

Oral History Interview with

WILLIAM A. MASSY

Saturday, Sept. 25, 1999

At Skyland Conference Hall
66th Reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter
of the
Civilian Conservation Corps

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Shenandoah National Park
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Transcription

CJ: ... 1999, we're at Skyland Conference Hall at the CCC Reunion. My name is Carrie Janney and I'm interviewing?

WM: William A. Massy.

CJ: Ok. And he's going to tell us a little bit about his experiences here at Shenandoah and the CCC. So can you start off by telling me when and where you were born?

WM: I was born on May the 22nd, 1914. My parents lived on the North Anna River, which is now Lake Anna, Virginia. And my dad only had 75 acres. And I got, had 4 brothers and 2 sisters. And I happened to be the oldest one of the family. And we were in the sawmill business, cuttin' lumber and everything in '32 when things got so bad. The Depression came on, and so daddy uh, daddy said, "Well somebody around here's got to go to work." Says, "The rest of the children all in school, the children in school." And I was the oldest of the children, I was 19.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: And when Roosevelt instituted the CCs, uh the WPA works and the Civilian Conservation Corps, I went to Spotsylvania Courthouse on the uh, 20th, on my birthday, the 22nd of May, and signed up for the Civilian Conservation Corps. And on the 27th I got a call to go to Richmond, to get the training in Richmond to go Fort Monroe, Virginia. And I was sworn in at Fort Monroe, Virginia on the 27th of May, 1933. We stayed at Fort Monroe about 2 weeks I guess. We were taking shots and getting ready for the camp, life. And so on a Saturday morning there, about, Saturday afternoon I take it, about 2 o'clock we were ordered to board a train to take off to a camp site. We traveled all night long on the uh, train, and the next morning we come on, on a sideline in from Salem into Catawba. Between the Catawba Mountain and the Fort Lewis Mountain, in the valley which is called uh, Mason's Cove. And there's a creek through the Mason Cove.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: Is where we was supposed to set up our camp. And the train had all, all the equipment on it, 200 men, and everything to set up camp. We started on that camp on a Sunday morning, cutting trees, cutting briars, and an old rabbit could hardly get through that. So anyhow that's the way we, we set up our tent. We set up our tents and uh the other officers' and the other men of it. And we stayed in those tents for about, a little over 2 months, maybe uh, 3 months. Camp, it was named, Camp 52.

CJ: Camp 52.

WM: Salem, Virginia.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: And uh, actually uh, we, we lived in those tents until along in the fall of the year when we got our barracks built. And the officers' quarters was uh, log cabins. Administration building was a log cabin, and we had a nice dining hall. Long nice dining hall, and a nice place to dance. We had some parties on Saturday nights. The, well, we'd invite the girls that lived around the camp. They'd come in, and, they were well chaperoned. Our commanding officers were right strict on us.

CJ: Really.

WM: Which they uh, they were good. Well I have to say it for them, they were real good. And I'll have to say uh, well, I was talking, that I think Franklin Roosevelt was one of the grandest presidents we ever had. I think if we had started it 20 years ago or maybe 25 years ago, and started our CC camps again, we wouldn't have had all these problems that we have today with our young generation. Sorry to say, that's uh, they have too much liberty, and they don't take things in stride like we did back in the old days.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: And uh, I think there would have been a lot of lives soon, and a lot of young people would have turned out better than what they have today, I'm sorry to say. But it's one of those things. And so today we're living under conditions quite a bit different than what it is was those days. 'Cause we were in a Depression, everybody was willing to work, help one another.

CJ: Right.

WM: Neighbor was neighbor, and children uh, went to church on Sunday. And Momma and Daddy went with them to Sunday school and church. And I think today, that uh, there's too many young people that have too much liberty of their own. Sorry to say, but it's true. So anyhow, we can all, I always say, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's one of the grandest presidents I think I've lived under. And he owned one of the greatest memorials of any president I think we ever had.

CJ: Now did he ever come visit your camp?

WM: Uh, no uh, no, we had uh, senators that came. Woodrum and [Tiffum Woods____] and all.

CJ: Uh huh.

WM: But I can say it just by my own self.

CJ: Right.

WM: 'Cause that \$25 dollars I sent home allowed my 2 brothers, uh 4 bro-, 3 brothers and 2 sisters to go to school. They got what I didn't get.

CJ: Right.

WM: I got as far as the second year high school and I quit. Alright, I stayed in camp 2 hitches. Well we had a good time, we enjoyed ourselves, we cut fire trails, built fire towers and we built roads, we'd visit other camps, and play football.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: Basketball, baseball.

