

## Phillip Merrell

### Side 1:

Background noise is the heater and tourists.

[1] His family came from Devon, England in 1662. Benjamin fought in the Revolutionary War. His son was hanged. The children moved to Western Carolina in 1792 (Cane Creek). There were sixteen children. Some moved to Hendersonville. His people went to Madison County and farmed. [Joseph and Sara Merrell, Col. Benjamin Crown]

[20] Following graduation from high school he served for 4 years in the Korean War in the Marine Corp. He attended the computer school programs to operate I.B.M. machines but didn't like it so became a brakeman and conductor for the railroad for 27 years. Following a spinal injury he answered an ad for the Museum at the Biltmore Homespun Shops.

[49] He has met thousands of people from all over the world. There are 25 vehicles dated from 1913-1962 worth a total of 1.2 million dollars. These have been collected mostly by a Blomberg son-in-law. Harry Blomberg's daughter, who lives just beyond the building on property Blomberg bought from Grove Park, comes every day with her dog. [Harry Blomberg, Buddy Patton, Marilyn Blomberg Patton, Barbara Blomberg, Mrs. S. M. Patton (Marilyn Blomberg)]

[70] Harry used to come every day with fresh donuts from the Rollin' Pin for the employees and his pet squirrel. [Harry Blomberg]

[83] The railroad used to link Marshall and Asheville. The highway was poor and the trip took all day by car. With the new highway and better cars the people no longer need the train. The train fare used to be 19-23 cents to Weaverville and 25-70 cents to Marshall.

[103] When he grew up in Marshall it was a boom town. He worked on a farm (cows, corn, tobacco) and attended the Red Hill Free Will Baptist Church. He is still a member.

[115] The Depression affected his life very little. There was little money but enough food and his grandfather (age 95) loves to tell about feeding the hungry travelers who were looking for work.

[134] Only the people on the main road had electricity.

[144] While attending Walnut School (first through 12 grades) he walked two miles to catch the school bus. The school was the community gathering place with top-notch basketball, baseball and football teams. There were about 400 in the school and 27 in his graduating class.

[166] Electricity changed the community lifestyle. Refrigerators and electric milking machines were bought. Battery radios were expensive at first. He remembers Amos 'n' Andy, The Lone Ranger and The Green Hornet. [as do I].

[183] Life is faster now. He has mixed feelings about TV because it keeps people from visiting neighbors. Most people stay home and watch TV. His first was bought in 1950. It had a poor reception but he watched Milton Beryl, Ed Sullivan and Gunsmoke.

[202] His daughter got a good education watching Sesame Street.

[218] Before he joined the marines he worked, as did many of his family members, in the Cadillac assembly line in Detroit. He remarked that he was impressed, while serving in Korea for 14 months, that the customs and styles had not changed in over 500 years.

[244] He joined the American Legion. His nerves were affected by his war experience and he was a patient at Oteen several times. He also volunteered at Oteen. Some of his best friends and his father died there. Patients are admitted from all over Eastern US.

[274] Vietnam, he feels, was a senseless war. The soldiers were looked down on in Asheville - this was not so in Marshall. The soldiers could not get a ride when hitch hiking. Many soldiers took drugs. He has had problems with flashbacks.

[320] Drugs were available everywhere in the late 60's and 70's. However, there was not much of a drug problem in Madison County. Society has developed an understanding of the problem and there are more centers for care.

[348] In 1980 he went to Appalachian Hall for alcoholism. The treatment was good. Alcoholics stay 30 days, drug users stay 36 days and are given drugs to ease the withdrawal.

[386] He feels that the passing of the passenger train (1968) has discouraged some people from coming to Asheville. He discusses the new Asheville/Hendersonville Airport.

[421] Grove Park Inn has changed over the years. The Vanderbilt wing, which replaced a smaller one, accommodates conventions. The golf course serves tournaments and is for the use of the guests. All guests come to see the car museum and he enjoys their comments. Only one customer was dissatisfied - she said, "I don't like old cars. I'm not that old!" He likes seeing elderly couples come in with sour looks and come out holding hands.

[530] He describes the beams bearing inscriptions from Shakespeare and the New Testament. He particularly likes, "Doing a common thing uncommonly will often bring success."

[561] In the building housing the cars there were once 40 looms making wool cloth for blankets, shirts and socks during the war.

## **Side 2:**

[2/5] The old Scottish style of weaving was taught to local people in Biltmore Village. It is almost a lost art. [Mrs. Vanderbilt]

[2/21] He tells the story of Blomberg's desire to buy a [moonshine] still which ended by his buying the whole building complex. The first car Blomberg sold to a school teacher at Claxton was bought back for the showroom. His son-in-law is keeping the building and cars preserved. There is a discussion of a restaurant being established at the gate. [Harry Blomberg, Finnie Turbyfill, Buddy Patton, Marilyn Patton]

[2/60] The Grovewood Gallery was just redone. Previously the merchandise was not outstanding. People come from all over the country to see displays there. [J. Edgar Hoover, Richard Nixon, Eleanor Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge]

[2/84] While it is not easy to buy good moonshine whisky today, in the past every family had its own distillery for whisky or brandy. One of the biggest stills 15 years ago had a 5000 gallon capacity.

[2/101] During prohibition there was no problem getting alcohol - it was a major industry in Madison County. He transported liquor into Asheville and after a year he was told that the "T" men were wise to him. He thanked his informer and quit. Later he helped the trooper "when he had more on his hands than he could handle." [It takes a thief to catch a thief!]

[2/124] He witnessed a shooting in front of the Madison Court House. There was a high rate of murders and bloody fights in the county. The people were "prideful" and easily insulted. They would fight with anything they could get their hands on. Families stuck together, were closely knit and if one was insulted they all would become involved.

[2/150] He has mixed emotions about the issue of tobacco and restrictions because of health. His grandfather grew burley, which was the easiest to grow and had the largest profit. It is a big money crop in Madison (he has an acre himself) and, although tomatoes have been tried, the market falls out when it is time to sell. In Paris Island he was caught smoking and had to eat 1 pack of cigars and drink a quart of soapy water - survived!

[2/184] His grandfather (born in 1865) told him about driving hogs, sheep and turkeys from Madison County to Charleston before the railroad. Lame animals were traded for corn, sugar, coffee and salt (salt was worth its weight in gold).

[2/229] His daughter, 18, is interested in genealogy and her family history. His son is 26 and attended UNCA for a year. He is assistant manager in Ingles in Marshall.

[2/247] He grows about 12 bushels of corn and gives 1/2 away to friends and neighbors.

[2/273] Up to 1970, Asheville was the hub of 4 railroad lines. Because of steep grades it was also the most hazardous and many accidents occurred. He was a brakeman, assistant engineer, and conductor in charge of train and crew.

[2/317] The railroad was vital to the expansion of Buncombe County but, because more profit was made by handling freight, passenger service was deliberately discouraged in 1968. During

the Thanksgiving and Christmas rush cars were taken off rather than added and people were made uncomfortable.

[2/344] As changes in Asheville occurred over the years, he cites the improved roads through the interstate highways and plane service. People move here to get away from big cities.

[2/364] There are only two black families in Marshall and there is no tension.

[2/378] He is thankful for his good parents and grandparents, wonderful wife and loves his job.  
[Christine Merrell]