

ARTUS MONROE MOSER

Interviewed by:

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SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER

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.

