

A R T U S   M O N R O E   M O S E R

Interviewed by:

Louis D. Silveri

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S O U T H E R N   H I G H L A N D S   R E S E A R C H   C E N T E R

The University of North Carolina at Asheville

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Interview with Artus Monroe Moser, April and May, 1972.  
Interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri.

Silveri: This is an interview with Mr. Artus Monroe Moser, dated April 27, 1972, and we're in Swannanoa, North Carolina.

Well, Mr. Moser, you do call yourself a native of Western North Carolina and spent most of your life here. You were born in Hickory, which is east of this area. But, as you say, you moved here at the age of two years and were brought up in Western North Carolina. I wanted to ask you first of all when you were born and how old you are.

Moser: I was born September 14, 1894.

Silveri: So that makes you a good--

Moser: That makes me about seventy-seven or so.

Silveri: Seventy-seven. I am always interested in how far back a person's root go in this country, this part of the country.

Moser: Yes. Well, my people on the Moser side came from Germany, and they landed in Philadelphia and came through Pennsylvania, and on down through the Shenandoah Valley, and came into the foothills of North Carolina which we call the Piedmont. They settled in what became Catawba County; joins Caldwell and some of the other counties. As I say, that was about 1730, and there must have been quite a colony of those Germans. In fact, they are described in the North Carolina history and pictures of them made by artists, of course, after it showed them coming in covered wagons and leading their cattle. I don't know where they got the cattle so quickly. Of course, they didn't hurry through. They must have stayed in Pennsylvania several years until they could get money enough to come down through the valley into North Carolina.

They tried to settle in land or in territory that must have resembled the Black Forest area from which they came. So, they settled along the Catawba River where the hills rose up on either side, very much as it would be up on the Rhine. They wanted to get the same feeling of the land, because they did love land. Of course, they took up great areas of land. They took up five hundred acres, and a thousand acres. My grandfather owned a thousand acres. The first German, the first one we have any record of or any information about, was called Hans Moser. He was my great grandfather, and one of the original Mosers to land. He had several children. My grandfather, John Calvin Moser, had a number of brothers. Some of those were killed in the Civil War, and about three or four of them went on west--went into the western states. Went to Indiana.

Silveri: Was your father old enough to fight in the Civil War?

Moser: No, my father was not old enough to fight, but my grandfather was, and he lost his left hand in the Civil War. He was a musician. He was a very talented man, apparently, and he played in the band. He played the fife, and he was with a regiment that fought in the first battle of Manassas. Remember, at that time we were in our first battle. You remember?

Silveri: The first--the Battle of Bull Run?

Moser: The Battle of Bull Run. But at that time he was in the band, and they were winning. They were very proud people. They were finely dressed in their uniforms. So he was in the band. Someone was near him and their gun dropped. He was just so enthused over the matter that he ran and grabbed this gun up and started with the rest of the company. Just when he had got going a few steps a mini ball shot him right across

the knuckles. He didn't think it was very serious. It just barely cut the top of his hand there, a little blood vessel or so. He had no medication, of course, right off. But he let that go about twelve days and it didn't heal. In fact, the doctor soon saw that blood poisoning was setting in. So they took him to the hospital and took his hand right off at the wrist. I used to see that little hand of his, and he used to say, "I could whip any three Yankees with that hand, yet!"

Silveri: So, undoubtedly, he was allowed to go home after that?

Moser: Oh yes. He was discharged and went home. But, you see, we had no pension system since we were Confederates and had broken away from the Union. We had no system of pensions at that time. So it was many years after that that he could get a pension.

But I always thought that losing his hand affected him emotionally, which it undoubtedly did, because he would sit and weep sometimes. I always regretted to see that, and my mother would say, "What are you crying about Grandpa?" He'd say, "Just a lot of things, but mostly I've been thinking about my first old lady."

He was married three times. The first wife was a very beautiful woman, and she was the mother of my father. Her family name was Hedrick, and she had three daughters besides. She died just a few years after he was married. It was probably due to the hard times after the war. He would grieve a great deal, but on the other hand he had a great sense of humor and would laugh and tell stories, and tell them over and over again.

He had been a carpenter in Virginia before the war, and he had met a lot of fine people there. I often heard him tell about seeing and

admiring the girls in the families where he was working, and hearing them sing ballads and songs and play music. He and his brother, Pete, were carpenters, and they were working on buildings and houses for these rich Virginia people. The Virginians had slaves, of course, and had fifty or seventy-five slaves. My grandfather's people, and most of the others in Catawba County, did not own slaves. They were thrifty and did their own labor.

Silveri: Was your grandfather a staunch Confederate?

Moser: Oh, yes. Yes, he was. He never repented being a Confederate. Many of the old Southerners did. As a matter of fact, they stayed Confederate right on up. It's been transmitted to me so that I have some of the same sentiment still.

Silveri: I have found one thing, that in Western North Carolina there were a lot of Unionists during that period.

Moser: Oh, yes. The mountain people were divided, very definitely. There were as many went to the Northern forces as did to the Confederates, and a good many deserted from the Confederates and went over to the Northerners!

Silveri: Why? How can you explain that?

Moser: Well, they had no slaves, and we wanted a good stable government here. These people loved good government, and law and order. You would read some of the magazine articles and some of the articles that have come out in books and you would think they were feuding and shooting each other all the time. But, as a matter of fact, they are law-abiding people. Of course, there's a kind of story that goes around, a kind of joke, that they only shoot their kin folks! They get these family feuds

going, you see, these little community feuds, and they shoot it out. That's because they are not willing to wait for the law to take effect. And another thing, it was in the old days when this thing was rampant. The courts were a great distance, and it was difficult to attend court and to get juries and to carry out the government order as it should be. But they are law abiding and they are loyal, but they are quick to take offense at slurs. They are full of pride; they are very proud folk. Proud people, they are.

Silveri: Do you think it was only because they owned little or no slaves that they--

Moser: That was it. They had nothing to lose. I had people on my mother's side (she was Scottish and English) on her side they owned slaves, but the Germans never owned any slaves. They learned to do their own work and they were skillful. They didn't need them. So my grandfather had no slaves, but he was with the people there in the Catawba area in the eastern part of the state where the people did own slaves.

But, as a matter of fact, there were great segments of society there in that area around Hickory that had (there were very few slaves there) and in the mountains here there were very few. My grandfather, William Foster (on my mother's side) had, I think my mother said he had about a dozen slaves, maybe eighteen. But he was setting them free long before the Civil War. They would serve until they were maybe forty-five, maybe not quite so old. He would get them married and he would give them sixty acres of land and a team of horses and give them agricultural tools.

They would live on adjoining his property because he gave the land to them. They were set up like that. So we were kind to the slaves here in the mountains, what there were. But I can't recall that many other people had slaves. As a matter of fact, they had a slave market in Asheville. Dr. Sondley speaks of that in his history of Western North Carolina.

