

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
C. RAY AND HENRIETTA
BARKER

MAY 27, 2007

READYVILLE, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY EVAN HATCH

PARQ

PRESERVE THE AREA'S RURAL QUALITIES

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #2

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

EDITORIAL NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Preserve the Area's Rural Qualities (PARQ) and deposited at the Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University. The original recording and associated materials are archived at the center, whose collections may be accessed in person or via the web site <http://gorecenter.mtsu.edu>. After a draft of this transcript was made, the interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. In a few cases, the interviewee also contributed editorial corrections. This final transcript incorporates the corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer, if applicable. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. Only verbalized pauses that do not appear to add meaning to the transcript, such as "uh" and "um," have been omitted. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. It is an interpretation of the interview recording, which should be considered the primary document of this interview. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition.

USE NOTICE

A release form signed by Ray Barker, Henrietta Barker, and Evan Hatch did not come to the archive with the tape recording of this interview. It is assumed, therefore, that copyright in the interview remains with the Barkers and Hatch.

Fair use provisions of the U.S. Copyright Act apply. Researchers may read, quote from, cite, photocopy, and download this transcript without permission for educational purposes. Other uses require prior permission from the president of PARQ, or the copyright holders, or both. Contact information may be obtained from the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

ABSTRACT

Clarence Ray Barker (born December 4, 1923) is a native of Readyville, Cannon County, Tennessee. He is joined in the interview by his wife Henrietta, also an area native. Life-long farmers in the area, they discuss many aspects of rural life in Middle Tennessee, including the important role that the Readyville Mill played in the community as a provider of electricity, ice, and milled grains. Mr. Barker's family history stretches back to the Readyville of the nineteenth century. Ray remembers the Readyville Mill well, both as a fascinating building with all sorts of machinery that would interest a boy and for the "genius" of its owner, Arthur McFerrin, who unlike most mill owners in the area used water power to generate electricity and power an ice plant. Ray recalls visits to his father by Uncle Dave Macon, who could play a banjo to "just make it talk nearly." The Barkers farmed and raised livestock, and he remembers the driving of animals on foot to Nashville and his family selling wheat to the mill, then buying back some of the flour. He explains the use of mill machinery in ice making, generation of electricity, lumber milling, and grinding of grain, and also recalls being afraid as a child of the water that ran under his uncle's garage through the mill race. The Barkers recount various aspects of life in the area, including church, recreation, Readyville commerce, and the advent of gas-powered tractors. Ray reveals that he loaded the last train cars of mules ever to leave Murfreesboro. Ray and Henrietta end the interview by reflecting on the importance for youth today to understand farming and rural life.

PHOTO



Henrietta and Ray Barker

PARQ photo by Evan Hatch

Sketch of Ray and Henrietta Barker, Written by Evan Hatch

The rock driveway bisecting the Barkers' farm on the Cannon-Rutherford line leads to the house where Ray Barker was born. The house has grown, been added onto in stages over the years, but still retains a proud sense of history that dates back to its original 1846 construction. A gentleman named Woods originally built the house (the original fireplaces still stand), but Mr. Barker's grandfather moved into the house after returning injured from the Civil War. Mr. and Mrs. Barker would talk that May 27, 2007, about the historic Readyville Mill and its influence on Cannon County and its residents and small burghs. Barker's father Clarence threshed wheat from his farm and carried it to the mill to be ground into flour. Clarence Barker sold his entire crop to the mill and bought back what his family needed at their home. Ray Barker started working in the wheat fields when he was nearly eight, "tall enough to reach the plow handles." Wheat was always harvested during the fall and carried to the mill by mule and wagon. Barker's father also grew corn, raised livestock, and traded horses and mules.

Ray Barker remembers Mr. Rat McFerrin as "a genius of our time." McFerrin electrified Readyville through the power of the mill. The electricity came in the 1910s, before Barker was born. Rat McFerrin proved quite the entrepreneur as well as the inventor and helped to provide to a small rural community amenities not known in other parts of Middle Tennessee. McFerrin used the power to make ice for the community. McFerrin also used the mill to saw and plane timber. Residents brought in twelve-foot sections of timber and the mill sawed boards to an inch thickness. In large part, Readyville was an advanced rural community in its time, surviving on McFerrin's power before he was bought out by Middle Tennessee Electric. His electricity kept Readyville lit until nine in the evening. The electricity began again at dawn the next day.

As important as McFerrin's inventions were, Mrs. Barker maintained that the importance of the mill for the majority of the people was to grind flour and meal for the members of the community. For miles around, people came to the mill to get their crops ground to sell to the mill. The bend of the East Fork of the Stones River provided a perfect location allowing for a race to be drawn off, powering the water wheel that drove the belt driven mill. While the time of active mills is long gone (they largely serve as historical places or remnants of past times) the Barkers maintain that there is inherent value in farming and milling. They lament that folks do not value the work that goes into farming, food production, and physical labor. The Barkers raised their family on the farm and are proud of their accomplishments. While farming has changed greatly in the twentieth century, it still represents a proud and time honored tradition of subsistence living and hard, character-making work.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
C. RAY AND HENRIETTA BARKER
PRESERVE THE AREA'S RURAL QUALITIES
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW #2**

HATCH: This is Evan Hatch conducting an interview with Mr. Ray Barker at his home in Readyville, Tennessee. The address is 1566 Barker Road. It is three thirty, actually about three fifty in the afternoon on May 27, 2007. Today, we're going to talk a little bit about the history of the Readyville Mill and the history of Cannon County in general. Apparently the room in which we are sitting is the room that Mr. Barker was born and we're going, we're sitting right next to it.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: And today we're going to call this interview Ray.Barker 5.27.07 for archival purposes. Mr. Barker, could you tell me your complete name and your date of birth?

R. BARKER: Clarence Ray Barker. My birthday is December 14, 1923.

HATCH: And could you give me your age sir, for the people who can't do math like me?

