

Oral History Interview with

MEARL E. MOSS

March 24, 1999

Park Headquarters

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Shenandoah National Park
Luray, VA

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Transcription

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JA: 24, 1999. This recording is made in the archives of the Shenandoah National Park. My name is John Amberson. That=s A-M-B-E-R-S-O-N. I=m a volunteer in the park. I=m sitting here today with Mearl Moss who is a former member of the Civilian Conservation Corps, who had worked in the Shenandoah National Park. Good morning Mr. Moss. Would you state your name and your current address.

MM: Well my name=s Mearl Moss and uh, I, I live outside of Luray. My address is Arrowhead, Arrowhead Lake Road. 99593.

JA: Very good. And where you at the time uh, that uh, you heard about the CCC=s? Were you living in Virginia.

MM: No, I, I was living in Pennsylvania then. I was 14 years old. My brother, he went in the CC=s for 2 years. He came out, and that=s when I first got, got, uh he gave me a pair of shoes when he came home, and uh, I, I really needed them too. And that=s where I found out about the CC=s. But when I got 18, then I, I joined the CC=s.

JA: What year was that, Mearl?

MM: Uh, let me see, wait a minute. Was it uh, it was, yeah that was, that was in >37. My brother got out. And uh, it was, I was, that=s right, I was up there in Camp 1 in >38 and >39.

JA: So you went to Camp 1 in 1938 and >39. Your brother came out in 1937?

MM: Uh huh. Yeah, well, I won=t fib on that, he came out 2 years before that. So he came out about >36 I=d say.

JA: I see. Ok. And uh, where was he, where was he working in the CCC?

MM: Well, he, I forget the name of the town, or even the number, but it was in Pennsylvania.

JA: Yeah, and uh, so you were 18 at the time, that you were recruited?

MM: Uh huh.

JA: And were, you were living with your parents?

MM: Yeah.

JA: And they, they were living, were they in the coal mines, working in the coal mine?

MM: No, see they, I lived in Downingtown. There=s no coal mines down there, just sand mines.

JA: I see. And what were your parents doing at the time?

MM: Well, he, he was a, he worked at the sand mine. He fired the boilers. And then he got rhuematism, got disabled, and uh, they, so uh, he had, so uh, he only got a thousand dollars for retirement then. And then, and we all went to Pennsylvania and bought a 100 acre farm for \$300.

JA: Excellent. Yes.

MM: It had a barn and a house on it.

JA: And so you worked on the farm?

MM: Well, yeah, we cut pulp wood. We cut a whole cart, boxcar load of pine. And then we cut up, we got that down, we cut up, uh carload of poplar and maple. And then we made, made crossdrives and such as that.

JA: Uh, you brothers worked with you, your family worked on the farm as well?

MM: They all, yeah, my mother and my daddy, well he was disabled, but he, he, he done a little bit of work. My brothers, you, you couldn=t get much work out of them, >cause they was right at the age they=d want to run around.

JA: And uh, so uh you decided to go into the CCC, and you=re 18 years old?

MM: Yeah.

JA: And uh, what was the reason, what was the reason for doing that?

MM: Well, I, really I wanted to get away from home, to tell you the truth. Tell the truth about it.

JA: And I guess you uh, you uh, expected some of the money to go back, some of the money to go back to the family, to help the family out?

MM: That=s right, because we were, we were very poor. I=m the, well the beans and potatoes, about the main, main dish.

JA: Yeah, so they recruited you back in Pennsylvania then?

MM: Uh huh.

JA: And uh, you came out from Pennsylvania with a group of other boys?

MM: Well uh, tell you the truth I, I don=t hardly remember, I was in, Uh, I don=t even remember where, where we got the training at. Somewhere in Pennsylvania, but boy I don=t , I don=t remember. But uh, if I didn=t have, we got in Luray at 11 o=clock at night.

JA: And what did they do?

MM: Well they, they were, loaded us up on the truck, and went on back to camp. And well we uh, none of us knew where we was. And we didn=t find out until the next morning.

JA: Where you were?

MM: Yeah.

JA: Did you know you were going to the Shenandoah National Park?

MM: No, we didn=t have the least idea of where we were going.

JA: Oh?

MM: But I=m glad I came to Virginia, got myself a wife.

JA: So, you went up to uh, they took you in trucks up to the park?

MM: Yeah.

JA: To uh, what camp did you go?

MM: Camp 1, was the, Company 3, 3-4, and uh, it=s about a mile from Skyland.

JA: Mm hmm. And what happened that first day, do you remember?