CJ: You were on all those teams?

WM: All those camps in West Virginia, mountains, and over here at Big Meadows.

CJ: Oh you did? You played those guys?

WM: Oh yeah.

CJ: You did?

WM: We got with those camps a lot of times, played in [f?? s], too.

CJ: Oh did you?

WM: We had called them in from one camp to another.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: And thought [f____s], those mountains was exactly who had them. The old mountain men would run on them, all those bases.

CJ: Uh huh.

WM: And I've been over here several times. My wife and I've been over here quite a few times. And my wife uh, her and I, the last time on our 50th reunion,

we went on our 50th reunion over to uh, the Mimslyn hotel in Luray. And we had a really nice time, a really enjoyable time. We had a lot of the guys, and we had a lot of musicians and they played music and sang. At 12 o'clock at night, my wife told me, she says, "Let's go to bed." She says, "I'm tired." Says, "Alright we'll go to bed." And so we did. And we went to bed and those guys was playing music when we went to bed, and we woke up the next morning they were still playing music. And her and I got up the next morning, and we'd taken off and went over to, uh, New Market and on up New Market, on up the Valley to Lexington and Natural Bridge and...

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: Back over to Salem and spent the night. And went back the next morning and got up and went over to the old campsite. The old campsite is about uh, north of Salem, it's about 8 miles over there. Over that Hanging Rock they called it a bunch of places.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: Anyhow, we enjoyed going over, and we went to this old store. Old store's about oh, quarter of a mile from the camp. And uh, the gentlemen that run the store, him and his wife, we used to go down and get our drinks and we smoked, and cigarettes was 10 cents a pack and Coke was a nickel and so forth. But uh, my wife was sitting in the car, and he says, "Tell you wife to come in here and sit on one of these old nail kegs the way you used to sit on them." But we enjoyed that. And she went over, we did a lot of visiting after I retired. I worked uh, after I come out of the CCs, I would work for the state, and worked for the state awhile. The state didn't pay much money, just 30 cents and hour.

CJ: What'd you do for the state?

WM: Worked on, on the highways, patrolled.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: But anyhow, I went from the state to the FMC plant, where we made cellophane. That still wasn't paying what it ought to be, working shift work. And my wife had 3 daughters. Now I'll also get to that directly, but anyhow they were on Sundays, on Saturdays and Sundays I had to go to work 3 to 11 and all that kind of stuff. But then I worked, worked construction. Went from Quantico Marine Base into what they called Possum Point. And Possum Point's where they built power, they uh.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: Made electricity. Worked on power plants some 'til we got them going. Then they had a break in uh, then, and a bunch of the guys I worked with went to work in Washington. And I went to work in Washington D.C. and I worked up there for about, I guess for about 15 years.

CJ: Really?

WM: In the city, high rise apartments, high rise apartments, built buildings, built all kinds of buildings. Had a, big city, and uh, I've got uh, oh I'll get to that directly, my grand, my grandchildren, but anyhow. Then I came back in I guess, 1970 it was. I had a change to go to Lake Anna, when they started building the bridges over the rivers.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: And working on the bridges, and we finished those up, and then we worked on the plants until the got the first nuclear plant reactor. There's 2 nuclear plants on the lake now. So anyhow, we got those going, and after we got that going I said, well it's time for me to hang it up. So when I hung it up, I retired and went home. And uh, I've got a home, we have 40 acres of land there. And uh, I raise some garden.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: Cut the grass, did a little touring, and this and that and the other thing. And we had a good time, very good times, getting around, 'til about '86 I guess it was. She was taken with a stroke, and from that stroke it got worse. In the hospital, out of the hospital. For about 5 years I taken care of her at home. I looked after her at home, with some help, social service, a little help. Not too much help. But then the doctor said, "Well, no longer, she can go home. She'll have to go in a nursing home." So she went in a nursing home. She stayed in there about 4 years I guess. She'll be passed away, the 3 years this coming September the 28th.

CJ: I'm sorry.

WM: She went to be with the Lord the 28th of September. But now I have 3 daughters. I have Betty which is the oldest. Betty has 3 boys, and one girl. All of her boys work for, either for the government. I got one, uh one son is a historian. He worked at Williamsburg for 3 years, he didn't like, he liked it too. But they wouldn't come up with no raise. So he put in a application for the capitol, for the government. And he got to go to the capitol.

CJ: Hmm.