R. BARKER: I'm eighty-three years old and let's see, about six months.

HATCH: Can you tell me, please, the names of your grandparents on your father's side and then the grandparents on your mother's side?

R. BARKER: Well, unfortunately, I never knew any of them as far as that's concerned.

HATCH: Passed away before you were born?

R. BARKER: Yeah. Mama's daddy was named what?

HATCH: Yeah. You can. You are welcome to speak.

H. BARKER: William Francis Holmes.

HATCH: This is Mrs. Barker who is speaking also. Thank you very much. In fact, if you want to come over here and sit, you are welcome to.

H. BARKER: Well, it's whatever you want.

HATCH: Thank you, thank you.

R. BARKER: It might be better—it might be clearer.

H. BARKER: And he lost a leg in the Civil War.

HATCH: To a shot, was he shot or was he?

H. BARKER: Well, I think.

R. BARKER: In Chattanooga.

H. BARKER: Something fell on him.

HATCH: Okay.

H. BARKER: That caused his leg to have to be amputated.

HATCH: That's terrible.

H. BARKER: And he was nineteen at the time.

HATCH: Goodness.

H. BARKER: But then he came back to Readyville and married, was the postmaster for many years. Raised a family.

HATCH: Okay. Did he live in this house? Did he build this house?

R. BARKER: No.

H. BARKER: No. He lived in this house before he died, because Ray's mother Willie Belle Holmes Barker cared for her father.

HATCH: Okay. Willie Belle Holmes Barker was married to?

H. BARKER: Clarence Oscar Barker.

HATCH: So Clarence is a family name?

R. BARKER: That's right. My oldest son's named Clarence.

HATCH: Can you tell me who built this house?

R. BARKER: The Woods family. Now, that's all I know.

HATCH: Okay. Is this house, was this house constructed all at the same time or has it been added on to over the years?

R. BARKER: Well, we did a remodeling of it, put it that way.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: In '69.

HATCH: Okay. Did some interior renovation?

R. BARKER: Yeah. We put another room on it.

H. BARKER: We do have a fireplace in the basement. Now the rock you stepped on when you came in . . .

HATCH: Mhm.

H. BARKER: And the chimney. Did you notice the chimney?

HATCH: Yes, ma'am.

H. BARKER: You need to look at this one on this side. That was all, the rock work was done by slave labor.

HATCH: Really?

H. BARKER: In 1846 is when the house was built, and we do have it written down. There was a Wood man and his son. Their initials are similar. That's why I couldn't tell you right now, but there are only three families who've lived here: Woods family, Dickens family, and Barkers.

HATCH: Okay.

H. BARKER: And the Woods have a graveyard here in one of our fields, and they had the death of three children in one year. The daughter must have been completely [?] and I think the sons were killed in the Civil War.

HATCH: Oh, my goodness. That is a hard life. I mean, it really is. Are there still Woods and Dickens in Cannon County?

R. BARKER: Yes. Rutherford County.

HATCH: Rutherford County.

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: We're right there on the line, pretty much right now, is that correct?

R. BARKER: Tom King Wood.

HATCH: Uh-huh.

R. BARKER: Was kin to them.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: T. K. Wood.

H. BARKER: And I really don't know about the Dickens. There was a lady in Murfreesboro.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

H. BARKER: But I'm not sure.

R. BARKER: Ms. Dickens is still here. She's kin to them.

HATCH: Sir, we were actually going to talk a little bit about your knowledge of the Readyville Mill today. Could you tell me perhaps or your, how you first came to be involved over at the Readyville Mill? What did you do? What, what drew you to that mill?

R. BARKER: Well, Daddy grew wheat.

HATCH: On this land?

R. BARKER: On this land.

HATCH: Yes, sir.

R. BARKER: And when they thrashed the wheat, they sold the mill the grain.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: And they made flour out of it.

HATCH: Okay. Did your—your father sold it to the mill. Did he have any, did he keep any back for his own personal consumption or did he buy it all?

R. BARKER: Well, he bought some of it back from him.

HATCH: Okay. So he sold the whole crop to the mill?

R. BARKER: Yeah, but what we wanted to use, we'd buy it back.

HATCH: How old was the mill? How long had it been in existence when you were doing this? Were you a child?

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Okay. You remember about how old you were?

R. BARKER: I'd say six.

HATCH: Six years old. Were you already working in the field at that time?

R. BARKER: Yes, sir.

HATCH: When did you start working in the fields?

R. BARKER: As soon as I could reach a plow handle.

HATCH: Were you a tall, were you a tall child?

R. BARKER: Yes. Yes.

H. BARKER: He was probably about eight, is when he started plowing.

HATCH: So what was, what did the scene look like down at the Readyville Mill? Let's say, were you, when you took the wheat down there and that would, it was harvested, what time of year was the wheat harvested?

R. BARKER: In the fall.

HATCH: In the fall. And you took, you took it down there by a mule, is that correct?

R. BARKER: Yeah, mules and a wagon.

HATCH: Okay. How much wheat, how many wagon loads would you take down there?

R. BARKER: Oh, I don't know. Several.

HATCH: Okay. Not a hundred. Maybe ten? Maybe twenty?

R. BARKER: Twenty-five.

HATCH: Twenty-five.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: How much money would, would that bring your father?

R. BARKER: I don't remember that, as far as that's concerned.

HATCH: Was it a good living for your father? Farming?

R. BARKER: No, that was part of it.

HATCH: That was part of it.

R. BARKER: He got his living mostly off of livestock.

HATCH: Buying, raising, and selling livestock?

R. BARKER: Yes. That's right. That's right.

HATCH: Okay. Did y'all have a family farm also where you grew gardens and also other livestock such as pigs and sheep and those kinds of things?

R. BARKER: We had a good garden here.

HATCH: Okay. Did you grow corn?

R. BARKER: Yes. That was one of our—that's one of our main crops is corn.

HATCH: Okay, almost as much as wheat? Did you sell any of the corn?

R. BARKER: Yeah, some of it, but we fed the livestock the majority of our corn.

HATCH: Okay, okay.

