

Subject: Dorothy Joynes' Voices of Asheville Interview with

Richard and Anna Matilda Parham

Interview Date April 23, 1993

at Residence of Richard and Anne Matilda Parham

Transcribed and Edited by Robert Cunningham

September 2011



Anna Matilda and Richard Parham April 23, 1993

Voices of Asheville Oral History Collection

Photograph by Dorothy Joynes

D.H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNCA

Dorothy Joynes: I am Dorothy Joynes talking with Richard and Anna Parham. I was so glad I met you on Saturday over at the Biltmore Industries Homespun Shop. Will you explain what you were doing there and all the different processes of preparing the homespun wool material you learned when you were a young boy? I asked you if I could come

back and talk with you and you explained that your wife had worked for Mrs. Evelyn Grove Seely. I said we should get together. I'm just delighted. Can I talk to you first and ask where you were born and how you got involved in what you are doing?

Richard: I was born in 1921 over in what they call Craggy. The old home place was my grandfather's over in Macedonia. He lived there all his life. Then we moved into Asheville when I was eight years old. My father died when I was eight years old.

Dorothy: Where about did you live in Asheville?

Richard: On North Street off of Broadway. He was working for Mr. Seely then. He died not long after we moved to Asheville.

Dorothy: Did he come here to work for Mr. Seely?

Richard: I don't know just how long he'd worked for Mr. Seely but, anyway, I know the day before he died, now, they was building that building down where the dye vats are at and he carried them big old tile blocks all day and the next morning he was setting in the chair playing with the cat and he just dropped over.



1929. Tile block wall construction on lower side of Biltmore Industries dye vat building

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Biltmore Industries dye vat machines

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Dorothy: What was your father's name?

Richard: Henry.

Dorothy: So, you were left without a father at very young age.

Richard: Yeah, I was eight years old when he died. I can remember him well.

Dorothy: You were going to school in Asheville?

Richard: I started West Buncombe and then, when we moved to Asheville, I went to Claxton over on Merrimon Avenue. Then in a year or two my mother married again and we moved up in Beaverdam. When I was thirteen I started working for a rock and brick mason and I quit going to school.

Dorothy: Who were these masons that you worked with?

Richard: I worked for my stepfather, Mr. Fordham. All his boys was rock and brick masons and his brothers. I worked with them 'til I was about fourteen or fifteen years old. I was about fifteen years old and started staying with my sisters, first one than the other. Me and my stepfather didn't get along too good.

Dorothy: You said you were up by Beaverdam. Now can you describe what Beaverdam was like at that time?

Richard: Well, there wasn't too many houses up in there then. Now there's a lot of houses up there near Lewis Cemetery. Mr. Lewis...Mr. Fordham did a lot of that rock work for him there at cemetery. I guess I was about nine or ten years old when I used to go out there with Mr. Fordham. Mr. Lewis, he wanted to adopt me but I wouldn't go. There wasn't too many houses at all up in Beaverdam then. Mostly just woods.

Dorothy: Was the lake there then?

Richard: Ma'am?

Dorothy: The lake...Beaver Lake?

Richard: Beaver Lake...yeah, it was...I forget...Beaver Lake...there used to be, years ago before I was born, used to be a street car track right down through the middle there.

Dorothy: I understand it's still there.

Richard: It went out toward Weaverville...

Dorothy: It went all the way to Dula Springs.

Richard: I didn't know exactly how far out it went.

Dorothy: Did you use the street cars when you were growing up?

Richard: Yeah...I used to ride them when we lived up on the mountain.

When we left Beaverdam we moved up there on Sunset. That's where we lived back in '36 when it came that big snow. It was two weeks before we could get out of that hollow there on account of the snow. That's when I used to go out to Mr. Seely's there and mess around the castle.

Also, when I was about fifteen, I stayed at the upper toll gate. There used to be a toll road that went to the top of mountain. They had a café up there. It was a big round building and had dances up there. They tore that down after Mr. Seely and them were gone...it just all went out.

Dorothy: What did the Seelys have to do with the toll?

Richard: Well, Mr. Grove owned all that mountain back in there. When he came here from St. Louis he bought all that Sunset Mountain up through there and that property where they built the mill.

Dorothy: What mill is that?

Richard: The Biltmore Industries.

Dorothy: Oh, I see. But the toll area to the top of the mountain...was that to pay for the paving of the road?

Richard: Well, it was still a dirt road then. It never was paved until after Mr. Seely died.

Dorothy: Why did they have a toll up there?

Richard: Yeah... a one seated car was fifty cents and a two seated car was seventy five.

Dorothy: That was for the trolley?

Richard: That was while Mr. Seely was still living.

Dorothy: Did he own the trolley line? Was that it?

Richard: Well, I think it went to some kind of a business to keep up the roads and stuff is what it was for.

Dorothy: And people went up there for amusement?

Richard: Yeah, people come up there from everywhere. They used to have one of them big glasses you look through. You could see all over Asheville and see people down there walking around with them things.

Dorothy: And you were living up there on the top?

Richard: I lived about two miles down from Mr. Seely's castle. I used walk up and down that mountain into Asheville every weekend to go to the movies.

Dorothy: That's quite a walk.

Richard: Back when I was young I didn't mind it. I walked all over that mountain.

Dorothy: Were there many houses up there when you lived there?

Richard: When we lived up there I think there was about four houses besides Mr. Seely's. That's all that was up there. Mr. Hacklin, he was the caretaker up there at Mr. Seely's... he lived down in behind the castle. Along down Sunset...there was about three houses on it when we lived up there.

Dorothy: Is your house still there, the one that you lived in?

Richard: No, they got all those big fancy houses all built in there now. It was torn down. Where we used to go the road into the hollow...they got a big fine home out there.

Dorothy: Now, you say hollow. Do you mean Chunns Cove or down on the city side?

Richard: How far does the city go up there now? I think the city goes nearly to the top of the mountain now. It's called Town Mountain Road now.

Dorothy: When you went to the movies in town on the weekends you found the city quite different from what it is today?

Richard: Oh, yes. It's different.

Dorothy: Can you describe it to me?