WM: So he was a tour guide at the United States Capitol. And he stayed there 3 years, and somebody offered him a better opportunity in some special, big contract for the government. So that's where he is now. He's engaged, and his girl, his girlfriend rather, she's finishing up college, she's going [MBA? CPA?]. Anyhow, the other 2 girls, Linda.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: Works for the banks. In Spotsylvania County, Fredricksburg.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: Her and her husband have a beautiful place up there, what they call uh, anyhow it's in Spotsylvania County. I talk so much I forget what I'm talking about.

CJ: And who was your third daughter?

WM: 3 daughters, 3 daughter, uh huh. And yeah, Linda, the middle one is the one, she moved. Sold her beautiful home up here, she and her husband bought a home in Florida. So they have a beautiful home in Florida now. So they live in Florida. He's the kind, he's a guy that flew airplanes for United Airlines. And she worked for the banks. She retired from the banks. And the other daughter's building a beautiful home up there. And she'll be moving in think, in about the middle of October. And she's got uh, her daughter is my youngest grandchild, granddaughter. She's a schoolteacher, teaches 5th grade at Robert E. Lee Elementary School and her son works for, her husband, her husband's an appraiser for Spotsylvania County. He's got a good job, all the work he can get, uh.

CJ: Sounds like you've got a lovely family.

WM: I've got a lovely family, and I love them dearly.

CJ: And the CCC was really good to you?

WM: And my sister, I've got 2 sisters. And one sister came, and lost her husband. And she can't drive, and I drive her to church. And to stores, and you know, different, wherever she has to go. And my baby sister is an invalid. And she has somebody has to be with her all the time. It's bad but that's the way life is. Life is not that all, pleasant.

CJ: Well thank you for sharing your story with us, and telling us about.

WM: Well that's the story of my life. And I'll tell you about my wife and I. When I went to camp, uh, her and I met when we were teenagers.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: She was 15 and I was 16. And her mother died when she was but a child, a baby. So her aunt and uncle raised her. But they used to have dances at this old country, uh school down there. And that's where we met, at these country dances. And we danced, uh you know, made friends, made good friends. But when I went in CC's I corresponded with her. And I used to uh, come home on different holidays, like uh, 4th of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. I'd get on the train at Salem, and take all night to get down to Frederick Hall, a place called Frederick Hall. Old country uh, railroad station on the C&O.

CJ: Mm hmm.

WM: And my dad would meet me over there with uh, the mules to ride home. Or else if he wasn't there I'd walk home. 8 miles. And then on Saturday night, my uh sister's boyfriend had a car. And he'd go up, and my sister, and my brother, my brother-in-law would go to dances together, and we'd go to different places together. And we lived around close where we could see each other. And in 1936 we both got married together. They stood for us and we stood for them. An old preacher, 90 years old.

CJ: So how long were you in the CCC's then?

WM: 2 hitches.

CJ: 2 hitches.

WM: 2 hitches, that's right.

CJ: So that was one year?

WM: It was 6 months each then.

CJ: So one year.

WM: And we could get a job, and of course I got a job. And I got \$25 dollars a month. 'Cause it sent those children to school then. The, things were getting a little bit better, 'cause I got out, I got some work to do, my dad got work to do.

CJ: So the Depression was.

WM: That's right, so we could make it. But anyhow, I enjoyed it. Life was good to that, and I've enjoyed every bit of it.

CJ: Well thank you so much for, sharing your story.

WM: And uh, like I say, my wife is buried at the Confederate cemetery. My mother's buried there, my father's buried there. I lost a brother 4 years ago, he's buried there. My wife's buried there. And uh, I've going to be buried there if I'm living, I won't be living, but my burials though. Now my baby girl called me this morning before I left home. "Daddy you take care of yourself now."

CJ: Well thank you for coming and sharing with us, we appreciate it.

WM: I enjoyed it. If you would, look now I know these officers there, all of them. This is Captain Fred B. Waters. And that was Lieutenant Colvin. And he was our first officers.

CJ: And what was the name of the camp?

WM: Camp S52, Salem Virginia. Camp Triangle S52.

CJ: Have you showed these to Reed Engle yet.

WM: Beg your pardon.

CJ: Reed Engle, the ranger that's in uniform?

WM: Uh yeah.

CJ: Have you showed him your pictures?

WM: Yeah. Yeah, Mm hmm. Yeah I'm setting right there by that tree. You can see it, see a little bit of a head in there.

CJ: Yeah a little bitty head.

WM: A little bit of head. And of course there's some of the, the cooks, there's the cooks and some of the officers that worked in there, these officers worked with us, too. And they all, we got good training, good training. And actually, they were good people, they were good people. And uh, if they want to take pictures of these while they're here, can they take pictures of them while they're here?

CJ: Um .