This man Enloe that we will mention sometimes: there's this legend concerning Lincoln and Enloe. He dealt in slaves. This Thomas Lincoln was with him, and they would go back and forth to South Carolina and Kentucky selling slaves and mules. They brought the mules from Kentucky and Tennessee and took them to South Carolina. And they also took slaves, transported slaves from South Carolina to Tennessee and on into Kentucky. Not too many, but he dealt in slaves. So he was considered a very wealthy man, because he must have made money. Slaves brought a high price, you know, eighteen hundred dollars.

Silveri: I wonder if you could say a few more words about your mother's ancestry.

Moser: Well, my mother's ancestry also came down through the Shenandoah Valley, and she was part Dutch: the Kings. The Kings were mainly Scotch and the Fosters were mainly English. They came from South Carolina. The Kings, who came from Pennsylvania, landing there in ports, and they came down through the Shenandoah Valley and came into Western North Carolina, settling near Asheville out at what's called Leicester, mainly an English and Scottish colony in this region. They were very aristocratic in their way. They had come from Scotland originally, where they had been raising sheep to produce wool. The English had sent some of these Scottish people



to Ireland. Apparently some of them(I get the idea from my mother's people) some of them had lived in Ireland awhile and then they came to America. From there [North Ireland] they managed to get to the ports and get to this country either by way of Holland or by way of some of the ports in England. It's not definite in my mind. I'd like to trace that up and find out.

But anyhow, the Scots and English settled in that region around Leicester and helped clear land. My grandfather, William King, cleared great areas of land for a man by the name of Robinson. He said he would rather clear land like that and live and rent it, than to own the land, because that way he could live on the land and he didn't have to be responsible for the taxes for the support of the land and yet he could live--get the cream of it, so to speak. They lived well. There was a large family; twelve in my mother's family. I think she was practically the youngest, if not the youngest. I believe there was one younger than she.

Silveri: Where was this?

Moser: This was out in Leicester, just a few miles from here. About twelve miles west of here, out toward the Smoky Mountains, the Great Smokies.

Silveri: The natives pronounce that name a different way, don't they?

Moser: Yes. They call it Leicester, and she did, too. But I've been out there a good many times, and they have a lot of folklore there. They have the traditional music, fiddling, banjo picking, and ballad singing. I did some of my best collecting down north of there, down the river further on down the French Broad in the vicinity, though, of

Leicester. All of those people down in there are of English and Scottish descent (nearly all of them) and so they have this English tradition, and they are very conservative people in government and in society and clannish. You'd have to speak their language and understand their loyalties to get along with them.

Silveri: You say your mother was one of twelve children?

Moser: Yes.

Silveri: Your father was obviously a farmer there in Leicester?

Moser: No. My father raised cotton and sweet potatoes, but he came to this region as a young fellow when the railroad was first opened up in the 1880's. I'll give you a little romance there that he had with my mother; how he came to meet her.

The railroad was being graded from Salisbury to Western North Carolina. They came through the mountain over here, a tunnel about-- I think it's eighteen hundred feet long, nearly. It's quite a long tunnel. It took a long time to grade that through the mountain in order to get to this plateau here and on down this valley, the Swannanoa Valley. But in about 1882 the railroad finally arrived in the vicinity of what is now Biltmore. It stayed there a good while. That is, the terminus was there. Then they extended that road toward Cherokee and toward the Great Smokies out toward Waynesville and Bryson City, so it opened up this region which had been isolated, more or less, for generations.

I was speaking the other day when we were hiking about the transportation being the key to what I consider civilization. So when the railroad was opened up, it brought in new people here and it opened up the region so that we could transport our produce out of this region.

Moser: So my father as a young fellow (I think he must have been about seventeen or eighteen) told the folk one day there at his home near Hickory, said, "I'm going to go up to the western part of the state and see if I can get a job helping to build the railroad." Jobs were really scarce then. So, he made the trip up here. I think he came on the cars, working trains, that came in this direction. Of course, they began to bring passenger trains through here right away. Anyhow, he arrived here and he got a job out toward Murphy, out beyond Waynesville toward the Smokies there in the foothills. He worked on the railroad on the sections.

Then he got a job lumbering, as the lumber people began to move in here to cut the timber. We had the finest timber here that you could imagine: finest poplar, great tall trees, all kinds of fine lumber for furniture and building. So this railroad, these people, began to build logging railroads down toward Tennessee, down the river, and also in other directions, towards South Carolina and Charleston. So he got a job in the lumber, cutting timber.

I recall hearing him speak very often of his friendship with the Indians. He was able to make friends very easily, and he liked these Indians. They were--they appealed to him because of their knowledge of nature and of the plants and their customs. He talked to them and worked with them. He told them one day, "I'm always a little afraid of rattlesnakes here." There were really a lot of rattlesnakes, and the Indians weren't afraid of them at all. In fact, they admired them; they got them and killed them and ate them. They cooked them, of course, and barbequed them various ways. They were a delicacy, as they are to a lot

of people yet. I don't think I would care for rattlesnake, but it's all right if you like it.

He said to them, "What can I do? I'm back in here where there are no doctors. I don't know what I'll do if I get snake bit." They said, "Oh, Mr. Moser, you don't need to worry about that. If you get snake bit we know exactly how to cure it! We'll go right out here. We know some plants and weeds and roots. We can put it right on there and cure it up in no time! But you see that boss man over there? Those other men? If they get snake bit we wouldn't try to cure them!" He had won the Indians his friendship. They were fine people. I met those Indians, too. That is, of course, several generations later, when I was in this play at Cherokee, "Unto These Hills," I made a lot of friends with them. They liked me. I played the Andrew Jackson part. He had been instrumental in transporting most of them to the West. Because I was playing that part they regarded me as Old General Jackson himself. They had forgiven him. Many of them had come back from the west. As a matter of fact, they went back and forth, and they had hidden in the Great Smokies until this matter of transporting people to different places was settled, you see.

Silveri: So back to your father again. How long did he spend cutting timber here?

Moser: He must have stayed about two or three years here. He made a trip back home and he had changed so and developed, working out in the open like that, that they didn't recognize him. So, he went back home, and he often told it and laughed about it.

He said, "I went back home and went up to the door. My mother

came to the door and said, 'How do you do?' I said, 'How do you do? How are all the folks?' She didn't recognize me. She said, 'They're all right, I reckon.' "(She had a kind of an accent, you know. By the way, she and my grandfather both could speak German at that time. My father could speak a little. I studied it at the university, and it was all I could do to master it. I took a minor in German, as a matter of fact.)

He said, 'May I come in?' She said, 'Yes.' He said, 'I want to stay all night.' She said, 'We don't have very much room. We don't have many accommodations, but we'll try to keep you for the night.' He said, 'All right.' They got supper ready and all of that. My grandfather came and looked at him and said, 'It seems I've seen you somewhere, but I can't recognize you. Your face looks somewhat familiar!' They got to talking, and they went to the supper table and started eating and they did recognize him. Oh, they got up, you know, they had a time!