Richard: Up there at the square now...all that's been changed. There used to be what they called a Paramount Theatre right there at College Street just above the court house. That's where I usually went to the movies. Across the street from where the movie was the Greeks run a restaurant. That's where you could go in there with a quarter and you could get two hamburgers or hot dogs and an RC cola and go to the movie with that quarter there at the Paramount. Right across from it, too, there used to be a fruit stand. Right across the street, where they got that big new building, there was drug store on the corner. Peterson's Grill was in there. They called it a café.

Dorothy: There was the Langreen Hotel.

Richard: The Langreen Hotel? It's still there isn't it?

Dorothy: No, it's a parking lot now.

Richard: Where was it at?

Dorothy: It was right there on the square.

Richard: It was on Broadway wasn't it?

Dorothy: Where did you do your shopping? Where did you buy your overalls?

Richard: Usually got them at the army store that used to be on Patton Avenue.

Dorothy: Did you go to Finklestein's?

Richard: Yeah, I used to go there quite a bit. He sold a lot of western stuff. Old Finklestein. He was a pawn shop.

Dorothy: Yes.

Richard: Arthur Sam was a pawn shop, too. There used to be a ceegar store right there on the corner. Then down Patton Avenue there was Kresse's and the State Theater was down there. Then Newberry's. I forget how many other stores was down through there. Kresse's and Newberry's and Montgomery Ward and Woolworth's and I forget all the others. There was a bunch of clothing stores all down through there. There was a Pollocks shoe store used to up there on the square. They're

the one where Mr. Seely paid to give shoes away every Christmas.

People would go up there and couldn't buy their kids shoes. He paid for thousands of pairs of shoes. I went there a couple times and got shoes myself after my father died.

Dorothy: You started working in the brick construction?

Richard: Yeah, Mr. Fordham did a lot of work for Robertson construction. All up in Kimberly Avenue we built a bunch of them. We did a lot of rock work out through Biltmore Forest and different places.

Dorothy: How did you get involved with the Biltmore Industries mill?

Richard: Mr. Seely said when I got old enough, why, he'd give me a job down there at the mill. When I became seventeen years old he put me to work. He gave me my father's job. I did the work he did there. I worked back where there was a picker machine they called it...it picked all the burrs and trash out of the wool. And then the oil and mixing machine where you mixed different colors together. The second time they'd run it through that mixing machine they spread vegetable oil on it so when it went through that carding machine it wouldn't fly everywhere like cotton. That vegetable oil kept the wool in the cage and it didn't fly like cotton did in these cotton mills. I'd run the washing machine and helped dye the wool.

Dorothy: Where did you put the cloth to dry?

Richard: We took it out there to the parking lot where they had three of them big long fences and they had what the called tenterhooks every inch apart and bottom boards where they'd lift up and down.

So, you'd hang that cloth on that fence to air dry. The bottom board then...you had to stretch it on down to hook it on it and that kept it stretched out until it dried. It was a pretty rough job especially when we'd take it out there in the winter time. The wool would start freezing and you'd have to take it back in the house.



Wool drying on tenterhook fence at Biltmore Industries

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Dorothy: How many worked with you?

Richard: I worked with Zeb Ballard and the two the Arrowood fellers that worked there, Fred and his brother, and old man Rockett, he worked there a while after I got there. Old man Arrowood, he's the one that worked with my father. He's the one that learned me on the machine that my father worked on. He didn't last long after I went there. Now, old man Rockett, down on Broadway, he used to have watch shop. He worked on watches, too. The old building's still down there where he had his watches. His son, he used to show movies across the creek from his house. Old silent movies. We kids...we'd go up there and watch. And Zeb Ballard and Frank Creaseman and the preacher...I forget his name. Anyways, quite a few worked down there. I'd help a lot of times Mr. Jenkins... he was the machinist when I didn't have anything else to do. I'd take all the machines down and clean them. Every time you'd run a different pattern you had take them and wash them and clean all them all out. Some of them machines like that picking machine had a hundred of them rows that turns them brushes that picked stuff. It was a pretty good job getting that wool ready. We'd have to wash it and we'd take it over down in certain places, spread it out and let it dry at room

temperature. And they had dye for bunches of different colors. We'd take the wool and spread different places in the mill. I went over there one day at one place that had big bags...we got down and were raking the wool in it...got done and took it and dumped it front of a machine.



Raw wool being cleaned at Biltmore Industries

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Mr. Stevens...he was standing there...I dumped it out there and there was a copperhead about that long run out. That place had copperheads all over that place. From then on I went and got me a pitchfork. I was scared to death.

Rules for Employees of
Biltmore Industries.

All employees must conform to these requirements or report to office for time.

Any weaver leaving without giving three days notice to Foreman of Shop will not receive bonus due them.

Smoking or loafing in dressing rooms or any part of Shop positively forbidden.

1st bell rings 7.55 A.M. - Work bell 8.00 A.M. 1st Noon bell 12.25 P.M. - Work bell 12.30 P.M. All employees will be expected to be at work when last bell rings.

Any damage done to machinery or building through carelessness will be charged to party or parties doing damage.

No employee of Biltmore Industries should attempt to repair a machine while in motion. The Biltmore Industries will not be held responsible for injuries if this rule is violated.

Machines broken or in need of repairs must be reported to Foreman before repairs are made.

All work or repairs on looms should be reported to Foreman.

Please return burned out globes to Foreman for replacement. No one in the Shop will be allowed to repair wiring or lighting system.

All machinery and floors are to be kept clean and in good shape. Loom Waste must be kept in loom boxes by weavers.

Any person over 10 minutes late must report at desk before going to work, otherwise they will not be paid for work done that day.

Operator must not leave room while machine is running.

We ask each employee for his or her co-operation that we may keep everything in #1 condition at all times.

Biltmore Industries.

August 16th, 1933.