H. BARKER: Mr. Barker was a horse and mule trader also. Sold lots and lots of mules from the barn out here.

HATCH: Real good businessman, I imagine.

H. BARKER: Yes, he was.

HATCH: Do you think you inherited some of that?

R. BARKER: Tried to.

HATCH: Would, so when, would you go, how many days a week would the mill run?

R. BARKER: Run six days a week.

HATCH: Okay. Monday through Saturday?

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: And would you, could you, were there certain days where they would be grinding certain things or would you go any day, give them the grain. Did they have to set the mill up differently to do different crops?

R. BARKER: Well, we carried it any day that we had a load of wheat.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: But they ground and work wheat the complete week.

HATCH: Mhm. Was there, how many people would you say worked there? An average?

R. BARKER: Three.

HATCH: Just three.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: And do you know what those positions were?

R. BARKER: Well, now this is my day. Mr. Justice. Mr. Leslie Justice.

HATCH: Okay. Is that J-u-s-t-u-s, do you know, or is it i-c-e?

H. BARKER: It's, it's in . . .

R. BARKER: It's in here.

HATCH: And Mr. Leslie Justice was?

R. BARKER: He was the owner.

HATCH: Okay.

H. BARKER: That was much later than Ray's childhood. Ray knew those original people who worked there, Mr. McFerrin.

HATCH: Okay.

H. BARKER: And Mr. [?] too.

HATCH: Can you tell me a little bit about Mr. Rat McFerrin?

R. BARKER: Well, to me, to me he was a genius in his time.

HATCH: What do you mean sir?

R. BARKER: Well, by electrifying Readyville.

HATCH: Can you tell me how he did that?

R. BARKER: He had a dynamo over there at the mill and it would run the water.

HATCH: Okay. I'm sorry, sir, can you tell me what a—did you say a dynamo?

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Meaning? What is that?

R. BARKER: That produces the electricity.

HATCH: Okay. So that was powered by water?

R. BARKER: That's right.

HATCH: And did he run power out of the mill?

R. BARKER: Run power out of the mill and to all the houses down there in Readyville. My mother, mother was raised in Readyville, and she had electricity that came from there.

HATCH: When did Readyville get power? Do you know?

R. BARKER: '23, I believe.

HATCH: Okay.

H. BARKER: That's the year you were born. It was much before that. I don't remember whether any of those papers tell it or not. A year.

HATCH: Do you think, what do you think would be the most important factor about the mill: the fact that it made power or the fact that it also . . . ?

R. BARKER: Made ice.

HATCH: Made ice.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Because you could run electricity you could freeze stuff out there, is that correct?

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: Or the fact, did people pay for the power at that time?

R. BARKER: The what?

HATCH: Did people pay Mr. McFerrin for the use of the power or did he just give it to them?

R. BARKER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So much I don't know how. I don't know what kind of metering system they had.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: But mama's home which I still own, she had electricity there and they had electricity till about nine o'clock at night. And they'd shut it down. Then the next—

HATCH: That's when you go to bed I guess.

R. BARKER: The next morning they'd start it back up again.

HATCH: So you would just, did he just run it until nine o'clock and he'd shut everything down again. Was there ever a chance, time when you wanted to have power or when your mom wanted to have power and she didn't?

R. BARKER: Not that I know of.

H. BARKER: Tell him your mother's name.

R. BARKER: My mother was Willie Belle Holmes. H-o-l-m-e-s.

HATCH: How long did she live?

R. BARKER: A hundred and three.

HATCH: A hundred and three. Can you tell me, is she on a family plot or is she in a, where is she?

R. BARKER: The family farm is still down there. Still a house and I own it.

HATCH: Can you tell me where she is buried, sir?

R. BARKER: Up in the family's—Riverside Cemetery.

HATCH: At Riverside. Okay.

R. BARKER: Her and daddy buried side by side, and I reckon I'll be buried the next side.

HATCH: How old were they when they got married, your mother and father?

R. BARKER: I don't know that.

H. BARKER: They married in 1914.

HATCH: Okay.

H. BARKER: And they moved up here in 1915. And I would have to look up, course Mrs. Barker's born in 1887 and he is 1884, so we would have to count that up, but she was thirty-six when Ray was born.

HATCH: That's pretty late.

H. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: How did they meet? Small town?

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Did they go to school together, you think?

R. BARKER: No. It might have been at a church service. I don't know how they met. He was reared at Porterfield. She was reared here at Readyville. I don't know what kind of gathering they met at.

HATCH: Okay. How long did Mr. McFerrin provide power for Readyville? When?

R. BARKER: The Tennessee Electric took it over.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: Bought it. Bought it.

HATCH: From him?

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: Did all of the mills in this area provide electricity for the, for their communities?

R. BARKER: Not that I know of.

HATCH: So is that the reason you consider Rat McFerrin such a, such a genius?

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: An innovator.

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: Did you ever see the, see how he had that—did you ever see the set-up that he used?

R. BARKER: Not really, but I saw him, of course, milling the flour.

HATCH: Uh-huh.

R. BARKER: And I saw him making ice.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: And I saw the sawmill work.

HATCH: How did he make ice?

R. BARKER: Well, he made it in three hundred pound chunks and in a metal container and then when they took it to out of there they cut it in three pieces, which were a hundred pounds apiece. And that's what they sold it. They sold it by a hundred pounds.

HATCH: Would a family use a hundred pound block of ice?

R. BARKER: In a week.

HATCH: How'd they keep it?

R. BARKER: In an ice box. Ice boxes had real thick walls and had them full of sawdust.

HATCH: Okay. For insulation.

R. BARKER: That's right and mama's was on the back porch and it held a hundred pounds of ice and then had a little compartment where she could put something that she wanted to keep cold. And we'd get a hundred pounds a week.

HATCH: How much did that cost? A few cents?

R. BARKER: I have no idea. A dollar I'd say.

HATCH: Okay. Would you use ice for your drinks or was it used more as a tool to keep, for preserving things.

