

**Oral History Interview with**

**ARTHUR EMORY**

Sunday September 27, 1998  
Skyland Conference Hall

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Shenandoah National Park  
Luray, VA

Original manuscript on deposit at  
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## Transcription

RE: Skyland Conference Hall. Today is Sunday the 27th of September, 1998. We're with Arthur Emory conducting an oral history on the Civilian Conservation Corps. Arthur, are you aware this interview can be used for non-profit commercial use and for research?

AE: Yes.

RE: That's ok with you?

AE: And you have signed our oral history release?

AE: Yes.

RE: Thank you very much. Arthur, would you like to tell me what year you were born?

AE: 1914.

RE: What date?

AE: May the 12th.

RE: And where were you born?

AE: Savage, Virginia.

RE: And who were your parents?

AE: Uh, Charles Everett Emory and Essie T. Scarborough Emory.

RE: And where uh, where did they live?

AE: Savage, at that time.

RE: What did your father do for a living?

AE: Eh, sawmill.

RE: Sawmill? Worked in a sawmill, around a sawmill?

AE: He logged the mill, he hauled the logs for the mill.

RE: That was 12 months a year job down there?

AE: Yes.

RE: And your mom just stayed at home?

AE: Right.

RE: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

AE: It was 8 of us altogether. Mm hmm. At that time, 2 of them had.

RE: 4 boys, 4 girls?

AE: 3 boys.

RE: 3 boys? And where did you fit in?

AE: I'm uh, the 4th one. My uh oldest brother and then my sister, Mary, and my brother Lawrence, and then me.

RE: Now did you grow up your whole life in Savage before you went in?

AE: No, we went to Claremont, Virginia. Where I live now.

RE: And where's Claremont, Virginia?

AE: It's um, halfway between Richmond and Norfolk on the James River, south side of the river. And it's um, mostly retired people that live there. Not much industry.

RE: Now did, did you go to school?

AE: Yes, I went to Claremont High School for 7 years and part of the 8th year. I thought I knew more than the teachers at that time, so I quit in the 8th grade.

RE: Well doesn't every kid think they know that their teachers?

AE: I really couldn't handle the trigonometry and the algebra. I couldn't handle that.

RE: Well, I can relate to that.

AE: I've havn't any need for it. I don't understand that. Why didn't I need that in my life?

RE: They teach an awful lot in school that you really don't need in your life. You learn a lot more about life in life sometimes than you do in school.

AE: I had a professor for the math part, that would scare me to death. He would jerk his finger at me like that. "Emory! Why were you late?" I'd jump about 3 feet.

RE: Well, let's see, 1929 the Depression came on. Did it have any direct effect on your family?

AE: Yes, we were on like, relief. My father worked on WPA, we'd call it. We'd piddle along, and um, I went in the CC camp. My neighbor, who had a Harley Davidson motorcycle, took me to Norfolk, and I came up on the train, to Luray, Virginia. And uh, the army truck, it was an army dump truck with the seats in the back, brought me up to SNP-1.

RE: Skyland?

AE: Mm hmm.

RE: May 15, 1933.

AE: '35.

RE: It was founded in, May 15, 1933.

AE: Oh yes. But I didn't come in 'til 1935.

RE: Now we're getting ahead of the story though. You went down to Norfolk to enroll?

AE: On the motorcycle. He took me to the, I forget the name of the place, like some military building for the physical, and sign in.

RE: Mm hmm.

AE: For the Civilian Conservation Corps.

RE: Now did you, did you have to go for a 2 week training program at Fort Monroe, or?

AE: No, I came directly here, and I was quarantined like for 3 weeks.

RE: So there was no, you didn't have any kind of training anywhere else by >35?

AE: No.

RE: Why were you quarantined?

AE: Everybody was. They gave you shots. Like for oh, what do you call it?

RE: Mumps and measles and chicken pox, and TB?

AE: Well I believe it was uh.

Female: [list some diseases]

RE: Not then, no. Whooping cough?

AE: No that wasn't right. What the hell was that?