Rules for Biltmore Industries Employees - August 1933

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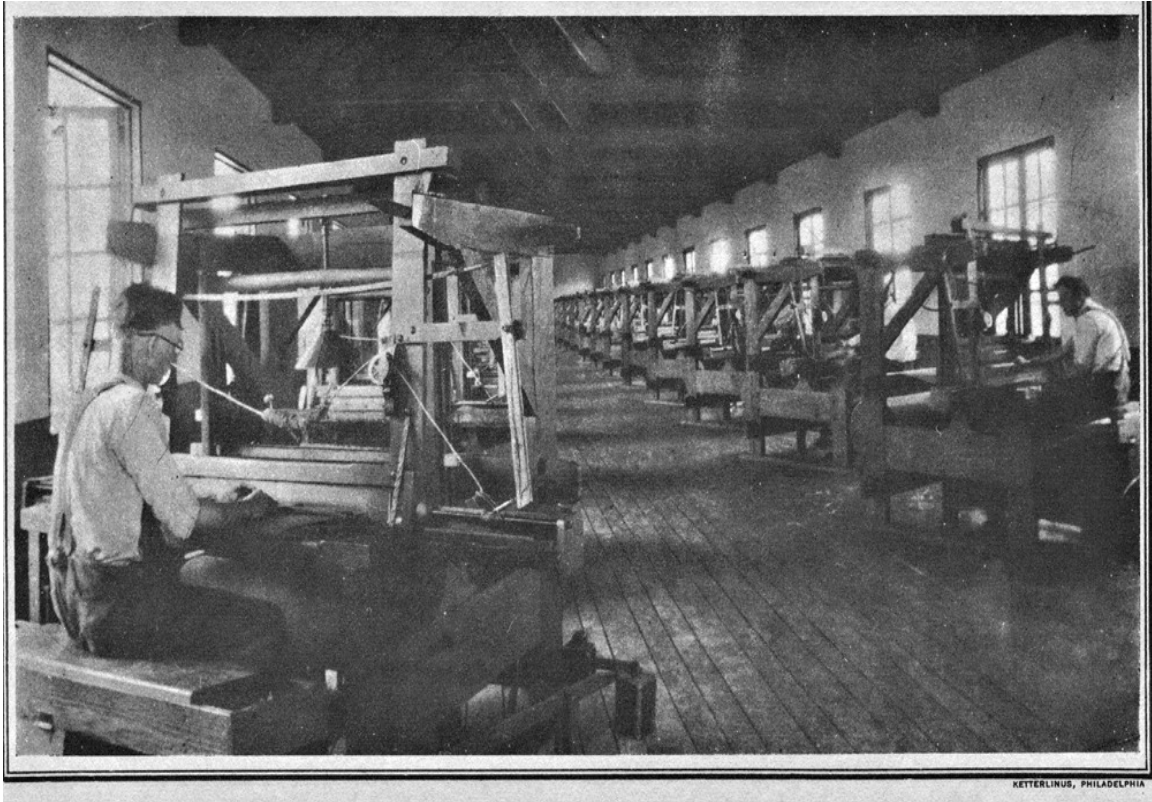
Dorothy: Was there a golf course around there then?

Richard: Well, the golf course was about the same as it is now. There hasn't been too much change on that golf course.

Dorothy: So, the buildings are as they were then?

Richard: The mill part? Yeah, all the building's still there just like...

Dorothy: The building that the cars are in now...was that used for weaving?



Weaving looms at Seely's Biltmore Industries

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1940 Packard automobile in the former weaving room at Biltmore Industries Museum

Photograph by Robert Cuninghame September 8, 2011

Richard: Where the cars is...that was the weave shop. They had forty of those looms there they were making cloth on.

Dorothy: Did you get to know the people?

Richard: Yeah, Frank Creaseman, he done some weaving. Zeb Ballard done a little weaving sometime.

Anne: There were fewer people than there were machines.

Richard: People worked different places. Now, you take some of the weavers...when you didn't have cloth for them to make...they'd work somewhere else. Clete Arrowood...he'd run the spinning thing. He's the one I bought my house from here. He lived down there next to the road right below us here. His brother, Fred, he lived up toward Beaverdam up there. Their father worked there, old man Arrowood did. So, a lot of the men worked there, their sons worked there, too.

Dorothy: How did they learn how to do the stitches?

Richard: He'd take them in there. He paid people to learn. He used to pay people to learn to weave. After Mr. Seely died, they didn't do that. People changed. Mr. Seely, he was a good man. You know, in that magazine, he went to Georgia and opened that newspaper. He came out fighting that convict lease where they would lease people. He got that stopped. The state used to lease them out here. When the railroad was putting in tunnels through the mountain down towards Old Fort the state leased prisoners for a dollar a day. He got that all stopped. He was just a good man. He told the workers at the wool mill that if they didn't make the money for him he couldn't make nothing.

Dorothy: Are you talking about Mr. Seely senior or junior?

Richard: You mean his son? I don't know too much about him because I went into the Army. He wasn't around too much...he went in the Navy. When I came back out of the Army I just stayed there about a year. I didn't know much about Fred. I used to see him a lot. He used to come up there when I was at the toll gate. He and a girl friend would come up and go horseback riding. They used to have at the big hotel a big barn and they kept riding horses there. When I quit going to school my mother didn't know nothing about it for two weeks after I quit going. There was a fellow at the barn that took care of the horses. I'd go down there and stay with him until it was time to go home. All of that through there now has changed. They used to have a big barn there. They kept quite a few riding horses there for people to ride. Over at Biltmore they had a cavalry outfit that used to come riding up there. They would ride horses up and down that mountain.

Dorothy: That was before the war?

Richard: Yes, ma'am. I forget which regiment they had in there. After the war started they left out from over there. At the first of the war they had cavalry over there. They used mules and stuff in different places at the first of World War II.

Dorothy: When you went into the service during the war where did you go?

Richard: I went to the South Pacific. We went right on into Japan. We were the first ones to go into Japan right after the war was over. When I left Mr. Seely's I went to take post machinery training. I learned to build motors.

Dorothy: Where did you get your training?

Anna: Through the state. He got a certificate. The government offered it as incentive to people that came out of the service. He got the job and the training and they paid part of his salary. Every time he got a raise they cut back labor a little bit. Our house burned right before our 42nd wedding anniversary. Most of our furniture burned up. The certificate got scorched. I have been trying to see if I can get him another one.

Dorothy: That is such a hard thing to lose treasures. Where did you get your training? Did you go to a technical school?