R. BARKER: No. We'd, you want a little for your drink, you go in there with an ice pick and you'd chip you off a little.

HATCH: Things were tougher back then, weren't they? [laughter] So . . . yes ma'am?

H. BARKER: I really think the mill was more valuable to more people for the grinding of flour.

HATCH: Okay.

H. BARKER: And the meal than it was just for the ice and electricity. That helped a few, but people from Woodbury and Porterfield and lots of places came to get ice, but it helped more people in the grinding of grain.

HATCH: Okay. Well good, that's a good segue, can we talk about that a little bit? If you walked into—the mill of course has two buildings. The main building where the millstones were. Can you tell me was it three stories or was it four stories?

R. BARKER: No. As far as the ice making, it was on the ground floor.

HATCH: Okay, and the mill itself, the other part that was used for grinding of flour and corn, the meal.

R. BARKER: It was about three stories.

HATCH: Okay. Can you tell me, can you describe for me when you walked in the first floor—were you allowed to go into the mill? What person came off the street, would they be allowed to bring, were they allowed to go in the mill or . . . ?

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: What did you see when you walked in there? Were the ceilings tall?

R. BARKER: Huh?

HATCH: Were the ceilings tall? What did they look like?

R. BARKER: It wasn't tall. It was more or less waist high.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: It spread out and the corners fed to it.

HATCH: Was it, was there a grinding stone?

R. BARKER: Yeah, that's what it was.

HATCH: Okay. Do you know where they got the grinding stone or what they made it out of, or what it was rock?

R. BARKER: Limestone, but I don't know where they got them.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: But they made them here.

HATCH: For someone who doesn't know anything about mills, could you describe the way a grinding stone works?

R. BARKER: Well, well the fact of it is I don't know that.

HATCH: Are there two stones on top of each other? They grind?

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: And are those, that's what is powered. Okay, I'm sorry. I'm not doing this very well. Let's say we start outside on the river. Can you tell the listener what the river, the purpose of the river for a mill is?

R. BARKER: Well, it was water powered, the mill was. It had a mill wheel.

H. BARKER: Tell him about the race and then you can tell him about that garage. The race came from the river.

R. BARKER: Yes. The mill race.

HATCH: Uh- huh.

R. BARKER: It was started, the mill . . . above the dam.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: And that makes the water come back through the mill, right, and the mill race was down through there and it went into the mill and that's what ran all the machinery.

HATCH: Okay. So . . . okay.

R. BARKER: Everything was water powered.

HATCH: There were wheels that ran into cogs and they turned all different kinds of machinery.

R. BARKER: Belts. Most of it was belts.

HATCH: Okay. Belt driven.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Where was, where were the logs cut in the mill?

R. BARKER: Anywhere around here.

HATCH: Okay. Were they, were they mill, did they also log mill, did they also mill logs at the mill down there?

R. BARKER: They cut lumber out of it.

HATCH: They cut lumber out.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Was that on the same floor where they cut the, where they ground the wheat and ground the corn?

R. BARKER: It was on the ground floor. It was on the left as you go into the mill.

HATCH: So how would they get, would they bring in large poles of timber?

R. BARKER: Yeah. Logs.

HATCH: Logs and about how long would you say: thirty, forty feet?

R. BARKER: Twelve foot.

HATCH: Twelve foot.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Okay. And they, how did they pull, how did they get the logs in there? Was that man power?

R. BARKER: Man power.

HATCH: Okay. Could they grind, could they cut log? Could they cut poles? Could they cut timber to any size?

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: They . . .

R. BARKER: Most of the lumber was one inch.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: Thick. But they could cut it two inches.

HATCH: Use it for different, for siding and flooring and all kinds of things.

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: Did you ever, did your father ever take in, did you or your father ever take in wood to be sawed there?

R. BARKER: No, we didn't. We didn't cut any timber.

HATCH: Okay. Did you ever—was the mill ever used as a meeting place? Was it a social spot or was it a place of business strictly?

R. BARKER: Take [unintelligible word] average person, they'd be in and out there and they'd talk to Mr. Justice, the owner, and his son was named Ray.

HATCH: Do you have any memories of those—any specifically, their character, those kinds of things?

R. BARKER: Ray and I were in school together.

HATCH: Okay. Where'd you go to school?

R. BARKER: Woodbury.

HATCH: That's a long way.

R. BARKER: Well.

HATCH: How'd you get there?

R. BARKER: I rode a pony to Readyville and I caught the school bus at Readyville.

HATCH: What'd you do with the pony while you were gone?

R. BARKER: Put it in Uncle Lawrence's barn.

H. BARKER: See his uncle was on one of the corners down there. Lawrence Barker, on the corner.

HATCH: Was he the brick house?

H. BARKER: Yes.

R. BARKER: Yes.

H. BARKER: But when Ray was in first grade he had an aunt who was teaching at Woodbury.

HATCH: Mhm.

H. BARKER: So he rode to school with her . . .

HATCH: Okay.

H. BARKER: The first year. And then after that, but he's ridden his pony or the bicycle and it'd be snow. They weren't out much for weather.

HATCH: No.

H. BARKER: So he went Woodbury all twelve years. Then he wanted to farm. He didn't want any more education.

HATCH: Had enough school at that point. So you went all the way through and graduated high school?

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Did you have any favorite subjects?

R. BARKER: Yes. I liked arithmetic and geography.

HATCH: Comes in handy running a business, doesn't it?

R. BARKER: I guess.

HATCH: Can you tell me where you all met and how you all met?

H. BARKER: We were in Church of Christ, I guess. Maybe the first time we met we were going to a, a ball game, a tournament, and we went with some friends at that first meeting. But then I went to Woodbury Church of Christ and Ray would come up there to be with other young people. And that's where we saw each other more.

HATCH: So was that a football game, ball game?

H. BARKER: No, a basketball game.

HATCH: Basketball.

H. BARKER: Uh-huh.

HATCH: Okay. Sometimes I get off subject. I'm sorry.