He had changed a great deal. But in the meantime he had (he did come back, too, after that) but he had already met my mother. He would go out to these churches, these mountain churches. He was curious about those things, as you and I would be, to see how these people lived, what they did, how they acted, and their singing, and their preaching, and so forth. He had an investigative attitude about it. I think I'm very much like my father in that regard. I don't have any edge on him; he was always investigating things. He observed everything he saw. He remembered everything: plants, and nature, and people, and he could judge people just like that! He could tell whether they had merit or not, just quickly. So, he went out to these churches. My mother and all

these girls were there, you see (her sisters), and they were all singing. They were naturally looking for sweethearts, you can imagine. I think there were ten girls in that family. So you can imagine they always had an eye out for a good-looking man!

He had this little black mustache, and he was all dressed up, nice looking. So he met my mother and they fell for each other right away. I think, though, they courted about a year. He wasn't ready to get married, and he didn't have a permanent job, you know, a good position, and so forth. Although they did have a lot of land in Catawba there; they had over a thousand acres of land and a very nice house, and he would get his part of that land. He did get it finally. I think he inherited several hundred acres, I think five hundred acres. They must have had more than a thousand acres, as a matter of fact. It was a large area. I never heard them say how much it really was, but he got five hundred acres, and there were several children in that family. So they must have had a large area of land there in the vicinity of Hickory. Nice country there, you know.

Silveri: I wanted to ask you how much schooling your father had.

Moser: He went to about what we call the seventh grade. He could read well. He kept up with all the farm news, wars, and all that. He formed judgments about it. He had a fine mind. I admired him a great deal. He wanted to be a fine writer. He must have had the same kind of artistic touch that I believe I have. I think he could have painted and done art work. As a matter of fact, he would draw buildings and plans for buildings. Everything was drawn off. I didn't pay too much attention to it because I just took for granted anyone who wanted to build something would fix a

design for it, you know, to draw it off. But I soon learned that that's not true at all. But he would do that.

Silveri: Just to get his life in perspective. What year was he born, and what year did he die?

Moser: He was born just about three or four years after the Civil War.

Silveri: He lived to be quite old, didn't he?

Moser: Yes, he was eighty-nine when he passed away.

Silveri: And when was that?

Moser: That's been about twelve years ago.

Silveri: That's been a tremendous period--

Moser: A very interesting period, and he had a very interesting life, although it was a hard life because the Civil War had damaged us greatly. There were no markets and money was scarce. During the Cleveland administration I often heard him talk about when they were supposed to be doing their best farming down near Hickory. They said that the cotton crop went to nothing--went to four cents a pound. So that was one reason he came to this area. And, by the way, later he brought his father here, brought my grandfather here and lived here something like three or four years out at a place called Luther out near Enka and Canton, N.C. I want to go out there sometime. I have wanted to go out there for a long time just to see this place they call Luther, and see if I could find out anything about where my grandfather lived. It isn't far, but yet I haven't gone.

Silveri: It's very interesting you mentioned about "Cleveland depression" in 1890. Did you ever hear your father talk much about politics?

Moser: Oh, yes. He used to march in what they called torchlight parades. They evidently lit up pine torches, and they'd all march through the town

and raise a big ruckus, you know, very much like these protesting people do now, except that he was on the positive side. He was for the Democrats a hundred percent.

Silveri: He was always a Democrat?

Moser: Oh, yes. He was never voted any other way. He didn't like it because I was rather liberal in politics. I would vote either way. I was independent, you know. Well, that shows you the development that can take place in a few generations. He was broadminded and tolerant regarding religion. He was not what we would call a religious man at all. He had evidently been inducted into the Lutheran church when he was just a child and had no memory of it at all. He never went to church. He was not a church man. We went to church, naturally. We went to some of the funerals of the family, and he would go in the Presbyterian church over here where I had joined when I first started teaching in this region, in this community. He would go in and he wouldn't take his hat off. I'd say, "Father take your hat off, because it's not the custom here to wear a hat." But evidently down there in the old days they (the men) would wear their hats. The men all sat on one side of the church, and the women all on the other. So it must have been a sort of primitive Lutheran church. Some of my people are buried at this Lutheran church, and I want to go there sometime and see that church. But that's neither here nor there.

Silveri: Your parents got married and they settled down in Leicester?

Moser: Oh, they got married, and after they had lived up here just a short while my father felt if he could get back to Catawba County and to Hickory that they might get into agriculture, might get into farming again and make quite a go of it. So, he persuaded her to go with him



down to Catawba County after about a year here, maybe not so long. Of course, being a mountain girl as she was, a mountain woman, she regarded that area there as just suffocating. It was low. The hills were just rolling, you see, and she didn't like the people there. They didn't speak the right accent. They didn't sing any ballads; had no folklore the way she had heard it, and they were not very friendly, naturally, to her because she was different, too. So that year or so, two years, they stayed there. She raised so much Cain about it and made life so unhappy for him during that time that he moved back here and moved over in the cove just opposite here, and I can recall our arrival there in that cove. I must not have been only a little over two years old. I guess I was going on three. That's the strangest thing, because I can remember seeing this double-log house with this open alleyway between the two parts of the cabin, you know, kind of a built-in porch there. Going downstairs they had a trapdoor that you opened up and you went down a stairway, and here were all these apples in there piled up. There were fine orchards here then. I can remember smelling those good apples, eating them. I must not have been but just a couple or three years old.

Silveri: Just a little distance from here in Swannanoa?

Moser: Yes, just a little distance from here. Across, over there in the next cove. I can walk over there in half an hour, and I often do. I'm going to draw a picture of the house. I can remember it just as plainly. The logs; I can see the logs and the planks, yet, on that house and how it stood. I've been over there several times since, of course, and you can see a view there. From there we moved over on the mountain that you can see there, over on what we call the Hughes Mountain.

Very beautiful. And there we farmed and raised the finest corn and vegetables, potatoes. Oh, we lived high in more ways than one on that mountain you see. We had our chickens, our cattle, and hogs. We had corn and we had every good thing to eat.

Silveri: He didn't raise tobacco, though, did he?

Moser: No tobacco up here. The climate right through this region here seems a little too high for tobacco, although people do raise it down in the valley, or did, and over in the foothills of the next valley there over in the low area, and, of course, on down into the counties north of here they specialize in tobacco. It's a money crop, and has been for many years. But we never raised any.

Silveri: What would be a money crop for your father?

Moser: Well, potatoes and corn would be the money crop. Cattle would be the main money source in this region at that time, but corn was considered the staple product because you could raise hogs on it, and you could always market the hogs and the cattle. People made their money that way. Some people made a lot of money on cattle and hogs.