RE: Smallpox?

AE: Probably smallpox.

RE: Yeah, because that was pretty bad back then. Well, how about the drought in 1930? Do you remember that?

AE: How about what?

RE: The drought in 1930?

AE: Yes.

RE: Did that have any impact on your family?

AE: No, I don't believe so. No.

RE: Alright, so 1935 you arrive at Skyland?

AE: Right.

RE: And you're 3 weeks in quarantine. Then what happened?

AE: I, I signed up to be a cook. And they gave me a shovel.

RE: [laughing] A cook with a shovel?

AE: And uh, now I was on the gang at Crescent Rock parking overlook, and uh, they, they had a truck loaded with stone for the sidewalk. And they couldn't get it over to the sidewalk. The truck. And their leader says, anybody can drive a truck? Well I don't want to drive because I had lost my nerve underage, what they call an 18-wheeler now. I turned it upside down in North Carolina.

RE: Ooh.

AE: And I had a friend with me, just teaching him to drive. And the corner of the floorboard was sticking between the 2 bones in his leg.

RE: Ooh.

AE: And I thought there was no houses nearby. And I reckon that's where I was, 'cause it was daybreak, and it happened to be a house in the woods, and they heard it when it turned over. Two adults came and they said they couldn't get us out from underneath the truck. And they were going to go get a car and go get some help. So I says, "One of you please stay here." Gasoline was dripping down on us.

RE: Oh, man.

AE: 'Cause the gas tank was under the seat in those days. So the gasoline was dripping down on us, and the carburetor caught fire, and burnt what was in it and went out by itself.

RE: Oh boy, were you lucky? Somebody was watching over you.

AE: Oh yeah. So the guy stayed there and I asked him could he see my feet. And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Pull on them." And he pulled on my feet and the other guy hollered because it made that place hurt worse, the floorboard sticking in his leg. So I said, "Don't worry about him howling, pull me out of here." So he put his feet against the side, and pulled me out. And he dragged me over in a field and laid me down, and said, "Lay there, you're hurt bad." And I was trying to get back to get my buddy from underneath that truck. And I, I told him to get the jack. And he got the jack and put it underneath the whole thing and started jacking it up, which mashed the guy worse.

RE: Oh, gee.



AE: I wanted the jack put inside of the framework to jack it open. And by that time some more people came, and got us out and took us to Raleigh, North Carolina hospital. In a Model T Ford, a Model A Ford. And it was going down the road, chug-a-lug, chug-a-lug, chug-a-lug. I thought I'd die before I got to the hospital. And they never even washed our face and hands or anything. They kept us there until my boss sent someone to pick us up from Petersburg. And we really looked bad because it was plate glass windows in those days in the tractor.

RE: Mm hmm.

AE: And we were cut with a lot of little places, you know. And we, we looked awful. But it wasn't as bad as we looked.

RE: Thank heavens.

AE: So I lost my nerve. In that accident. So I don't want to drive any more. So it happened to be a kid in the group that came in with me from Norfolk, and he told the leader that I could drive, that I'd been driving. And uh, so the leader asked me to move the truck over to where they could unload it. And I moved it out over there and got out and got my shovel. And the leader took my shovel away from me. He said, "You don't need that anymore, you're a truck driver." Now I don't want that 'cause I'd lost my nerve, so I drove that Dodge for about a week. And then they gave me a Chevrolet dump truck and I drove that for a week. Then they gave me a, a FWD. That was actually the name of the truck. It was built in 1918.

RE: 4-wheel drive?

AE: 4-wheel drive.

RE: 1918, you had 4-wheel drive?

AE: Yeah. Built in 1918. That was the actual name, Four-Wheel-Drive.

RE: Never knew that. So what?

AE: I kept on driving it. Well it, the 4-wheel drive, you couldn't pull it and start the motor in cold weather. So I had to park that and I worked in the garage whenever it was cold weather.

RE: And where was the garage at Skyland? Right at the camp?

AE: Right at the camp, we had it, a good garage.