H. BARKER: That's alright.

HATCH: What did, let's say . . .

H. BARKER: It may be confusing to you. We've gone back and forth. I want you to tell him about your uncle's garage over the race.

R. BARKER: Mama's younger brother.

HATCH: Named?

R. BARKER: Henry Holmes.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: He was a mechanic and he worked on automobiles, and he had a garage over the mill race.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: And Uncle Henry lived there with mother before Uncle Henry died.

H. BARKER: Before we married.

R. BARKER: Oh, yes, before we married, and I would go to the garage with Uncle Henry. The garage being over the mill is, there was cracks in the floor . . .

HATCH: Why was that?

R. BARKER: I was like a little boy looking down through there and seeing that water run. It scared me. So I didn't like to be nowhere over the mill race.

HATCH: I can imagine that would be kind of scary. How far up was it?

R. BARKER: It was up, six or eight foot.

HATCH: Did you ever go swimming in that river ever?

R. BARKER: Not down there yeah, but up here yes.

HATCH: Okay, can you tell me a little bit more about the mill race. I'm kind of not understanding.

H. BARKER: Alright, the race is the water that came from the river that went down that smaller channel that powered the mill.

R. BARKER: That's back of the dam.

H. BARKER: That's called the race.

HATCH: Now was that something that, was that something that people diverted or was that a naturally occurring thing?

R. BARKER: People diverted it.

HATCH: Okay. Was that the miller, you think, who did that?

R. BARKER: Well . . .

H. BARKER: When the mill was built I think they had to do that to get the water. You know.

HATCH: [Unintelligible phrase.]

R. BARKER: The people that built the mill built a dam and then that would make the race.

HATCH: Do you all know if, you know if there is a certain area on a river that's better suited for a mill? Or could you put a mill on any river if you wanted to?

R. BARKER: That was in a bend in the river, is ideal for diverting the water where it didn't go all the way around. It shortcut and went through.

HATCH: Did you ever, were you—you said you were interested in mathematics. Were you interested in machinery also and how it worked?

R. BARKER: Yes, yes, yes.

HATCH: Can you tell me a little bit about that please?

R. BARKER: You can still do that. All that stuff that we used in farming and everything is nothing but machines.

HATCH: Even a simple mule-drawn plow is a machine, in a way.

R. BARKER: We used to.

HATCH: You had told me that—when you, when did you stop using mule power and start using machine power?

R. BARKER: In '44.

HATCH: Before the war ended?

R. BARKER: Huh?

HATCH: Before the war ended?

R. BARKER: Yes, 1944, and you had the, there wasn't never—Joe Blow didn't ever go in there and buy a tractor. It had to be a man that had a farm, and you'd go in there and he'd let you have a tractor. You'd be offered a profit on it just as soon as somebody had it, trying to get it away from you. My first tractor was an H Farmall, and I got it in '44, and, let's see, I got a tractor, a disk, a turning plow. That's all I got.

HATCH: Were you happy to see electric motors come in and be rid of the mule-drawn plows, or were you happier being—I'm sure it was hard work.

R. BARKER: Oh, I was proud to get a Farmall tractor.

HATCH: I'd imagine so. Were they, you said they were only given to established farmers. Is that because of reputation or were they hard to find?

R. BARKER: Well, they just made so many of them, and they let the bigger farms have them. Made in Chicago, Illinois.

HATCH: Yeah, I don't know that brand. I know Allis Chalmers and I know John Deere of course.

R. BARKER: International Harvester.

HATCH: Oh, was that the kind? International Harvester, okay.

H. BARKER: They sold out to Case a few years ago. Now it's known as Case IH, but at the time it was just International Harvester.

HATCH: Okay. Did you serve in the war, sir?

R. BARKER: No. This big farm would keep six people out of the service to farm, and they just had three of us.

H. BARKER: Had he went to . . .

R. BARKER: They came and examined us, but they sent us right back home.

HATCH: What was it?

R. BARKER: Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia.

HATCH: Did they say why you didn't serve? Was it medical?

R. BARKER: No, they said, "You, go back home. You go back home and go to farming!"

HATCH: Was that good news for you?

R. BARKER: Yes, sir.

HATCH: I could imagine. I don't think I'd want to be serving. Especially then, not now either.

H. BARKER: I really admire those who will go and serve, and especially now, and you feel the sorrow for those families who are losing their young sons and husbands to help us to be able to do the things that we can do today.

HATCH: That's right.

H. BARKER: I have a little story to tell you that Ray's mother related to me, and I don't know what year it was but when they were still, did you say it was a thrasher or a binder, Ray, in the fields with the wheat?

R. BARKER: Binder.

H. BARKER: Alright, Ray told you his uncle, who was Arthur's brother, was very mechanically minded, and owned the garage and fixed the cars. Well, she was also mechanically minded. She fixed her sewing machine or anything that needed fixing, but Mr. Barker was in the field and had a lot of people waiting on him to bind up the wheat, but something happened to the binder, and they didn't know what to do to it. And he said, "Well, ya'll just wait here. I'll go up to the house and get Willie Belle. She can fix it." So she went to the field with him and all the men standing around, and she decided to fix the binder. [laughter]

HATCH: I'll be. Do you know what was wrong with it? Did she tell you that?

H. BARKER. No, I don't know what, exactly what was wrong, but she knew quite a bit about machinery, too.

HATCH: Do you remember the men not believing she could do it?

R. BARKER: Don't know.

HATCH: That's something to be proud of, for sure. What was, when the, when the, let's say, let's go into—the mill closed in 1978 officially. Was it still producing up until the day it closed? Was it still being used by

the community, or was it just still, were people, how were people using it to cut, to mill, to mill their crops and those things?

R. BARKER: As far as I know the saw mill part, it cut timber. It closed before the milling part did.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: And the ice plant closed before the milling plant. And of course Middle Tennessee Electric had bought the electric part.