Richard: My training was on the job training. You started working with it building motors. I worked for Mr. Post about twelve years. I got a skin disease in the South Pacific. I was going to the doctor here and there and they told me I had to get out of the foundry on account of the heat. It was dirty work.

Dorothy: Where was the foundry?

Richard: That was down on the lower end of Hall Street you called it. The big new highway took it. That's west of Asheville down by the French Broad River. It used to be the Asheville dump all up and down the French Broad River. When the highway went through there Mr. Post closed the foundry...he didn't rebuild it nowhere. I left before the highway got through there.

Dorothy: Did the highway disrupt a lot of business?

Richard: Yeah, it went right through where his foundry was. It took his foundry.

Dorothy: Did you use the river at all? Did you fish or swim in the river?

Richard: I fished in the river. For years there, the stuff they dumped in the river...you couldn't eat the fish. There used to be a real fishing stream through there years ago. Down on that bridge...I can't think of that name of the bridge...where that big park used to be...

Anne: I think it's called Riverside Amusement Park.

Richard: They used to have all kinds of entertainment and stuff. You could go out there on that river and catch all kinds of fish...called them jack fish. Then they commenced dumping all kinds of stuff in the river. It's getting better now since they cleaned it up.

Dorothy: Do you ever go down to the river?

Richard: I haven't been down there in years. I know people that catch a lot of fish down through there now. It's a lot better than it was. They stopped a lot of that stuff from going in the river now. Up there at the recreation park...they used to have a big lake up there. I used to catch a few big fish up there. But Asheville is nothing like it used to be around anywhere. Back before World War II, why, if people was to come back to see it now they wouldn't know where they was at I don't guess. Back through the tunnel, they had a couple of restaurants in there. Weeks and Bucks. There wasn't nothing down through there hardly at all. Radio station WISE used to play records on Saturday night. Kids would gather. Wasn't no trouble. Beer and liquor wasn't sold. The only alcohol you could get then was what you got from bootleggers.

Dorothy: Did you know any bootleggers?

Richard: Well, I knowed a few fellers that made some.

Dorothy: Was that in Asheville?

Richard: They lived out from Asheville.

Dorothy: Madison? Marshall?

Richard: They made a lot of it down through Marshall there. They get back out in the mountains where they made it.

Anna: Wasn't that many years ago when the police or sheriff were going to have a party, they would raid a place out in Swannanoa and confiscate it. Then they had to test it to see what proof it was. They would test it at night. They would get as high as a Georgia pine testing it.

Dorothy: I understand it was no trouble getting liquor anytime you wanted. You just had to know the right person.

Anna: When we were small they used to pour it around our neck when we were sick.

Dorothy: You say there was no trouble with alcohol?

Richard: There wasn't no beer stores or liquor stores around. Asheville was dry then. They'd catch a fellow up town every now and then with boot liquor. They'd take him and lock him up. My sister's husband was captain of the police department. Messer? His uncle was chief for years. Every now and then they'd catch a kid up town doing something he shouldn't be doing. They'd get on him and tell if they caught him up there again they'd put him in jail. Lot of times they'd take him home and tell the parents they'd better do something about this kid. They won't do that now. Most young people think the law just uses them to make money. They sell them the stuff. They can buy it any time, day or night. Anytime they want to get it. Then they'll catch one going home. Stop

him and take him up there and get three or four hundred dollars out of him. It's not the young people's fault they are like they are. It's the older people's fault.

Dorothy: You used to have connections with the police department?

Richard: Yeah, I used to go up there quite a bit. Young people used to have respect for the laws and police back then because they would talk to them. They would see them doing something and go up and talk to them. They would take them home and tell his mother they did not want to catch him up there again or we will have to put him in jail. Back then if you got a whuppin' in school you would get another one when you got home because you did something you know you shouldn't have done.

Young people don't talk like they used to talk.

Dorothy: Why do you think that is?

Richard: Well, it's like everything else. Progress. Change. Poor people, if they make a living...a man and his wife... they have to rent a house. If they try to buy one, one in the family can't make enough...one of them working. They can't stay at home and take care of kids like they need to be. Back when we were kids most of the mothers stayed at home. I was reading that millions of kids...age nine and on up are alcoholics. Since they took the Bible and prayer out of school they turned to

alcohol...anywhere they can get it. The truth is their leaders don't set a good example for young people to go by. Most of the fathers and mothers...they don't either. They used to teach stuff in school. They don't teach nothing in school. They teach them how to make a living I reckon. They do stuff now that if they had done before World War II they'd took them out and horsewhipped them. The Bible says these things will happen. There's nothing much people can do about it now. I've studied the Bible for several years now. Churches don't teach the Bible about the prophets. He told them to go to the elders and tell the people what I'm going to do to their nations for their sins. The leaders are the cause of the sins that goes on in the United States. I don't think it's going to get any better. A person just has to do the best they can. I believe in helping anyway I can. That's the Bible all in one...to love another and to help one another. They don't do that no more. People just don't seem to care. Just like the Bible says about Satan's way of getting instead of giving. If people would understand how the world has changed since World War II. United States hasn't won a war since World War II. I don't know if we'll win the next one or not.

Dorothy: Has your church changed over the years?

Richard: Yeah, they have changed. Now you take Mr. Ingle that killed his father. He'd drank and fight 'til he was almost forty years old. He was going somewhere on Saturday night and went to a tent meeting. He was saved. He never went to school a day in his life. When I was a young fellow the preachers worked five days a week and preached, too.

But, now, look at Swaggart and Baker...look at the millions of dollars they take in. I was reading here awhile back about how much each denomination is worth. Millions of dollars. The Bible plainly says that ten percent tithe is supposed to be put in the store house for widows and orphans and people that needs help. The money that they takes up...just half of it... they could feed the people that's going hungry in this nation.

Dorothy: What church are you with now.