RE: Now you went in to town weekly to pick up supplies?

AE: No. Uh, Charles Wagner and another person, I forget the other one, which was Luray. Sometimes if it would snow, we would take like 8 people on a dump truck and dig through the 16-foot snowdrifts and go to Luray and get a load of whatever we could get. And then coming back we 'd have to dig ourselves back through the drifts. And uh.

RE: I think we have some photographs in the, that I showed last year. Remember some of those slides of people shoveling the Drive?

AE: Well later on.

RE: Unbelievable.

AE: We got a snowplow. Of course we had to clear the gas station, it took so much gas. It would open 2 lanes. It shot the snow on the side. And that was a godsend. Instead of digging through the drifts we could go with that snowplow.

RE: Well earlier, you said you were working on Crescent Rock Overlook. Was that building the walls?

AE: Yeah, the wall 's there now.

RE: The Drive was in at that point, the paving for the Drive, right?

AE: Right.

RE: But the overlooks were built after?

AE: Yeah.

RE: Did you help carry the stone?

AE: Yes.

RE: For the stone walls?

AE: Yes.

RE: And where do, do you remember where they quarried some of that?

AE: They started right there at Crescent Rock, on that kind of a deal.

RE: They quarried there?

AE: Yeah, well it's along the Drive. I worked right on up to Hawksbill, Hawksbill Mountain.

RE: They were dynamiting?

AE: No, I didn't have any dynamite. I hauled the, the rocks that that wall's made of.

RE: And they were quarrying them, as they went, right along the side of the?

AE: We had a quarry down over the side somewhere, but I don't remember just where it is?

RE: Downslope?

AE: We'd, huh,?

RE: Downslope?

AE: Yeah, we'd haul that stuff from uh, like a quarry. Well, we had our own rock crusher. We, some stuff that we'd crush for the driveways and things.

RE: Mm hmm.

AE: We had that, a pretty good rock crusher.

RE: Where was that?

AE: That was in that quarry, now I can't tell you where. I don't remember where it was.

RE: What was uh, do you remember your average day? What time did you get up in the morning?

AE: Oh, we got up about 6 o'clock, 6:30, and we had Reveille every day.

RE: Did you go out and raise the flag?

AE: We had that and uh, we had snow up to the half sash of the windows. And I decided one morning I wasn't gonna go to Reveille, so I stayed in my bunk, and 4 guys took my bunk out and set me in line. And Lieutenant Curtis, you know the sergeant says, "6 men absent, so many men present, 1 man in bed." So Lieutenant Curtis says, "We'll have to check his story." He comes over and yanks the cover off me a piece. It was snowing then. He said, uh "Just what's your story?" I said, "Lieutenant, I don't have a story." "You don't have a story?" I said, "No sir. I worked last night." "Ho, ho, ho. He worked last night." And he said we'll have to check his, in other words, check with the boss, so he made those guys take me back in the barracks. And they lifted me up as high as they could and dropped me on the floor, and it really hurt my back. But they were mad because I didn't have to get up in the snow, and carry my own bunk inside.

RE: [laughing]

AE: So I told the shop foreman what I had done. He said, "That's alright, I'll take care of it." So Lieutenant Curtis comes up after awhile and wants to know where that Emory boy worked last night. So the guy pointed to different [vehicles], well he did this job, and he did that job, and he did that, 3 or 4 jobs. "Damn, got me again." So uh.

RE: Didn't you have to go to Reveille and into your meals in dress uniform? And then you went back and changed and wore your work clothes?

AE: No, you wore the work clothes when you got up, because you were ready to go get breakfast and then go to work.

RE: And you could wear your work clothes to dinner in the evening? Supper?

AE: No, I mean, breakfast.

RE: Right.

AE: You had to be dressed up for the evening. For Reva-, not Reveille, what do you call it?

RE: Can't remember. But you'd get back, mid-afternoon, and you'd have, you'd have a little free time, and then you'd have to get dressed up for dinner?