Silveri: I was wondering if you could give us some recollections of your early childhood: the kind of food you ate, the kind of entertainment there was for a child in those years--

Moser: We did not have a cook stove. We lived in a cabin on this mountain and we had a large fireplace. We had skillets and ovens, and my mother baked all the bread in the oven. I recall the cornbread that she used to bake, and it was better than any cake I can recall, because she knew how to make cornbread, and of course it was ground by a mill run by water. My father took turns of corn to this mill on the Swannanoa,

and they ground this corn just right. Of course she sifted out the coarse stuff and she knew how to mix this with buttermilk--this meal, buttermilk and eggs, and produced a pone of cornbread that was magnificent, brown on top and on the bottom. Then this good rich milk would go with it. We would do what we call crumbling this cornbread into these milk bowls, and you'd eat it out. I suppose the ancient Scotch highlanders and others used to do that. But we would have that. We ate cornbread. We ate simple. We ate simple foods. We would have our own cured meat, our hams. We even raised our own meat, you see, we cured it ourselves with hickory bark, smoked it in the smoke house, and had all that nice, good ham, good meat. Learned how to make hominy the way the Indians did. Most delicious hominy. We had cracklin's. It was part of the rendering of the lard from the--they sliced this, I suppose, and this mixed with bread had wonderful flavor, and it was delicious.

Silveri: You mentioned hominy. How was hominy made?

Moser: It was made by--they used ashes to take the skin off the hominy, you know, the rinds off the grains, and of course they boiled it then. First they boiled it. I don't think I can give the process, as a matter of fact, but I do know it was boiled first until it swelled up, you see. Then it was put in this lye which took off the peeling, and it left just a nice, clean, white grain, beautiful grain. It had a marvelous taste. And that could be fried and put in the various--they had various ways of serving it. It was good any way at all. Corn, if it's not spoiled and it's treated right, is really a wonderful food. The pioneers, and the Indians too, lived on it. The Indians, you know, would have a dance. It was such a pleasant food that they celebrated it with what they called

the Green Corn Dance. So the pioneers took over the corn, and we, as time went on, developed a fine corn. I never will forget the wonderful bin of corn we used to produce every year. We'd bring it down off this mountain with a yoke of steers, and I can see those huge steers with that yoke on their shoulders, you know, coming down that mountain with a sled--pulling a sled that was filled with fine corn. We'd go back again and again and bring down those huge loads of corn off this mountain.

Silveri: You mentioned cracklin's before. I just want to go over that again, because you can get them in the supermarket even now.

Moser: Oh, they are delicious. They can be put in bread, especially cornbread, and they enrich it and add a fine flavor.

Silveri: It's fat? Is it fat?

Moser: Yes, it's fat, but it's choice fat from inside the pig, the hog. It is cut in slices and then it's boiled out. All of it is fried out, as a matter of fact. It is fried out. And that was stored separately to use in bread and lard. But these cracklings, then, were used from time to time in bread. Just in cornbread; I don't think it could be used in any other kind. It is delicious if it's prepared right. We had wonderful food in these mountains, and we still have. When you go to this picnic, which I hope you will do, next Sunday week, you'll find some unusual food. These mountain people know how to cook. I'll tell you, you'll be surprised at the delicious foods they know how to prepare. They are very artistic, you know. They make these beautiful quilts and all these rugs and carvings, but they are just as skillful, the women are, at serving food and preparing it. My mother was really the best cook I've ever seen. I guess I'd be biased if I didn't say that. The point is--

Silveri: You said she cooked at a fireplace, and she didn't have--

Moser: Oh, yes. She'd call it cooking over the fireplace, but she cooked--the coals would be raked out from under the wood. We used hickory wood. We had the finest wood. That was a wonderful thing, to have the glow of the fire in the evenings. About the only light we had, as a matter of fact, except an oil lamp. The oil lamps--my mother would read some, and my father would, too. At that time they read the Bible a good deal. Used to have family prayers, they'd call it. They outgrew that after a while, but they were very devoted people. I said my father was not a very religious man. As a matter of fact, he was probably more religious than most people without having the orthodox attitude, you see.

Silveri: How many children in your family? How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Moser: There were nine in our family. I had two sisters and seven brothers, of course. They served in the armed forces. All except one or two were in different wars. They served--I was in World War I. I was the only one to go in at that time.

Silveri: You were the oldest in the family?

Moser: Yes, I was the oldest. And the others served, I think about (not all of them) three or four of them served in World War II, and some of them enlisted in the Army during peace time, one or two of them. But I don't recall exactly.

Silveri: Were the mountain families usually that large?

Moser: Yes, mountain families were traditionally very large. There were as many as (twelve was not unusual) ten or nine was not unusual for

mountain families. Some men married twice. A lot of the men married twice and would have as many as eighteen children. In the Enloe family we mentioned, there were something like eighteen children in that family. Fine people they were.

Silveri: All of the men in your family survived to adulthood, right? None of them died in childbirth?

Moser: Only one died in childbirth. Yes, they grew into strong young people, strong adults. The Army damaged them, though. I must tell you that one or two turned to drink (whiskey). They smoked heavily, some of them. One of them became an alcoholic. He staggered out into the road and an automobile crashed into him, killing him. There have been a lot of regrets. My family has had its part of tragedies and regrets as well as all the others.

Silveri: As far as your own childhood, growing up in those years, you can remember so much that was enjoyable for you.

Moser: Oh, yes. We had a lot of dances and corn huskings, you see, in the old days the whole community would come together to husk the corn and get it ready for the crib, we'd call it, the bins. On our farm, up on the mountain there, we would have fifty or seventy-five people come from all over the region around here. After the husking, which would last into the night, we would invite them in. We would have a big feast. We'd have a big turkey supper or chicken supper, and then we'd have music afterwards and dancing clear into the night, way into the night, you see. I never will forget the fine banjo picking that we had. I seldom hear any as good as that now, even though the men are famous, some of them, I don't hear the good banjo picking, the traditional kind I like. It's

better than the Bill Monroe. It's not so raucous and so high. It was more subdued, but it was very fine. Of course, they sang. The mountain people have always been fond of music. Wherever you go you will see--hear about singing and music in the mountains.

Silveri: Is that house still standing, the house of your early childhood?

Moser: No, neither of those houses is standing, but one of them resembled very much the house that you passed down on the road here as you come around through the valley.

Silveri: The log cabin?

Moser: The log cabin. I want to make some pictures of that, because the real, genuine, log cabin is getting to be a thing of the past. It was quite an art to carve the logs and put them together without nails so they would stay there.

Silveri: Can you remember what the first school looked like that you attended?

Moser: Oh, yes. It was called the Pickens School. The land was given by a man named George Andy Pickens, who was a relative--who was a son, as a matter of fact, or grandson, of the Major Pickens who used to be in South Carolina. There's a town in South Carolina called Pickens, named for him. He was a great Revolutionary hero back in the days when they fought Indians and had to take up land. I can remember this Pickens School down there that we went to from off the mountain. It was about two miles on that same road that we took during our drive, but that school was further down. If I'm not mistaken, a man bought that school and moved it slightly. I don't know--he still lives in it, a man by the name of Redmon. The building is still intact. It's painted white. You hear a lot about the little red schoolhouse. Well, I never saw one. I never did like the idea of a little red schoolhouse. We always had

white schoolhouses in the mountains here. It took particular paint to paint them beautifully white. They were attractive, and they were clean inside. We had very good schools, and I recall my first teacher, a Miss McClerkin. I recall that she would allow us, every day at noon, to take an hour off from our studies in school, and she would read the classics to us. I recall her reading Robinson Crusoe. I never will forget that story. I've been fond of it ever since, and I couldn't have been more than, well, I was probably seven years of age. Seven, I guess I was, going on eight, because I had two other brothers that went with me to school, and they didn't get along well. But I, we all liked books. I recall they had a little bookcase at one side of the schoolroom and we were just about the only ones who checked any books out. Mother would read them to us at first, because they were difficult, such as Hannibal Crossing the Alps. [End of Side I]

[Side II]

Silveri: [Where did you grow up?]