Richard: Well, I don't go to one certain church now. I went to Pine Brook Park for years. My kids grew up there. We had a preacher up there and he worked at the Bleachery and every night he would visit the hospitals. If someone in the neighborhood was sick he would visit them. Some of the deacons wasn't doing just like they was supposed to and he was preachin' and he was hittin' them. So they got people up to say they couldn't pay a full time preacher and couldn't pay him. He said that he wasn't paid full time but could appreciate even a little extra to buy gas

for visiting people would help. So, they voted him out. All the old people that built the church...they left. That church ain't done no good since. So, now, I wouldn't be scared to say if you take the big salaries and the homes they furnish the preachers now there wouldn't be too many of them that keep on preachin'. That's my belief. The Bible speaks of false prophets old and new.

SIDE ONE OF TAPE ENDS

SIDE TWO OF TAPE BEGINS

Richard: It was so hot in the foundry that I had to get out. I went back and stayed just a little while. So, I told Mr. Post that I was going to have to quit. The doctor said I was going to have to leave. He called up there and told them he was going to lay me off because on account of slack of work so I could draw my unemployment. While I was on unemployment I built this brick house down here on this curve here. Just as soon as I got it done they called me to go down the Hitch Corporation down on the river where they made those missiles for the Army and Navy. I worked there as a security guard.

Anna: Can I interrupt? He was screened by the Army and Navy. They went all the way back to Noah's ark checking on our relatives before they'd let him take this job.

Richard: I worked there, until they closed down, about seven years. I went to work then on that Northwestern Bank, you know that big building up there on the square. I put the hot and cold air ducts in there. When they got done there the foreman wanted me to go to Hickory for three years to help build a hospital down there and put in the same kind of ductwork. Jim Locke...he was my boss at the Hitch Corporation. He was a security officer. He went out to Aero Corporation next to the airport. They made the ejection seats for the Army and the Navy. I told him I had about two more weeks of work up there at the bank building. He said they'd wait on me. So, I went out there in '65. So, I stayed out there until they moved out when they had trouble in 1983 with the government. I guess you remember that? Talley Industries bought them out when they had that trouble. I stayed there a little over twenty years. They moved it to Arizona and I didn't want to go out there. So, I just commenced drawing my social Security.

Dorothy: When did you move here?

Richard: We moved here in '46. In '83 our house we lived in, it burnt.

We lost everything we had. We barely did even get out but with what we had on.

Dorothy: Whereabouts was your house?

Richard: Usually, early in the morning she would go out and take a walk early up and down the road every morning. If she had done that that day I would have been left in the bed.

Anne: I started to give you a picture of the house. It was right near here.

Dorothy: So, you moved this in on your property?

Anna: This brick on it is salvaged from our old house. There was a book down at the bank that he would go down and read. Then he would come back here and build a little and then go back to the bank and read some more. The book told how to build a house by FHA specifications. When the man came to do the appraisal on the house he said he had never seen a house built like this. He said you could run a freight train over it and not hurt it.

Dorothy: What's the address?

Anna: Well it's two houses down from here. It's on the same side. It's got a fence around it.

Dorothy: I'm glad you told me about it. Now, tell me how you two got together...where you two met. Can you tell me?

Anna: Well, I'll tell my side of it. I had stayed with Beards until I was real homesick. Then they asked me what I was going to do and I said whatever...

Dorothy: Now, where were the Beards?

Anna: In Winston-Salem. That was Mrs. Seely's daughter.



*John D. Eller, John D. Eller (infant), Gertrude Seely Eller,
John M. Beard, Evalyn Beard (infant), Mary Louise Seely Beard*

I had worked for them about three or four years. Then they asked if I would like to have a job in the Biltmore Industries. So, they gave me job as a guide. Mr. Stevens was the manager. I had never been through the place. Most of the guys were out and a group came down from the Grove Park Inn. Mr. Stevens asked me to show the group through the place. Richard was running the machines and was very quiet. That's when I first met him. We met in September and got married in December.

Dorothy: What did you tell them about how it worked?

Anna: Well, I tried to stay ahead of the group and figure out what each machine was for. He said I didn't get any of them right. We would go through and explain all the details about the Industries. I just stayed ahead of each group and looked at what each worker was doing and told them what each person was working on. He said I didn't get anything right about what was going on with these machines.

Richard: (chuckling) Yeah. Ha ha ha.

Anna: They were just fascinated. They were visitors from the Grove Park Inn and they didn't know anything more about it than I did.

Dorothy: Did you get many people going through?

Anne: Oh, yes. I worked as a guide then after that for a while after we were married.

Dorothy: And the people mostly came from the hotel?

Anna: This is real interesting to me. I have been accused of having a photographic memory for unimportant details of silly things. This is the truth. We were getting a lot of people from different places that looked at us and treated us like we were hillbillies or mountaineers. We would take advantage of it sometimes. I remember once. I had gone through with these people. They were highly intelligent people. There was piles of bright yellow, Chinese red, sky blue wool sitting there. They asked if it was dyed. I was tempted to tell them that we raised sheep that color. Another time a guide had gone ahead of me. A Miss Hawkins. Are you interested in this?

Dorothy: Oh, yes!

Anna: In the weave room they would use four pedals to do the diagonal weave and only two pedals to do the straight weave. At the first they were doing the diagonal weave. At the second loom they were doing the straight weave. This one lady said he was only using two feet. Miss Hawkins, the guide, said really that was all that he had.

Dorothy: I'll bet you had fun.

Anna: Yes we did.

Dorothy: How long did you do that?

Anna: I didn't do it very long after we were married. We were married only a short time after I worked there.

Dorothy: Then what did you do?

Anna: Stayed home and had babies.

Dorothy: How many?

Anna: Two. I'm real proud of this. I am seventy-seven. My medical history consists of a tonsillectomy, an appendectomy and two babies.

Dorothy: I see there a lot of baby toys here. Are they around here?

Anna: Three great grandchildren. They will be here after school.

Dorothy: Wonderful! Now, tell me where you were born and where did you go to school?

Anna: I'm five years older than Richard. We went to the same school but we didn't know each other. I was born in Buncombe County I went to school in Buncombe County.

Dorothy: At Claxton School?

Anna: No. It was called Grace then. Now it is R.B. Jones.

Dorothy: You said after you had your babies you went back to work again.

Anna: I went to work at St. Joseph's Hospital as a Nursing Assistant. Later I was in the first group of LPN's to be licensed. Then I worked eight years at

this nursing home on Beaverdam. That's where Mr. Hamilton's next to his last daughter died. Happened when I was working there.