MM: Well, we filed out to go on a crew. And this, much older boys that had been there for awhile, they told me, they said, ADon=t you get on John Ash=s crew.≡ And I said, AI=ll betcha I get on his crew.≡ And I was the third name called out, and he said AJohn Ash=s crew.≡ But John and I got real along good. He was the one that made me trail boss at the end. But that=s where I learned to drive a truck at.

JA: I see.

MM: And uh, so I=m going to drive that truck if it works, and I wanted him barracks leader.

JA: And did he uh, he had various tasks that he performed or was he doing certain special type of work?

MM: Well, John Ash, he, he was a foreman. I forget what they called him. But he, he was a, he was a big [one_____], see he saved, lived in Luray. And uh.

JA: Mm hmm.

MM: But, but uh, he=d, he=d put you to work. Now, but he had no trouble from me, >cause I knew what work was.

JA: Ok, the uh, did they issue you clothing there, did, when you got to the park?

MM: Yeah, they, they furnished everything for us, clothes-wise.

JA: And uh, they gave you, gave you some basic information as to how they wanted to run the camp, and how the, things were?

MM: Well, right then, no, they didn=t, I just, no, not as I remember. But I mean, they had, they had education there. That=s one thing that I wished I had taken up, >cause I only got to 6th grade in school. I had to quit. But I wished I=d taken it up. Or even the same way when I was in the army. I was in the army over 4 years, and, and I should have taken something there too, but you know you=re young like that, you, you don=t know, have a head.

JA: So you were, so you were uh, with this Hensley=s crew, was that right?

MM: Beg pardon.

JA: You went, you were on a special crew the whole time?

MM: Yeah, Uh huh. We built, well we worked up there at Hughe=s River Gap. You know I live right underneath, right where I live is right straight up from the, there=s a rock quarry up there.

JA: Mm hmm.

MM: We spent many a May day in that thing. Getting out rocks.

JA: In the rock quarry?

MM: Yeah.

JA: And what were the rocks to be used for?

MM: For, for anything they wanted it for, for walls, to replace walls or something like that.

JA: So you were quarrying rock for awhile?

MM: Uh huh, and boy I tell you, some of those places you hit with a sledge hammer, and there=s, pieces of rock fell off.

JA: So you did it by hand?

MM: Yeah, if everything=s by, but, somebody might have got in there and blown, oh that=s right, because that=s right, we, there was no dynamiting at all going on there.

JA: Mm hmm.

MM: And we dug all by hand, dug it.

JA: So you dug rocks out any size?

MM: Yeah, and they then, well most times you had to take a chisel and chisel them out.

JA: Mm hmm. And what did you do with the rocks?

MM: Well, we loaded them up on the truck, and where you go into the quarry, they dumped them back there, back in the same hole, but it was down a little bit further. And then when the park service needed rock, or anybody else, then.

JA: They were available?

MM: They, they were there, uh huh.

JA: What other types of work did you do?

MM: Well, we, we worked with, well uh at the end, we built a, a road into Skyland. It was the east part of Skyland. There=s a road that goes east. Well that=s when I was, I was driving a dump truck then.

JA: Right.

MM: But, we built a, a, well down at White Oak Canyon, there was uh, there was no trail down there at all then. And uh, but we built a trail all the way down to Old Rag.

JA: All the way to Old Rag?

MM: Uh huh. But we didn=t, we not quite, we was building a bridge across there. That picture there of me using an axe. There, that was the last day I was down there. And

uh, but uh, the following week, the foreman, he had taken everybody up on Old Rag. I never, never was up on there and still haven't been up on there.

JA: Yeah.

MM: But I, I thought maybe the trail was like it was, but uh, I'd say 5 years ago, the 4 of us went, went up and went down from Skyland down. Sometime though, they worked that trail over. I see sights down there, and very big rock fall. There was a ledge down there, a little higher here at this buildings. And uh, and uh, but I don't know where they got all the rocks, but they, they, like a pair of steps, it was about 4 foot wide. But they improved it. A lot.

JA: They improved it quite a bit since that time?

MM: Yeah. Yes, see we were using chestnut logs been there, like a gutter or something or another, or form a lip. We used chestnut logs, and you, so they, they rotted out.

JA: Yeah.

MM: But uh, they, they, for soft wood, they last a long time.

JA: Uh, and uh, it was just a regular hiking type trail that you were building?

MM: Yeah. Uh huh.

JA: And I guess you worked on fire duty as well, didn't you?

MM: Oh yeah.