H. BARKER: TVA first.

R. BARKER: TVA, yes.

HATCH: Was, when did the army come in and start, the Army Corps of Engineers, when did they come in and start affecting the way the river was flowing?

R. BARKER: I don't know that.

HATCH: Okay. Was . . . there's a market beside—right now Russells Market is beside, is beside Readyville Mill. Was that something else at that time? Was it a commissary in town—excuse me, a general store, a mercantile store?

R. BARKER: Mrs. Burnett ran a store there.

H. BARKER: Same location.

R. BARKER: Yeah, before them.

HATCH: And it was a, could you get anything you needed there?

R. BARKER: Almost, and there was Tilford Lumber Company, which is still there. They [unintelligible two words] beside them.

H. BARKER: And there was also a store where the post office is now. Mr. Ryan [?] Becton ran the store.

HATCH: Did Mr. Tilford, did his business have anything to do with the, the ceasing of the, of the milling over at, the cutting timber over at the mill?

R. BARKER: Not that I, I don't think so. One of them followed the other one. Tilford Lumber Company wasn't in existence when the mill was running. It's a follow up.

HATCH: So you filled a void. There was something there that you didn't, it wasn't being done anymore, so you decided you needed to open this business.

R. BARKER: That's right. That's right.

HATCH: Well that store, that was where Russells is now, was that—Did you ever see any water baskets or cane [back?] chairs in there? Did you have basket makers peddle down there, to your memory?

R. BARKER: They peddled baskets all over the county. Now my father would bring in fifteen to twenty baskets to give away to his good friends.

HATCH: Really?

R. BARKER: Maybe at Christmas time or something like that.

H. BARKER: Tell about the feed [?] baskets he brought in also. He would go out to the other end of the county, to the basket maker and . . .

R. BARKER: And he, he always sold the basket makers a mule, or two, or whatever they wanted.

HATCH: Did you, so there really weren't any basket makers in the Readyville community that you know of.

R. BARKER: No.

HATCH: Most lived on Short Mountain.

R. BARKER: Short Mountain. That's right.

HATCH: Is that the same for the chair making? I know that, did you have a chair shop down here?

H. BARKER: But that was just in recent years. When you were a child there were no chairs made around here, when they . . .

HATCH: You had said that you were familiar with Uncle Dave Macon.

R. BARKER: Yes, sir.

HATCH: Can you tell me some stories about Uncle Dave?

R. BARKER: Uncle Dave, his favorite time to come and visit my father.

HATCH: Were they friends?

BARKER: They were good friends.

HATCH: His favorite time to come and see him?

R. BARKER: It would be Sunday morning.

HATCH: Why is that?

R. BARKER: I don't know about that, but they would come here on Sunday morning, and he'd get to talking and playing.

HATCH: Would he ever bring country ham with him.

R. BARKER: Pardon?

HATCH: Would he bring the country ham with him? He carried around ham as I remember.

R. BARKER: Yes, but I don't remember him ever bringing them here.

HATCH: Was he usually in a good mood?

R. BARKER: Yeah, laugh. Done a lot of laughing.

HATCH: Do you remember any of the songs that he played?

R. BARKER: No. I don't remember that.

HATCH: Are you a musician?

R. BARKER: No, sir. Not really.

HATCH: So what did Uncle Dave and your father ever talk about generally? Were you allowed to sit around and hang out with him?

R. BARKER: Yes. They'd stay out in Uncle Dave's old car, along beside it, and they'd talk about changes that happened in the community.

HATCH: Now, you said a car. Was that one of his son's cars?

R. BARKER: I guess it was.

HATCH: Dorris, perhaps? Did you know Dorris?

R. BARKER: Yeah, I knew Dorris. Dorris or . . .

H. BARKER: He must have come fairly early because Mr. and Mrs. Barker were always at church. They never missed it.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

H. BARKER: [Unintelligible] Uncle Dave [unintelligible words].

R. BARKER: That's the reason Uncle Dave would have to leave before he got done telling all his tales, really, before church time.

HATCH: Do you know where Uncle Dave went to church? Baptist, I think. I think his wife was Church of Christ out in a . . .

R. BARKER: Well now, you've got me. I don't know about that.

HATCH: Was he a professional musician when you remember him coming to see you?

R. BARKER: He was a good musician. Now, he's, play on that banjo, just make it talk nearly.

HATCH: So was he already on the Opry as you remember?

R. BARKER: Yes.

HATCH: What was it like to—I told ya'll I'd be down here on the porch [?]. What was it like, I mean he was a celebrity, right? Bonafide.

R. BARKER: Yes. He'd bring his banjo with him and he'd play his banjo, and he'd always play a new tune or something for Daddy.

HATCH: So your dad, was he—was your dad musically inclined?

R. BARKER: No, not really.

HATCH: But he did appreciate it. Now Uncle Dave kind of had what some people would say nowadays is a drinking problem. Did you ever experience him intoxicated or anything like that?

R. BARKER: Nope.

HATCH: It's been said that he was a clown. He could make anybody laugh except himself.

R. BARKER: That's right.

HATCH: He kind of had a hard life. You know, and . . .

R. BARKER: Well, drinking brought on a hard life.

HATCH: Yes, it does. It's like a double edged sword. He was not a, from my understanding he was not a very happy man all the time.

R. BARKER: No.

HATCH: But he could entertain some people. Okay, let's—I'm going to go back, we're going back to the mill here for a second if you don't mind. How did you, can you tell me the path that you walked to get down to the mill? You'd take a pony down there usually, is that right?

R. BARKER: I'd go down the road, just like the road is now.

HATCH: Okay, it wasn't paved yet, or was it?

R. BARKER: No.

HATCH : And how often would you say, on average you'd go down there, once a week? Get your ice and get everything milled. Would you go down there even if you didn't have anything to get milled?

R. BARKER: I'd go to Readyville, yeah, to Uncle Henry's garage, and by that time Uncle Henry had built him a new garage, which is now still standing on this side of the river and that was in 1928.