AE: Yeah, yeah, and then you had uh, uh classes sometimes during the day, depending on what you were doing. And uh, they uh, they would have instructors come up for different courses, and uh, it was really no excuse for you to not learn. Like I was telling

you about the man learned to read his, write his own name, spell it and write it. Dave Burracker. He was from the, local area. And uh, the instructor asked him to go to the board, and he did it. And I thought, I was right proud of him.

RE: I would think so.

AE: He was like a middle-aged man.

RE: Yeah, there were, that family was, actually that family was, remember the story of Herbert Hoover with the uh, the >possum. One of the Burrackers gave Herbert Hoover that `possum that they kept as a pet at the White House.

AE: I don't recall that story.

RE: He was a young, he was a young boy about 12 or 13 years old at the time Hoover was down at Camp Hoover.

AE: Yeah.

RE: Remember, but that was all part of the Burracker family. But, did you take any of the courses?

AE: Not really. I took different parts of things that I needed to learn. Like I learned some math. But not Algebra and Trigonometry.

RE: Right. What'd you do for recreation?

AE: Recreation? They had all kinds of things like ball games and stuff. And we could go to Luray for the movies. And of course you had enough dimes you could go to the movie.

RE: Well, you had \$5 dollars a month didn't you?

AE: But I uh, I worked mostly all the time. See I got a day off for each day I worked, like a Saturday, or a Sunday, or a holiday. I was given a day off, for that, like Mr. Noyes was my immediate supervisor.

RE: Skip, Skip Noyes, right?

AE: And he, I, I told him I wanted to go uh, pass for the weekend, and he said uh, "Hell, you don't want to go down there for a weekend, it's too far. Take a week." So he gave me a pass to take for a week to take to Lieutenant Curtis. So Lieutenant Curtis

wants to know when I made up all that time.

RE: Hmm.

AE: I says, "You ask Mr. Noyes, he keeps the records." He called up Mr. Noyes, Mr. Noyes says, "You run the goddamn army, I run this part. You take care of your job and I'll take care of mine. Just give the boy his pass and let him get, get on the way." And Lieutenant Curtis gave me a pass for a week. And I hitchhiked to Virginia. I mean down to the Claremont where I lived at that particular time.

RE: How long did it take you to hitchhike to Claremont?

AE: All day.

RE: All day?

AE: Uh huh. Sometimes longer.

RE: Didn't I remember you said you slept in a field one night, hitchhiking?

AE: Mm hmm.

RE: Couldn't get a ride.

AE: That's right. I slept in the dispensary at Number 3 Camp. One night it was really cold. I, I flagged a car down on uh, it'd be 250 then, not 64. And this guy, made a U-turn and came back and asked me what the hell I wanted. I said I'd like to get a ride up to the top of the mountain. "Hell, I ain't got time to fool with you." And he did another quick turn and went on his way.

RE: Oh gee. Nice guy.

AE: So I walked to Camp 3 and slept in the dispensary that night. And then one of them took me over to my camp the next morning.

RE: What do you think was the best thing about the CCC experience?

AE: The chance for learning. You see most of the people that went in there had dropped out of school. And uh, they were just allowed to roam the street. Which was bad, that'd get you in a heap of trouble. So they uh, they learned and it kind of gave them a chance to get their feet on the ground. So they uh, could uh, learn if they wanted to, which most of them did learn. It was actually the best thing that ever

happened to kids our age at that time. That's the best thing that could have happened to them. Because you actually earned your way in it. It wasn't hard work. Nobody forced you to work hard. And it, they learned to do so many different things. Like uh, nobody wants to use a shovel I don't believe. But they had to learn to use a shovel, and everybody learned something. I don't believe that uh, we had, I don't think we had 3 out of 100 dropouts. Once in awhile you'd get a new recruit in and the guys would tell snake stories or something, and the poor things would be scared to death. And some guy, some guy would take a set of rattlers and crawl around on the floor and shake the rattlers near the kids head. Of course, he's going out the window by that time. It was terrible some of the things like that.

RE: 1935, Skyland. George Pollock was still running Skyland. Did you ever meet George Pollock?