Dorothy: Tell me what the city was like when you were growing up?

Anna: I have a horrible memory of my childhood at that time. We lived right below where the university (UNC Asheville) is now. People lived in abject poverty.

Dorothy: Was that off Barnard?

Anna: It was off Broadway. It was called Red Egypt. It was a short street that didn't really have a name. There was an herb house there that was one of the oldest houses in Asheville. I lived on a little short street right below that herb house.

Richard: That's the lower end of Montford.

Anna: The horrible things I remember were two things called the two or three pest houses. If any of your brothers or sisters came down with a contagious disease they'd put a yellow thing saying you're quarantined. These people just came and got them. They took them up to the pest houses. They were the cruelest people. Even the parents didn't half know what happened or what went on in those houses. We were fortunate since we never had to go there but it happened to people all around us. It was a

horrifying experience to have a child snatched out of your arms and taken to the pest houses.

Dorothy: What were some of the diseases that they had?

Anna: Diphtheria, small pox...the places they took them to were down on the river road.

Richard: When I worked at the foundry people lived in those pest houses. Them Bishops lived in one of them.

Anna: As far as sanitation goes they had these big trucks that would come by once a week and they would lift these big old cans out of the outhouses and put it on the truck and then put an empty one in.

Dorothy: Did you have running water in your house?

Anna: Mostly we had a spigot outside. We didn't have running water in the house. We had a spigot out in the yard.

Dorothy: Where were you living when all this was changed?

Anna: It was so gradual. We had so many tragedies in the family it's hard for me to remember places and times.

Dorothy: They had a relocation of people who were living in town.

Anna: I don't remember anything about that what-so-ever. For some reason I looked after my brothers and sisters. Even the older ones. One of them just sat and read all the time. She was brilliant. She worked her way through

school at Berea College. She was the first woman that had a job going around to different states gathering information. She read everything she could get her hands on. The other one of my two sisters would play with dolls. Anything that had to be done Mamma had to get someone she could trust to watch the children. I would be the one that would go along with her. I recall many times she would see if she could find a rent house and trade labor. She was such a wonderful person. She would do anything she could to clean it up and fix it up. Whitewash it, plant flower seeds. Then they would come along and go up on the rent and she couldn't afford it and they'd say some other people wanted to live there. That happened over and over and over. It would get very discouraging. I always said if I ever got a rent house I wouldn't do anything but sweep.

Dorothy: This was the depression wasn't it?

Anna: That was THE depression.

Dorothy: There was a lot of suffering.

Anna: People would not believe...they just think you're talking...I never got all I could eat until I was grown.

Dorothy: I did an interview yesterday with a man who lives in the country and he was from Marshall and I asked him about the depression. He said they didn't have any money and didn't need any money. When I called to

ask him if I could talk to him that day he was just finishing putting in his potatoes. I asked him about his garden. He always plants a garden and plants twice the amount they are going to need because he has neighbors who are unable to do this. It was a lovely experience to be able to share with him because people in the country did not have the suffering that the people in the city had. It was as though they had a different depression. They would barter for flour, salt and coffee. Sometimes salt was worth more than money because it was so important to them because they grew everything. Did you have that problem in the city in the depression?

Richard: Well, like I said, my father died when I was eight years old and times was pretty hard I don't remember suffering and going hungry. We might not had enough but being young I didn't pay much attention to it. We had plenty to eat because my father, every Friday evening, he'd take me to the store. So he would take me to the store with him so he wouldn't forget the peanut butter. He'd buy that big roll of bologna. It would be that long. He'd get a big roll of it. I can't remember going hungry even after he died. Things got a little worse when we moved up to Beaverdam. Mr. Ford had done alot garden and grew lots of stuff. Then they left Beaverdam and went up to the mountain. We used to tend the tops of them mountains. We'd raise

corn, taters, 'cane and make syrup. We always had plenty to eat as far as I can remember.

Anna: Do you know anything about the Sheltons from Madison County.

They tell me there is a little book I should read about them. My grandmother, my mother's mother was a Shelton. They were from Shelton Laurel in Madison County. During the Civil War these Sheltons was way up there and they just stayed to themselves. They would not take sides. What do you call that?

Dorothy: Non-partisan.

Anna: Yes. It made the people very angry. They wouldn't sell them anything. Only thing they really needed was salt and they wouldn't sell them any. There's graves up there...there's pictures in this book. A group of these soldiers came in there and just killed them...a bunch of the young men... and buried them in one grave.

Dorothy: Because they wouldn't take sides?

Anna: That's a real heart-rending, tear-jerking story.

Dorothy: That's part of your family?

Anna: That's my mother's mother from Shelton Laurel.

Dorothy: Well, you'll have to look that up.

Anna: I have read it all. I've seen pictures.

Dorothy: Tell me how your mother managed. She must have been remarkable.

Anna: I never saw her eat. The Presbyterians wanted to send her to school. Her father wouldn't let her go. So, she never went to school. She raised, somehow, by sewing, faith, raised up ten children. All of us graduated from high school except for one boy. Two sisters went to college. My youngest brother went up to Berea College. He had graduated high school a year ahead of his class. She had never had a regular job until she got a job in a mica factory. She had made pocket books and sold them. She managed to have enough to make a down payment on a house on Hillside Street which is right off Merrimon. Richard helped her fix it up. If Richard and my Momma don't get to go to heaven don't nobody else need to try. A real estate person came along and wanted to try to sell it. She just laughed. She kept it. Then the war was over and property values had changed. The real estate person was able to sell it for more than they asked the first time. So, she found a little house that had some trees with it over in Weaverville. These people who couldn't afford to buy a house came along and she let them make small payments and she counted it as interest. How many houses did you fix up with Momma?

Richard: I don't know.

Anna: She had several houses that she was just collecting payments on at one time. One of them left and went out to Texas or somewhere. Just gave up the house. So, she sold it again for more than she sold it the first time. She died young to have had that many children. The attorney said if she had lived longer she would have died a rich woman.

Dorothy: You had a lot of smarts running in your family.

Anna: I don't know. She must have taken them all with her.

Dorothy: She had two daughters go to college even at that terrible poverty level.

Anna: My sister found ten dollars in the drug store and turned it in. They said if no one claims it...that was a lot of money back in those days...you can have it back. That was her entrance money to Berea College. She got hit in the head with a golf ball when she was walking up that street there. They hastily gave her five hundred dollars...which was a fortune back then...to keep her from suing. She turned right around and gave it all to Momma.

Dorothy: Good family stories. Tell me more about the Grove Park when you were there and what it was like inside.

Anna: Well, the summers I stayed there I was with Evalyn and Skipper and we just played.

Dorothy: Now, Evalyn and Skipper were...?

Anne: There are Mary Louise Seely Beard's children. . He was in the first grade and she was in the third grade in 1938. I didn't have anything to do except just be with them and see that they were alright.

Dorothy: Now, Evalyn and Skipper were Mrs. Fred Seely's daughter's children?

Anna: Evalyn and Skipper...John Jr.

Dorothy: Now, you worked for Mrs. Seely before you were married?

Anna: After I came back and got a job at the industries, Mr. Seely would go to St. Louis, by himself, to where his medicine company was. He would go away and there wouldn't be anybody up there except the care taker, Lum Howington, and he would make his rounds outside. So I would go up there and stay about two or three days up there with her until he came back.

Dorothy: You're talking about Seely's Castle?

Anna: This was up at the castle. See, Mrs. Beard, they lived in Winston-Salem. I worked for them there about three years. I came back and I got the job as a guide. So, I would go up and stay with her. I was always felt so sorry for her. I guess I had read novels that made me think what she might be like. It's not a very good picture I paint. The one and only

thought she had was like one who had been to a very high finishing school. Her one uppermost thought at all times was she must act like a lady and speak like a lady at all times. She would have the grandchildren and the children to dislike Mr. Seely. It was sad. I think she was not a well woman.

Dorothy: There were how many children?

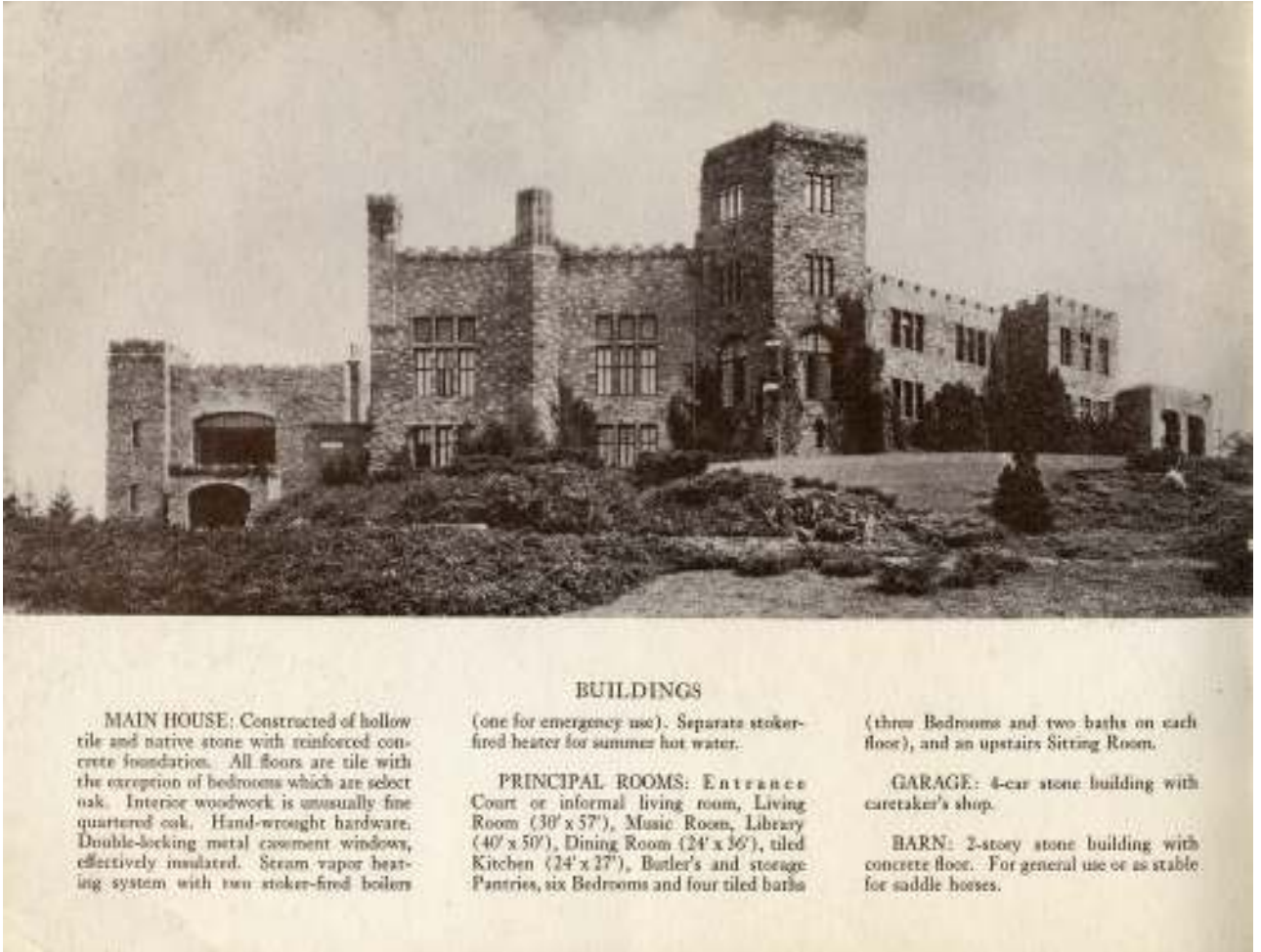
Anne: There was Grove and John and Fred and Gertrude and Louise.

Dorothy: And the person that you knew was Louise?

Anne: Louise was Mr. Fred Seely's and Evelyn Grove Seely's second daughter. Evalyn was Louise's daughter. They were exactly alike in every way. Skipper was her son. Gertrude was the other daughter.

There's a Gertrude Place over there off Kimberly.