HATCH: Was, when did Uncle Henry decide that he wanted to be a mechanic? Was he just, was he always mechanically inclined? Your family is very mechanically inclined also. Was that what he just, what he always wanted to do?

R. BARKER: Something that he just fell into, I'd say. People would bring cars for him to work on and fix, and he was just inclined to fix them.

HATCH: Do you remember when the mill closed down?

R. BARKER: When the mill closed down? I couldn't tell you.

HATCH: Was there a feeling of sadness about it? Was there, I mean, do you remember any—it was an indicator of another time, that's not being used—in these days where you can go and you can buy the flour at the store . . .

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: And of course you don't need a mill to get your electricity anymore and you can go buy your lumber at Lowe's.

R. BARKER: But, they, Mr. Justice . . .

HATCH: Yes, sir.

R. BARKER: Had a pickup truck and he loaded his pickup truck with flour and meal and he went around to all the communities, and he was wholesaling it, more or less.

HATCH: Oh, can you tell me a little bit more about that? He was kind of, he was a delivery man?

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: And so that would help [?] people . . .

R. BARKER: And then they would come in and buy five pound or twenty pound or whatever they needed at certain times during the week.

HATCH: So, that's a pretty innovative idea too, much like the electricity. Take the product to the people. Was that a standard then, or was that something that he kind of thought up?

R. BARKER: I don't know. He did that for several years, though.

H. BARKER: Could I tell you another story?

HATCH: Please.

H. BARKER: Alright. It happened that my sister's family and our family got to go to Washington D.C., and I don't know the exact year. It must have been early 70s. It was when the Watergate hearings was going on.

HATCH: Yes, ma'am.

H. BARKER: So, my sister's husband was a minister and of course we always attended church and bible study on Wednesday night, and we were up there and he said, "Well, should we go to church on Wednesday night or up here just to not go?" But we all came to the consensus that we should go. Well, when we went to the Church of Christ up there, Mrs. Joe L. Evins was there. Of course her husband was a congressman, and she said, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you." Anyone from Tennessee she was glad to see. But she said, "When I pass through Readyville I stop at the mill and get me some flour and meal to take back home with me." And of course our oldest son was a teenager and then she allowed us to have some passes to see the congress in session, and Mark [unintelligible] being a teenage son, he said, "See, going to church Wednesday night does benefit you!" [laughter]

HATCH: In so many ways. You were talking about the, they had a specific name for that flour there, and the corn meal.

H. BARKER: It was King of Patents.

HATCH: And do they know why, was there any reason? The reference there.

H. BARKER: I don't know why.

R. BARKER: That's what they named it, though.

H. BARKER: It's probably some kind of historical thing, but I don't know.

HATCH: Okay. Could you describe to the listener what the design on the bag looks like?

H. BARKER: Oh, well, it has the name, and then it has a man in the center, in armor, with a headpiece on. So, I don't know where it got the name.

HATCH: That would be interesting. I'm going to have to go look up the historical significance of that and figure out what that meant. There was another gentlemen here we were talking about. It says that people from all the way from Beechgrove, Porterfield, and from Woodbury came over to see, to the mill.

H. BARKER: That was to get their ice, wasn't it? Because it would melt if you didn't [unintelligible; traffic noise]. There were other things too, I'm sure.

HATCH: Sure, that's important. Do you all know the history of, can you tell me a little bit about Charles Ready's development of this little burg? Do you have a little idea of the history of . . .

H. BARKER: Well, I think the brick house down there, "The Corners," I believe that was built in 1803, and there's a cemetery in Readyville I think, where some of them are buried. And, course, they had at one time a county court meeting out there. He was a commissioner, I believe, I have read and he really wanted Readyville to be—at that time it was Rutherford County—he really wanted it to be the county seat and they had a big dinner down at The Corners one night with the commissioners and other people, but he got outvoted and Murfreesboro got to be the county seat. They didn't think evidently think Readyville was large enough.

HATCH: Wow, that really would have changed history because Readyville would have definitely grown. The Corners is in Readyville, right? Excuse me, not in Readyville, but in Rutherford County?

H. BARKER: Well, at one time the line went through the hall down there. Part of it was in Cannon and part in Rutherford, and I suppose the line is still that way, although I think the line at one time was changed some for the post office. But I reckon it still goes through the house. I'm not sure about that.

R. BARKER: Everybody on the east side of the highway down through there is in Cannon County and all on the west side is in Rutherford.

HATCH: Okay. This is real nice. You guys are so cool, I mean it's just [unintelligible] . . .

H. BARKER: We'll be married fifty-five years if we live to June 22.

HATCH: Congratulations. That's coming up.

H. BARKER: A wonderful life that hasn't always been easy, but three fine sons, and we have four grandsons, one granddaughter. Our oldest grandson now has three sons. So Ray's father and Mr. Lawrence that we told you on The Corners and another brother, Lance, were three Barker brothers, so our sons Mark, Boyd, and John, were three Barker brothers. And now there are three more Barker brothers, when our grandson had another son in March. So there are three Barker brothers again.

HATCH: That's a strong line you've got there, definitely. Can you all tell me what you think—is there a generation of, a new generation of people, kids who know nothing about mills? What do you think that people who don't know anything about it could learn about the Readyville Mill? What could the Readyville Mill teach them? What could even milling teach kids?

H. BARKER: Well, of course, about the way of life that people had, at that time to have their own food. I think the generation—now our sons would know how to survive on a farm because of growing things themselves and preparing food themselves. They can still remember hogs being slaughtered. They can still remember chickens having been here and eggs and killing our own meat and things like that, but when our grandchildren, they haven't grown up knowing how to survive off the land themselves, growing crops and growing gardens, preparing food, even preserving food, other than it being in the freezer. They might have watched that some. But all of those things unless a person just really concentrates on how we should live if you lived in that period of time, how could you survive yourself? All of those things are being lost, I think.

HATCH: Yes ma'am.

R. BARKER: The average teenager, say in Nashville, don't know where the food comes from.

HATCH: Is that, why do you think that is so valuable?