Moser: We moved to the Vanderbilt Estate several years later. I was nine years of age when this notable event took place. It meant a complete change in our lives. We now lived in some of the finest houses. My father became a forester and an assistant to the head forester on the Vanderbilt Estate, Dr. Carl Schenck. We lived on the estate about twelve years.

Silveri: Did Mr. Vanderbilt take good care of his workers? Was he a good man?

Moser: Oh, yes, he was a good man to work for. He was distant. He was kind of a reticent man. He was very scholarly, but he had fine



overseers under him and he was always conferring with them. We admired him. His wife, especially, Mrs. Edith Vanderbilt, was a tall, elegant, charming woman. I never will forget her! She was a personality, let me tell you. She took a lot of interest in me. She was interested in art; in my drawings and paintings. She gave a special exhibit of my work down at the fair we had at Riverside Park, I remember.

Then at Biltmore she wanted me to come to her school where they taught carving. So I attended that. Learned to carve quite well. (I like it yet; I'd like to carve more) So she took a lot of interest, and he did, too. They would visit us out on the estate there. He would usually sit in the Cadillac while she came to the house, you know, and met all the children and my mother. She would just sit down anywhere on the front steps, just anywhere. She was just as plain-- My mother used to say she was as plain as an old shoe, but she wasn't.

Silveri: Mr. Vanderbilt would stay in the car until she came out?

Moser: Yeah, he would stay in the car, and sometimes we would pass by there and he'd throw up his hand and smile. He wouldn't say anything. He was always thinking and planning what he could do next to develop the estate.

Silveri: Your father enjoyed working there, those eight or nine years?

Moser: Oh, yes. He had a great time there. He got started, and after that he became a forester on Mount Mitchell and was a state forester. That is a state--(What did they call them then?) Well, that's all right. In other words, he was a guard, he took charge of the mountain, the truth is, and helped with the tourists who came there and guided them and helped them with their campfires. He would preserve the trees, which they would cut

if they got a chance. Tourists will cut down everything if they get a chance.

Silveri: Let's go back to that previous time when he was at Biltmore. Do you remember famous people visiting the place? Were you there when Teddy Roosevelt came?

Moser: No, but we heard about it. You see, we were out on the estate there some distance, five miles from the mansion, from the main center there. So we were not concerned. Neither was my father. And Dr. Schenck didn't seem to take too much interest in it. But they had meetings. My father would attend huge banquets out in Pisgah Forest. Mr. Vanderbilt had a hunting lodge in Pisgah Forest, and there they would meet once a year and cook this wild game that was killed (that the hunters would bring in) and have a real antique-kind of party where all the different wild animals that were edible would be barbecued and served. They had a special mountain cook that Mr. Vanderbilt discovered who knew how to prepare all savory dishes.

I should tell you about that. Vanderbilt went out there walking one day in the forest from his camp out in Pisgah Forest, and he came around a curve in the road. He saw a man by the road building a fire and his rifle over against a tree there. Vanderbilt went up to him sort of tentative like and said, "How do you do?" The man said, "Howdy!" Vanderbilt said, "Nice day, isn't it?" He said, "Yes, it's fine." Vanderbilt said, "It looks like you've been out hunting." The man said, "Yes, I've been hunting, but I haven't had such good luck." Vanderbilt said, "I guess you know this is my property and that I own all this area through here, all this timber and waterfalls and all." He said, "Yes,

I know that, but I've hunted here before you bought this land. My people have hunted here for generations. I come in here occasionally and hunt. I didn't think you would mind." Mr. Vanderbilt said, "I don't mind, just so you don't kill anything or damage anything that we are trying to preserve here. We are trying to take care of our resources, the natural resources, and preserve them. What were you hunting?"

The man said, "Well, I was trying to get a turkey (I believe he said). I didn't have any luck on that. I did get something, though. I've got it already cooking here." Vanderbilt said, "Oh, that smells good. It smells delicious! That must be something very good!" The man said, "Yes, it's practically ready to serve now. Just sit down. We'll have us a little feast here."

So they sat down there around the fire, you know. This man reached over there and twisted off a front leg of this thing, all brown and nice and juicy, you know, and handed it to Vanderbilt. Of course, they were just eating with their hands. They had no fork or knives there. Vanderbilt took it, smelled it, and said, "Oh, man, I don't know when I've smelled anything as good!" He said, "Just go ahead, I'm going to take a piece of the hand." He twisted off a piece of the hand, and they just sat there and ate that; talked and talked and laughed. And that was the man who became his chief cook when he had these great parties. His name was Sam Allison.

Vanderbilt said, "Where do you live?" So, he got to talking with him and he found he lived out at Brevard. He was a real mountain hunter and a real mountain cook. Vanderbilt said, "Do you know how to cook?" The man said, "Why, I know how to cook deer. I know how to bake things.

I know how to really keep the good taste in." Vanderbilt said, "I can tell that you do!" They didn't happen to mention what the food was, what the meat was, you know. After a while Mr. Vanderbilt said, "Oh, by the way, what is this? What is it?" The man said, "Well, I'll tell you: it's wild cat!" The man said that Vanderbilt sort of held his stomach and acted as though he were going to upchuck! Mr. Vanderbilt said, "Well, I wouldn't have dreamed that this meat could be as good as that. You must come to see me now at the mansion. I want you to come to see me. (He gave the man a time.) I'll be there and I want to talk with you." So this man went there, and they were the best friends you have ever seen.

Silveri: That was very fortunate to live on that estate for those years, and, of course, I guess we should mention that the estate comprised over a hundred thousand acres.

Moser: Yes. Originally (I've written a whole story about it)-- originally it contained a hundred and forty thousand acres. They'll tell you a hundred and twenty thousand. They gave a great area of it to-- as part of the Pisgah National Park, as part of the National Forest.

Silveri: I heard that only twelve thousand acres remains with the mansion.

Moser: That's right. There's only twelve thousand now with the estate on which the Biltmore House, as it is called, is situated. Of course, they have made that into a garden of beautiful places. It's really gorgeous. We go over there every now and then. I take friends over there, and we--I know the Cecils who are grandsons of Mr. Vanderbilt. I met both William and the other Cecil.

Silveri: They are the ones who own the estate now. Is that right?

Moser: Oh, yes. They own the estate. They have families, and their

children will probably inherit that.

Silveri: Do they live in the castle?

Moser: No, they have turned that into a museum. Not many people have been comfortable, felt comfortable, in the mansion. It's too big and too gorgeous. It's not homey; doesn't have a homey atmosphere. So they have moved out into the suburbs out into Biltmore Forest. It's a very nice area, a very nice section, there.

Silveri: Is the estate a non-profit thing or is it still privately owned?

Moser: It's still privately owned, but it's owned by, it was until recently, I'm not sure that it's owned by a company. There was a period during the depression when (before the Cecils took over) it looked as though that estate would have to be taken over by the state. I think, as a matter of fact, they offered it to the State of North Carolina, if the State would maintain that estate there as it had been maintained, you see. In other words, they wanted to keep it as beautiful and on a high plane, but North Carolina wouldn't do it. So they formed what was called the Biltmore Company. A group of fifty or seventy-five men underwrote the estate and took it over, took stock in it, formed a stock company. So they have that thing set up, so far as I know at the present time, but the Cecils didn't like it and so they are trying to take it over again. Of course they must be able to do it because they made so much money on the dairy. They have a marvelous dairy and a large farm on the estate.

Silveri: That's part of the estate?

Moser: Yes, and they have expanded their dairy interest all over

North Carolina; all over the western part, at least.

Silveri: Well, while you were there, then, you went to Biltmore High School?

Moser: That's right. I attended Biltmore High School. I walked about five miles there and back.

Silveri: That must have been a good school.

Moser: It was. It was a very good school. It was a small school. There were only twelve in my class when I graduated, and we had good teachers; good order. There was never any disciplinary problem, and it has always made me be in favor of small schools, not too large, at least, and also small classes where you can know your teachers and where students have a special interest in getting an education. We had no other object in mind except to develop our intellects, and we had very good teachers; they were graduates of colleges, as a matter of fact. I recall my English teacher, how she would teach Shakespeare and teach all the classics, and how I bought a great many classics and read them.

I had been deprived of an education. We had been on the estate there, and for something like five or six years I never went to school because of the distance and the isolation. Later, as a matter of fact, we went to find a school and two of my brothers and I entered. I virtually grew up without any schooling except with my reading, and my mother encouraged me to do it in the way of reading. But I was studying nature all the time and running wild there. We had nature all around us. It was gorgeous. It was an education to be there in all this nature. Later I entered Biltmore High School. In the meantime, I had also attended

the Vanderbilt Art School for a brief time.

I went to Biltmore school and graduated with that small class, and then the war came on. It was already going on then; it was 1917 when I graduated.

Silveri: You graduated in June of 1917?

Moser: Yes, and then I went into the Army immediately after that, and was soon in France in World War I.

Silveri: Did you volunteer for the service or were you drafted?

Moser: Well, as I told you the other day, I wanted to get into the Marines, and I went to the officer, to the recruiting office. He said, "Well, clear your draft status over at the courthouse and come right back. You passed the physical. I can see that you will pass, I believe you will. You've been out in the open and you look as though you'd have no difficulty in passing at all. Come right back and we'll take the physical and you can be signed up. It'll be about a month before you'll go into the service."

So I went over to the courthouse to see about my draft status, and they said, "You're on the next list to come out." I said, "In that case, you might as well sign me up and get me in right off. No use wasting time." So they did. So from that point of view I have never decided whether I volunteered or whether I was drafted. It didn't seem to make any difference. I had to go anyway. He said in a month or so, you're on the list. So I went in and in just a few weeks after that I was on my way to Camp Jackson.

Silveri: How old were you?

Moser: I guess I was twenty. That was right close to 1918. I was

eighteen plus four, plus six.

Silveri: You had voted in the presidential election?

Moser: Yes, I had voted already.

Silveri: Who did you vote for in 1916?

Moser: Woodrow Wilson. He was my hero. Oh, I admired Woodrow Wilson.

Silveri: Why?

Moser: I liked his scholarly attitude. I liked to hear him speak, his writing. I admired his writing tremendously; I do yet.

Silveri: Did you believe in what he was trying to do?

Moser: Oh, yes. I was sold a hundred percent on going to fight for this country. We were going to make the world safe for democracy, you see, and to end the wars for all time, bring peace to the world and form a league of nations and make the world over again.

Silveri: As a young American of twenty-one or twenty-two, you thought America could do that?

Moser: Oh, yes. I had no doubt. I had absolute confidence in myself and in America. I have never lost that. I'm sold a hundred percent on America yet. There's no radical streak in my system. I'm right in there. I don't mind to tell you.

Silveri: Well, you went over, and I think you told me you spent about a year in the service before the war was over.

Moser: It couldn't have been much over a year. I went to Camp Jackson. In about six or eight weeks we were on the way over there. As I told you, they put me in a special squad because I had been studying the arts, you see, to some extent, and I could draw. So I signed up really as an artist, to draw maps and to diagram, make plans for



battles and so forth, to conceal the guns and camouflage. I took a special course in that after we got over in France, went to a school. And I was promoted in comparative short time to corporal. I got to be a first class private in no time at all. I liked military training. I liked to drill. I liked to hike. I enjoyed it. They'd load us down with all kinds of tobacco and cigarettes, but I didn't smoke. My father said, "Don't ever smoke, and you'll be stronger and you'll feel better and you'll live longer." So I never smoked. I took his advice. I had all of this tobacco that was dealt out to us, you know, every week or two. That fine tobacco smelled so good: old Prince Albert and Bull Durham. I never will forget those tobaccos. And I tried to smoke. I was young, and all of this tobacco given out to me. Maybe I'm missing something. So I started to smoke a little. The craziest thing. It was doing me no good at all. Quit.

Silveri: You didn't do any kind of fighting over there, because you weren't in the line?

Moser: No. We were on the way out to the front with the artillery. I was in the artillery, the seventy-five's. We used these small guns; not so small at that. But we were on the way out to the front, about twelve miles in the rear, and we were getting ready to go in at Verdun. That was about the tenth of November, 1918. The word came down the line that the Germans were capitulating, that they were giving in, and, sure enough, we heard the armistice had been signed the next day. Everybody was celebrating. We got off the cars and unloaded our guns and got ready to go to a village and spend time until we could come home, go somewhere and get at something. But I was over there eight months.

I believe, seven or eight months. So I had plenty of time to travel all over that country. I had vacations, and it was great experience.

Silveri: Well, could you tell us something about the trench warfare that went on those years? Did you see those trenches?

Moser: Yes, I saw the trenches. They were down lower than a man's head. They were dug down about eight or nine feet, so that a man could walk up and down those things, and they had fairways and you could go quite a distance. Some of them were broad enough to pull carts, and even artillery. You could pull it along and be concealed. Of course, those things were built up with logs and sticks: palings driven in to hold the dirt back. And some of them were very muddy and bad because the water ran in there, but others were not bad at all. They had little alcoves on the side where the men could have little shelters there, and you had (it was dry in there) and you had a light. They had electricity sometimes, strung, the wires were running along there so that you could have some lights. Didn't want much light, as a matter of fact, because the airplanes were up over us there. I was there. Those trenches were trenches that had been deserted as time had gone on. See, we had moved further and further up on beyond.