Dorothy: Mr. Seely would go out of town and you would be there at the castle keeping her company?



"Overlook" – Seely's Castle (depicted in real estate brochure)

D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville

Groewood Gallery 111 Groewood Road Asheville NC

Anna: That was Fred Seely, Sr. He would go down to St. Louis.

Dorothy: Did you ever see much of Mr. Seely?

Anna: Pretty much. He was a likeable person and a good person. I could never associate the two of them having met. My name is Anna Matilda.

He would call me Tilda. Skipper would call me Tilder. When we would

see Mr. Seely he would ask Skipper if he had been a good boy. Skipper would look at me and I would say that I thought so. So, he would give him two or three silver dollars. So, then he would ask Skipper if I had been a good girl and Skipper would say I had so he would give me some silver dollars.



Anna “Tilda” Parham

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Groewood Gallery 111 Groewood Road Asheville NC

Dorothy: Well, they were from quite different backgrounds weren't they.

Anna: They were, yes. I think she was an unhappy person. She would always notice the manners of the children especially when they would eat at the table. They had these two reeeeeall old servants. One was the cook,

Lonnie and one was the maid, Anna Lee. They would let them off when I was up there. I would always fix her supper if I was up there. I fixed her supper for her and set it on the table. She never did seem like she wanted anybody with her when she ate and didn't think anything about it. I left her there when the telephone rang and I went and answered the telephone and I came back to tell her something. She would always eat like she wasn't hungry at all. Just tiny little bites she would nibble on. Actually, she didn't want anybody to eat with her. I had this horrible feeling like she was trying to starve to death. I was so proud of myself because I managed to get out of there without her knowing that I had seen her way of eating.

Dorothy: You thought there were two people there didn't you.

Anna: Yes.

Dorothy: Tell me what the house was like.

Anna: The castle?

Dorothy: I know two of the chandeliers are in the car museum.

Anna: I know it's unbelievable but I didn't pay much attention to it.

Some people thought it was a mental hospital. They had these swinging doors with mirrors on each side of them between several of the rooms upstairs. It was a lot smaller inside than you would think.

Dorothy: I heard that he deliberately left part of it unfinished to make it look like it was very old.

Richard: He left it like that on top so it would look like an old castle in England. Some of them left like they never did finish them up. It was meant to be left that way.

Dorothy: Did you ever work on it?

Richard: No, I never went inside. Mr. Ford worked on it before. He was my stepfather. He finished in the 1920's. They had some Italians that worked on it. They worked on the hotel, too. They had stone masons from everywhere working on that hotel. There were four hundred that worked on it at one time.

Anna: Mrs. Seely was a very religious. I don't know if she went to church. Every week on a particular night we would all, except the servants, come down to the big huge rock fireplaces and she would read a little scripture. Then everybody would kneel down and hold hands. She would say a prayer.

Richard: They used to keep deer up there. Then they built that big building behind it, that hotel I reckon, behind the castle. That used to be all Seely's Castle land there even up to where I stayed at the upper toll gate. He used to keep deer up there. Old man Hacklin went into the pen

one time to get a baby deer out one time and the mother deer liked to kill him. Cut him all over with her feet. I think after that Mr. Seely got rid off the deer (chuckling).

Anna: I am racking my brain. I'm trying to remember how I got down through there. It must have been a winding stair case. It was a real gloomy place. They had the big old-timey stoves and the swinging glass mirror doors between the bedrooms. If you forgot something you would end up meeting yourself.

Richard: The grounds and all, it was beautiful. Flowers and shrubbery...kept them all trimmed as you'd go up the drive to the castle. It was a beautiful place. The road used to go all the way around the castle...the toll road did, but they stopped that. You could go around the front and you'd see the castle good up there then. They had one big sliding board behind the castle.

Dorothy: Was that for the children?

Richard: They had swings and everything for them kids to play on.

Anna: Who was that lady and man that stayed there? Do you know if anybody stays up there now?

Dorothy: Not now. The university was there.

Anna: The people that are up there now own some stores...I think they have one at the mall. I had their names somewhere.

Richard: Wells is their name.

Anna: They wanted us to come up there and talk to them about the castle.

Richard: I never did go up there. They wanted me to come up there and show them some things.

Dorothy: I read in the newspaper there was a couple moving up there but that was some time ago.

Anna: That was some time ago.

Richard: Two years ago...maybe. They run some kind of business out in Hendersonville. Just to look at them I wouldn't thought they could have bought that place. I don't know how much they had to pay for it.

Anna: I don't think they own it. I think they just lived up there. Bell told me who owned it.

Richard: Yeh, they lived up there. They are supposed to be restoring it back like it was... the yards and all.

Dorothy: If you come across the number I would like to have it.

Anna: I can get that from his sister. She worked up there forty years.

Dorothy: What did she do there?

Anna: She inspected homespun for Biltmore Industries.

Richard: Yeah. Her picture is up there...Martin. She worked there after Mr. Seely died.

Dorothy: She was there for forty years?

Richard: She went there after Mr. Blomberg bought it in '53.

Dorothy: Can you tell me anything about his buying it?

Richard: Mr. Blomberg made a lot of money. He started it behind where that that man wrote that book. What's his name?

Anna: Thomas Wolfe.

Richard: Yeh, right behind that Thomas Wolfe house is where he had his first Cadillac place. I can't think of the name of that street through there.

Anna: When he first bought it he was selling blankets there. I don't know if he made them or...

Richard: Anyway, he kept 'em from tearing the Thomas Wolfe building down. Got them to save it. If it hadn't been for him Asheville would have been torn down. A lot of that money he made he bought up all that property up the river along Patton Avenue back years ago. He owned most of those building there...Sky City...He was a smart man. He knowed how to make money.

Dorothy: We are almost at the end of the tape so I wanted to thank you both and tell you how much I enjoyed being with you and I will have one of these tapes for you.

ADDENDUM:

Anna Matilda Parham was born in 1916.

She lived in Winston-Salem for three years in the 1930's when she worked for Mary Louise Seely Beard. Mr. Beard was frequently away on business for the U.S. government.

Richard Parham was born in 1921. He met Anna when she was a guide at the Biltmore Industries.