R. BARKER: Well . . .

HATCH: I believe it is. I agree with you.

R. BARKER: Well, it just doesn't happen to be in a grocery store when you want it there. Somebody has to provide it.

HATCH: Yeah, I think farming is actually underappreciated in this modern world.

R. BARKER: That's right.

H. BARKER: Of course, we're members of farm bureau and have been for many, many years, and at one time I was a farm bureau women's chairman here in Cannon County. But that was one of the stories we tried to tell about agriculture to our children even in our county schools, the children growing up. Their parents go other places to work. They don't necessarily raise their food. It's for children to understand where their food comes from.

HATCH: Yeah, I think it's very valuable. I went to my first hog killing when I moved to Tennessee, maybe in the winter of 2004, January of 2004 up on Short Mountain, and it was probably one of the neatest experiences I've ever been, I've ever seen. I took some real neat photographs.

H. BARKER: Our sons were so glad when we stopped, though. [laughter]

HATCH: Why did you stop?

H. BARKER: Well, we do not use as much of the lard . . .

HATCH: Trying to be healthier?

H. BARKER: Yes, trying to be some healthier and we just didn't use all the meat. We thought it might be better just to buy the parts that we would want.

HATCH: Because some of those things, those are probably like the last meats that you eat, or the ones that you don't like, that aren't quite as appetizing as others, I'm sure. Do you think—they're starting to offer classes again on kind of a sustainable living, they call it sustainable development now. Do you think that kids nowadays can learn a lot from that? Is there something that—do you think it should be offered again, something for people to learn, survival even?

H. BARKER: Well, I think it would be good, of course. So much depends on the teacher in that kind of thing and how interested [unintelligible phrase]. Still, you have to have the resources behind you in order to provide the food.

HATCH: What do you think about movies—yes, sir?

R. BARKER: The areas you grow can't just sit out on a farm. It's still a lot of money involved in farming.

HATCH: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

R. BARKER: And like, over here we got 1300 acres of land.

HATCH: Presently? You still do?

R. BARKER: Yes.

H. BARKER: Not much of it is till land; it isn't tillable. But another thing that hurt the farmers is cost of machinery advancing so much. Even the machinery our son uses so much of it is getting old now because it's just so expensive to buy machines that you have to use today, even with this amount of acreage. The farms are being combined and the western farms you have to have thousands and thousands of acres in order to justify buying the big machine.

HATCH: There are, there's just, well kind of goes to that whole [unintelligible word] Wal-Mart effect in the day when the people can, they buy thousands of acres and they run smaller businesses out of business, and they're at like huge agricultural conglomerates, corporations.

H. BARKER: That's right.

HATCH: What do ya'll think about the movement of Murfreesboro this direction?

R. BARKER: Well in my lifetime now . . .

HATCH: Yes, sir?

R. BARKER: I went to Nashville last month, took care of a lot of stuff, and Murfreesboro is about the size Nashville was then.

HATCH: It's getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: You guys don't have any intention of selling off any of your acres do you?

R. BARKER: What?

H. BARKER: Do you want to sell any acres?

R. BARKER: No.

H. BARKER: Tell him—this is not about the mill, but it's such an interesting story.

HATCH: Oh yeah, we're not through yet. This whole thing is not necessarily about the mill.

H. BARKER: About driving the cattle and your pony and the top field, and those kinds of things. His father even drove turkeys.

HATCH: Drove turkeys?

H. BARKER: Up to Nashville, yes. But you tell him about that, the pony thing.

R. BARKER: Well, in their heyday, they drove everything by foot. The turkeys would walk, the hogs would walk, the mule would walk, everything. Cattle, sheep. I helped drive some in my lifetime. They didn't make me, let me go from here to Peaks Hill. That's the hill right down here.

HATCH: Yeah, that's the one Fox Chase is written about, around the round hill.

R. BARKER: Correct, but they'd make me come back home. Which that didn't suit me a lot of times, having to come back in here. But they had me and Morgan here that would go to Murfreesboro and would load them on rail cars. I loaded the last load of mules that ever loaded at Murfreesboro, myself.

HATCH: How old were you at that time?

R. BARKER: About fifteen, I guess.

HATCH: So the 40s then?

R. BARKER: Yeah.

HATCH: Why was that the last one?

R. BARKER: Nobody else didn't have them.

HATCH: [Unintelligible]?

R. BARKER: No.

HATCH: You loaded the last car. Did you know that was the last car when you were doing it?

R. BARKER: No, I didn't.

HATCH: Well that's something, that's something to be proud of, sir. Is there anything—and I'm sure there's tons of things I've missed out on.

H. BARKER: Well, there's lots and lots of things we haven't remembered and I would've have jotted down more if I'd have known your other questions. I mean dates or things like that, but I wasn't accurate.

R. BARKER: When we were loading mules . . .

HATCH: Yes, sir?

R. BARKER: They had those steam cars then . . .

HATCH: Right.

R. BARKER: And they went choo-choo-choo. It would scare the mules. You'd put about thirty mules on one car, and they'd hook up to that one car and put it in a line and they would scare the mules just to death nearly.

HATCH: I thought mules had that reputation of not getting spooked?

R. BARKER: They'd get spooked with that old steam engine.

HATCH: They [unintelligible word] changed everything, didn't it? Do you think that it's possible that we could talk again sometime? When I go and realize what I've neglected to ask you, would you mind if came back out here sometime?

R. BARKER: No, I wouldn't mind at all.

HATCH: Okay.

R. BARKER: Just get a time of week we're available.

HATCH: Yes, sir.

H. BARKER: Sunday evenings is usually the best time for us.

HATCH: Okay. Works for me, too.

H. BARKER: We have one air conditioner in the kitchen and one air conditioner—is this thing still recording?

HATCH: Mhm. This is Evan Hatch signing off for the interview today on May 27, 2007. Mr. and Mrs. Barker, I certainly appreciate your time and your cooperation today, and I'll be back. We'll talk soon. Thank you. This is Evan Hatch signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW