west where nothing is raised. There's always something on the

Davidson: (continued) farmland, although some years are better than others.

Silveri: No tornadoes come through here?

Davidson: Nothing of any--once in awhile there is mild ones, and some damage, but not great damage like people. I don't know of anyone ever being killed here. There has been a barn or two blown down and some homes damaged, but no big amount of destruction.

Silveri: Any electrical storms? How about those?

Davidson: Occasionally there are some that affect houses. In fact, this house has been hit, but that's not too often.

Silveri: It's still a wonderful place to live.

Davidson: Even though I've been in other places--

Silveri: Still the climate is one of the most moderate I've come up against in the mountains. You have, as the saying goes, I guess, you have a little latitude and altitude. It's far enough South and high enough--

Davidson: Yes. Some of the real cold storms are partly played out before they get here from the North out of Canada. Of course, we have had very cold winters, a few. But in the recent --last year was an unusually mild winter, milder than average. But we have, a few winters, had some snow on the ground that would be for a month or so, but it wouldn't be extremely cold then. It would be cold, of course.

Silveri: I was wondering, going back to your ancestors, have they left anything in the sense of manuscripts or anything like that telling the story

Silveri: (continued) of their lives or is this information you told me you've heard from your father and your grandfather and so on? Did they write down their stories?

Davidson: No. They's very little documented. Of course, about fifty years ago Dr. Foster Sondley, that one that gave the library to Asheville, and General Theodore Davidson, (that General term is Attorney General and has nothing to do with the military) worked together in digging up quite a bit of the history, most of which we have now. Of course, Dr. Sondley wrote the history of Buncombe County and also two or three other books and pamphlets on that line. They gathered up most of what is regarded to as authentic at this time, and we believe it is accurate. Incidentally, I don't know if you know about it or not, but over at Old Fort there is a museum there. Did you know about that?

Silveri: No.

Davidson: Also further on, a more elaborate one towards Marion. If you are interested in the history of the area, you ought to go down to both of them. I think they're open only in the afternoon, but you could spend an afternoon. You ought to go to that because that gives you the background.

Silveri: Are they owned by the local communities?

Davidson: It's operated by the state. In fact, the one down towards Marion, I gave them a number of old relics. They weren't really a part of our family, but there were quite a few old tools there were quite rare, cabinet maker's tools and things of that sort.

Silveri: Well, Mr. Davidson, that's been most informative.

Davidson: Interesting, but true.

Silveri: Very interesting. We've covered a lot of ground today--

Davidson: Yes.

Silveri: In a short period of time. I was wondering if there's anything--
I'm sure there are areas that I've gone over too fast. I just thought maybe you could think of any of them that you'd like to talk about.

Davidson: No. I can't, off hand. I expect there probably is, but I don't know of any.

Silveri: O. K. Thank you very much.

Davidson: You are quite welcome!

{The End}