Silveri: Did you have much of a chance to talk with the French natives?

Moser: Yes.

Silveri: Did they welcome--

Moser: Oh, yes. They would invite us to their homes. I used to go and drink their wine and eat their great loaves of bread and the potatoes. Their diet was not very elaborate. They had cheese and milk; the finest cattle you've ever seen. I was there in the vicinity of the French Alps,

those little Alps there along near Switzerland. We were at Saint-Saëns. We moved from one village to another, and some of them were very fine villages. We were in one village, a large village, Aix-les-Bains, (things fade from my mind) anyhow, it was big enough so we could have a band concert every evening out in the square of the town. People would come, and girls, the men, the soldiers, here they were. Magnificent-looking crowd. So we could mix around and talk. We got so we could speak some French. I studied French a little. There was always a big fountain spewing up water there, and the people came and carried water from the fountain. A lot of them didn't have running water as we have in America. They didn't have the water piped to them the way we would have it, yet there was plenty of water.

They had great barns, and we slept in one of these barns. The cattle were in there: the largest, finest cattle. Holstein, I suppose they were, and they would have the barns down under the houses, too, in the Swiss Alps, there in the French Alps. I'll have to get you a map and show you where it was, sometime.

Silveri: I want to know when you left France.

Moser: I left France in July, 1918.

Silveri: You were there after the war was over?

Moser: Yes. I was over there eight months after the war was over. I'm still a little confused. I'll have to check on that to get exactly the length of time.

Silveri: You might remember because the peace conference was going on. Were you in France when the peace conference was going on?

Moser: Oh, yes. I was there when Woodrow Wilson and all that group

were trying to settle things. Of course, much of that was done after I got back, too, as I recall, because I kept up with it in the newspapers a great deal. I taught school for a short time after I got back to make a little money so that I could go to the university. I saved some, though, while I was in the service overseas. You'd be surprised. Out of thirty dollars a month, I sent money home. There was nothing much you could spend it on. The wine was soon all drunk up, you know, and there were no amusements of any sort. All the fellows could do was sit around and shoot crap and throw their money away. The Y.M.C.A. would transfer it for you to the bank at home. I sent enough home so I could stay my first year at college without having to work my way so much.

Silveri: Can you remember what your attitude was about the peace treaty and the League of Nations fight?

Moser: Yes. I was in favor of it. I was really very much in favor, and that's why I kept up with it. I was a hundred percent back of it, because I was hoping we could build a better world, honestly. I felt that we might be able to do away with wars and get people together to see how foolish it all was, and what a cruel business, and how it got you nowhere at all. Of course, as I say, I enjoyed my military service, but I wouldn't have enjoyed it if I had gotten up in the thick of the battle, I'm sure, because I saw men coming back wounded. A lot of them, our 30th Division, and also part of the 81st Division in which I belonged, were shot up considerably. A lot of men were wounded in my division, but I happened to be fortunate in being in the artillery and being delayed somewhat in getting in.

Silveri: Do you think it would have been a good idea for the United States to join the League of Nations?

Moser: Oh, yes. I do. I think we might have got somewhere. I think we might have done better.

Silveri: You think, then, Wilson did not fail. Others refused.

Moser: That's right. I don't consider Wilson failing at all. I know he was very idealistic. I know he was overly optimistic, doubtless. He was supposed to be considered an impractical visionary, but I don't regard him as such. I regard him as a man who had a great dream, a great vision that could have brought us nearer peace in the world, doubtless, if his enemies--Who was the man who blocked him so?

Silveri: Senator Lodge?

Moser: Senator Lodge. His son became a very active man in the United Nations, in our new United Nations. I'm proud of him, but I always regretted that Lodge was so hostile. He was the man who really broke Woodrow Wilson down, in his attitude.

Silveri: Well, you know, after the first World War a number of Americans began to write stories and novels about the war. You are probably familiar with John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway, and so on. You never got that feeling of disillusionment about our participation in--

Moser: No. Oh, yes. I began to get disillusionment about it after I got to the university. I was having a hard time making my way through, because I had to work my way a great deal and I had no money. I was eager to get my degree and make good. I did, but it was hard to do it. But I always felt that I should have had help as an ex-soldier, but you felt as if they didn't care for you anymore. The soldiers--he was just another soldier. You were disillusioned. I was. I began to feel not too good about it all. There were several years there that I had doubts

about the thing. Of course, you begin to change your ideas when you become a student, but I've often told my friends who criticize students at the present time that I think I was just as revolutionary and as radical as any that we have now. In my way I was, of course. I became editor of the magazine, and I was contributor to it. I wrote articles.

Silveri: Maybe we'd better go back to the beginning of that. When you got out of the service in 1919, you enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Was it 1919?

Moser: That's right.

Silveri: What did you intend to study?

Moser: Well, I really wanted to get a good general education so that I could do practically anything I chose to do afterwards. That's the attitude I had. I took all knowledge to be my field. I had no special-- I wanted to study philosophy. I wanted to study psychology. I wanted to especially study English and literature and sociology and history. I didn't draw the line. I wanted to know how the world really was, and how people were; what the history of the world had been. Honestly, I had a terrific attitude towards scholarship, I don't mind to tell you. I'm not bragging. I wanted to even study folklore. They had a special--I recall a Dr. Hanford and some others that said, "We're going to have a series of lectures and courses and we would like to know if you, if we can get enough students that will go into that." So they could conduct the course, you know. So I told my roommate: "Let's go over and attend this, and we might like it very much, because they had said that in the western part of the state we have a lot of people who still sing the old ballads and the songs of Scotland and England."

I used to hear my mother sing some of the old songs, but they didn't mean anything. I mean, they were not significant as far as I was concerned, but the fact that these professors began to mention this kind of thing interested me a great deal. My roommate was also from the mountains, so we attended this, and signed up for the course. But not enough students entered to justify these men to conduct that course-- great disappointment. But not 'til many years after that did I have the pleasure of going into folklore in courses.

Silveri: Well, Chapel Hill in 1919 was a pretty small place?

Moser: Yes. There were only eighteen hundred students when I was there. We had only four hundred in my class (of '23).

Silveri: You had mentioned to me before that your first year at Chapel Hill was the year of Tom Wolfe's senior year.

Moser: Yes. He, as I recall, was a senior when I went there. He had been there three years, and he belonged to the literary society called the Dialectic Literary Society, which was a very staid and formal organization. They had--we met in a large room upstairs, and the oil portraits, fine oil portraits, covered the walls. They were of the men who had been there and attended that society and made themselves famous in the world: governors, senators, and distinguished men in many fields (presidents, two presidents on the wall there) sat in that same hall there that we were in. Wolfe belonged to this group, and all the distinguished students on the campus, and men who have now (several of them) become governors since that time. Then I was with men like William Bobbitt, who has become Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. He was there, and he became president of the society.