AE: Not really in person, but I knew of him. Different things that I did concerning the area.

RE: Did you ever get over to Skyland at all, this part of Skyland?

AE: Yes, yes uh, they had horses at Skyland for people to ride. And we had a civil engineer named Brown. And he, he ran into a white horse and killed it one night. So people would holler, "What's the color of Brown? The color of the horse manure?" somebody would yell. "Brown." And he would get so mad. And that, that went on for quite awhile. Of course, he didn't mean to hit the horse. Nobody would do that if they could help it.

RE: Right. Well Skyland Camp, had a pet didn't they? Didn't you have a mascot?

AE: Huh?

RE: Didn't you have a mascot?

AE: Well, it was a couple of dogs around there, but I don't remember who they belonged to. Uh, one Shepherd, German Shepherd dog belonged to one of the directors, like Major Jenkins, or one of those, I don't remember which. And there was another one like a, kind of like a hunting dog. [name\_\_\_\_\_]

RE: Your doctor.

AE: Doctor Tanner?

RE: Doctor Tanner. Didn't he have a nickname?

AE: Huh?

RE: Didn't he have a nickname?

AE: I don't remember what it was. Uh, I never will forget one thing he told me. About going to the bathroom. He says, "Nobody's going to bother you if you're sitting there. You have to think about it. Practice it." If you go at the same time every morning, you'll develop a habit, like that and it works." He taught me that. Doctor Tanner. I don't remember where he was from.

RE: Now how long, did you serve? 2 years?

AE: No, one year.

RE: One year?

AE: I went in in July of '35 and came out in July of '36.

RE: And where did you go then Arthur?

AE: I went to work at Arnold Pen Company in Petersburg. I was walking down the street and this, it turned out to be the vice president of the company was standing outside smoking a cigarette. And I told him he needed a guy like me. And he said, "Go in the office and give the girl your name and address. If I need anybody I'll let you know." And his belly would jump up and down. So, he sent a guy that afternoon to my brother's house to tell me to come to work the next morning, and I worked there 4 and a half years. Then I went to work for the navy. In Annapolis.

RE: What'd you do there?

AE: I worked 35 years for the U. S. Navy. And proud of it.

RE: And retired?

AE: Retired, and went back to Claremont, where I had grown up. Same place, I was able to buy the place that I grew up on.

RE: Oh wow, that's wonderful.



AE: Yeah, it's the garden spot of the world.

RE: So you, how would you sum up your whole feeling about the Civilian Conservation Corps?

AE: The greatest thing that ever happened to me.

RE: Alright.

AE: It taught, it taught me more.

Another Man: How often do you come to Shenandoah National Park?

AE: How often? Oh I guess we average coming about 3 times a year.

Man: And when you're here, what do you think of?

AE: The good old days of the CC, camp days.

Man: And uh, let's see, how many reunions have you been to?

AE: What?

RE: How many reunions have you been to?

AE: Oh I, you mean the reunion up here? This is probably the third one that I've been to.

Man: What keeps you coming back to this, to the reunion?

AE: The mountains. The good old mountains. Camp, the 334th Company, Camp SNP-1.

Man: And you say that this was the best experience that uh, uh you ever had? What made this the best experience of your life?

AE: This was the best experience that I ever had, was up here.

Man: What made this the best experience of your life, in what way?

AE: I guess, uh the learning. Things about life. I guess that's the most important thing.

Man: And you made a career in the navy, now did the CCC ' s help you in your career with the navy?

AE: Oh yes. See I went to work for the navy as a machinist helper. So that I had learned from in the garage up here. But uh, Mr. Thompson was the foreman in that garage, and if you didn ' t know, you would ask, you would find out something if you asked questions about. The was a good boss, and he actually was smart about cars and trucks and he taught me a lot.

Man: Now he was a locally-employed-man?

AE: I don ' t remember where he was from, but his last name was Thompson. I don ' t remember where he was from. Do you know where, do you have any information?

Man: We can look that up. Thank you.