So Wolfe belonged, too, and a good many men from Asheville, in this section, belonged. In fact, nearly all of them did. Those from the western part of the state belonged to the Dialectic Society, and those from the eastern part of the state belonged to the Philanthropic Society. So there was great rivalry there as to who could get the best men on the campus into these organizations, that would show up later in this state and in this nation.

We had a great idea. The university had a great spirit. You got the feeling of it that the world was yours. All you needed to do was to study, prepare yourself and get ready, and the world was yours. You had that feeling, you know. It's a great feeling.

Silveri: What are your recollections of Tom Wolfe? Did you see very much of him?

Moser: No. I didn't meet him personally. I saw him a great deal, because I saw him there in the society, and then in classes. I was working in a Latin class. I'd see him on the campus. He'd reach up, you know (he was a very tall man) reached up and pulled down an oak limb off the tree and ran around the campus whipping some of the fellows with it. He had a great sense of humor. Played a lot of pranks, you know. He belonged to one of the fraternities there. He would be on the program to give a paper or play in the Dialectic Society. I recall on one occasion he read a play which he called the "Dirty Streets of Durham". . . oh, the "Muddy Streets of Durham." That was the title of that play, and it was afterwards published, too, in the Carolina Magazine. I was one of the editors on it, and I never will forget that. At that time Durham was undeveloped. Of course, Duke University wasn't



there then, you know. They had Trinity College there, which became Duke University. So he wrote this play about spending a Saturday evening over there. It was the nearest town from Chapel Hill, and the largest town. So the boys would go over to try to get a little pleasure: to attend a show, or get a drink or something, or see some of the women.

So he wrote this terrific thing. It was not a very nice thing, you know. It was a little risqué all the way through. Wolfe was like that. He could picture things and, of course, the fellows were in a jovial mood so they just laughed. We had a great time. He appeared a great many times before the group with plays and poems that he would write. They tell he had become a legend there. It is supposed that he came on Dr. Greenlaw's class. Dr. Greenlaw is the editor of that series of books of literature called Literature and Life, and I was very fond of Dr. Greenlaw. He was a great scholar and a very fine man; very level-headed fellow. He was hard to pass under, though. You had to study hard. I was afraid of him, I don't mind to tell you. Wolfe is supposed to have entered the class late on one occasion, and when asked to read his paper, read it from a copy written on toilet paper. Dr. Greenlaw had asked the students to write some kind of a paper. Perhaps it was to be a play. I think it was to try to hand in a play using local material out of their environment, out of their childhood and young manhood, out of their community. Dr. Greenlaw had the philosophy, and so did Dr. Koch, that the most vital subject matter that you could write about, the most interesting things, in fact, that you should write about were things you had come in contact with in your community: the people, the institutions, the organizations, the folklore, and all

that kind of thing which was found.

Wolfe took that up, of course. That's why he couldn't go home again. You remember, he wrote this book, and what he did: he portrayed the people here in Asheville in Western North Carolina.

Well, Wolfe. . . It is said that he came on class one morning with his hair all disheveled and his shirt all unbuttoned, and he was very undignified. He'd evidently been on a little binge probably the night before, and he had written part of this. . . .

Oh, he, Dr. Greenlaw, said, "All right, Mr. Wolfe, would you now read your essay (or whatever it was)?" He said, "Y-yes, just as soon as I can get my paper here." So he reached in his pocket and he began to get an envelope out of here, and a sheet of paper out of this pocket, and a little part of the manuscript out of the other pocket, and he got those things and packed them up together, kind of looked at it, and he began to stutter and read. On the back of one. . . and, by the way, one part of it was a piece of toilet paper. That's the way the story's told. I don't know how accurate, but it sounds exactly in Wolfe's character.

He began to read, you know, and stutter; stutter and read. After a while he got going, and he read the best paper in the class. Dr. Greenlaw said, "Mr. Wolfe, you have a very good paper there, very interesting theme. You need to revise it and clean it up a little. I guess the main thing was to clean it out a little, at that. But he got started. Wolfe was interested in writing, and he wrote a play called "Buck Gavin," and he acted in it. But he did that with Dr. Koch, though. I attended some of Dr. Koch's classes and Wolfe was there. But

I only sat in, because I couldn't get it into my schedule. It was a very interesting class. What they would do is write these one-act plays, and then they would all gather around the table and read these plays. Then they would all criticize these plays, and that was when the fun started. Oh man, they would tear into it. You can imagine. They were a critical crowd all on the campus. Everything was evaluated and judged. That's as it should be on a college campus, but it was fair. It was not destructive. It was always constructive: How can you do this better? What can you do to this to make it really acceptable?

So Wolfe would read these plays. And he wrote this play called "Buck Gavin," and it had to do with a mountaineer bootlegger up here (not a bootlegger, but a maker of whiskey, a distiller). He showed. . . They had the still there, you know, on the stage, and here was Wolfe acting the part. They had the worm and the whiskey, and they were making it there.

Silveri: Did you see that play?

Moser: I saw it. I saw all those, every one I could. I was very much interested in playmaking myself. I helped some of them write some of their plays, the fellows. I would have liked to have got into that, if I could. Afterwards, I acted in some plays, you know. Acted in this "Unto These Hills," which to me is very interesting. It's an outgrowth of Dr. Koch's playmaking at the university. He started a great movement there, and stimulated more writers than any man I've ever seen or heard of. He was creative, and he got you going. It reflected itself in numerous publications there. We had a student magazine which was really a fine magazine. It was really a good thing. It was not just

a magazine full of risqué stories and all that kind of thing.

Silveri: What year did you become editor in your years there?

Moser: I was editor there during my senior year.

Silveri: Senior year?

Moser: Yeah.

Silveri: And you were. . . Well, were you considered an English major when you were there?

Moser: No. I took work in history. To tell you the truth, when I got ready to graduate they called me in once and said, "Mr. Moser, what are you majoring in?" I said, "Everything I can." They got my transcripts, you see, and said, "It looks as though you are going to major in sociology here. You've had more work in that." So, I did a lot of papers outside the class work. You see, we had a publication called "What Next in North Carolina?" I wrote numerous essays and articles for that, and for every one of those I got credit in sociology. But I had never taken a sociology course because it took a lot of work in research to prepare these papers, and they were published in a booklet every year. I have them somewhere. I studied on the. . . I gave a research paper on the traveling libraries for the mountains of North Carolina. I was interested in the same things that Mr. Whitman is interested in: in bringing books to mountain people. See there? I never told him about this. He doesn't know it, but I was ahead of him by several years in wanting to get books where they could read, and get libraries into these communities. That is, I wrote this research paper with that in mind, and it was published. So, I got credit for all of these papers, you see. I would read these papers to the group.

We would read these to this society. I did a lot of that kind of thing. I didn't hold any punches. In other words, I was there to get everything I could. I had been in the Army, you see, and I was settled. I didn't have any time to waste. As a matter of fact, I was going to get out and get into teaching, probably. In fact, it was the only field at that time that was opened to me. So, I didn't specialize.