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## **Iron Hill School Oral History Project**

### **Interview with William Charles Smoot**

Date of Interview: February 17, 2004

Interviewer: Roberta Perkins

Transcriber: Marcia Adams

Also present: Laura Mackie Lee, Museum Director, Iron Hill Museum of Natural History

**Roberta:** This is Roberta Perkins and today's date is Tuesday, February 17th, 2004 and I am interviewing Mr. William Charles Smoot. We are here at the Iron Hill Natural History Museum and this interviewing is part of the ongoing Iron Hill School Restoration Project. At this time I would like to thank Mr. Smoot for taking the time to share his life with us.

**Mr. Smoot:** You are very welcome.

**Roberta:** Mr. Smoot would you start by stating your full name and your place of birth and when you were born?

**Mr. Smoot:** William Charles Smoot and I was born in Cooch's Bridge, Delaware, February 24, 1935.

**Roberta:** How many siblings did you have?

**Mr. Smoot:** I had two sisters, one older and one younger. I am the only boy and the middle child.

**Roberta:** What were their names?

**Mr. Smoot:** My older sister's name is Elizabeth Smoot which is Elizabeth Price now, and my baby sister's name is Evelyn Smoot.

Roberta: And your parents?

**Mr. Smoot:** My father's name is Walter Smoot and my mother's name is Lucille Smoot.

Roberta: Were they from Delaware?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, they were from Virginia.

Roberta: Where in Virginia?

**Mr. Smoot:** Warrington and Culpepper.

Roberta: County?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, my father was from Warrington, the city of Warrington, Virginia, which is about a hundred miles from Washington. My mother was like maybe 25 miles or something down the road called Jefferson, Virginia.

Roberta: Would you spell that?

**Mr. Smoot:** J-e-f-f-e-r-s-o-n.

Roberta: What was your mother's maiden name?

**Mr. Smoot:** Grey.

Roberta: Grey?

**Mr. Smoot:** G-r-e-y.

Roberta: What brought them to Delaware – do you know?

**Mr. Smoot:** My father migrated this way for some reason. They were married before they came here because Elizabeth, Libby – we call her Libby – she was born in Virginia. Evelyn and myself were born in Delaware. So Daddy I

guess migrated this way and I think Mom came up later and started working I think at Dayett's Mill was his first job, if I am not mistaken.

Roberta: I was going to ask you was there a particular reason why your parents, your father, moved to Cooch's Bridge?

**Mr. Smoot:** I never did know the reason. I guess it never came up before.

Roberta: What things do you remember about growing up in Cooch's Bridge?

**Mr. Smoot:** It was a dirt road and the mailman came by in a car and delivered the mail so we would walk down the road for a ride and get on the back of the car and as he stopped to drop mail you know we would get off. The woods there where 95 goes over 72, that was all woods, and then the farmers were up above there and we got on the car and if he didn't stop at one of them houses we had to stay on the back of the car until he stopped and Mom would come out looking for us and that's when we were in trouble. She would come out and call us and we couldn't answer her that far away so we knew we were in trouble.

Roberta: Did he know that you were...

**Mr. Smoot:** Sometimes he did and sometimes he didn't. When we got off we were all dusty but it was fun you know. It was all in fun.

Roberta: It sounds like it. How many black families were in that area when you were growing up?

**Mr. Smoot:** Four – because the Moseleys came from Virginia, although a little bit later and they were in that area. There was Mr. Lewis and I think the other family was named Davis. They all owned those little strips right there, on 72.

Roberta: Was the Mill the draw?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, I think Daddy, my father, was the only one who worked for the Mill that was in that area, of the black people.

Roberta: What did the other family members do for income? Do you know?

**Mr. Smoot:** I think Mr. Lewis worked on the railroad. Mr. Davis was more or less like a farmer with pigs and chickens and stuff like that you know. I think he even had a garden, not much of a garden, but he would make his money off the garden, and stuff like that. Plus he would sell the pigs, the meat from the pigs and something like that.

Roberta: How many children were there among the families?

**Mr. Smoot:** There really wasn't that many. I think the Moseleys there was like two and there was three of us. There was only like six kids in the area.

Roberta: How did people get information? How did they communicate with one another and how did they find out the news or activities that was going on in the area?

**Mr. Smoot:** Well we could buy a paper but other than that it was like word of mouth. Somebody heard it and it came down because we didn't have telephones at that time. I know we didn't have telephones or television.

Roberta: When you parents first moved did they – well you said your father came here first

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: Ok. Did he purchase, own his home initially? Did he rent?

**Mr. Smoot:** He purchased it. Because we lived across the street and I think it was Mr. Cooch's property. I think that's the way it was. Because the land when we bought the house and built the house that was moved to Glasgow,

across the road, that house, that land, was bought from Dayett. Now whether he worked it off, paid for it or however we owned that land there.

Roberta: How many acres?

**Mr. Smoot:** About two. It was all like woodland other than what we cut out to make the house. It ran almost back to the railroad because there had been times when we went down to the woods and watched the train go by.

Laura: That went like from 72 all the way back to the railroad?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Laura: That's a pretty big chunk of land.

Roberta: Celebrations. Let me touch on family or group celebrations. Do you remember?

**Mr. Smoot:** There wasn't too much in our time. The only thing I can remember celebrating mostly was maybe like picnics in the summer or something like that but it wasn't like you had a family reunions and stuff then. We had people that came up from Virginia to visit and stay and stuff like that but it was just like maybe weekends and it would depend on what time of the year it was whether they would have a picnic or not. But as far as families in the community getting together most of us just went to church and that was something that we had to do because my mother and father had joined the Pilgrim Baptist Church at that time.

Roberta: What was the name of it again?

**Mr. Smoot:** Pilgrim.

Roberta: Pilgrim?

**Mr. Smoot:** Baptist Church. It was in Newark on New London Avenue. We went there. That was one of our activities. In fact that was the most activity we

had other than playing and stuff like that till we got grown and then we started playing ball in organizations.

Roberta: Did you have a job? Did you do something to earn money?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, not until I moved to Glasgow.

Roberta: And that was how old?

**Mr. Smoot:** My first job was in Glasgow.

Roberta: How old were you then?

**Mr. Smoot:** You would ask that wouldn't you? I had to be 10, 12.

Roberta: What was it?

**Mr. Smoot:** Working on a farm.

Roberta: What did you do?

**Mr. Smoot:** Drove a tractor, helped with planting corn, mostly all like farm work.

Roberta: When did you learn how to drive a tractor? How old were you?

**Mr. Smoot:** 10, 11, 12 somewhere along there.

Roberta: So you had just learned.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: What was that like?

**Mr. Smoot:** It was a great job. It was great for me you know.

Roberta: Was it difficult?

**Mr. Smoot:** No it really wasn't difficult. Even when I learned how to drive a car I taught myself from watching my father. That's the way I learned how to

drive. The first time I had to drive a car Daddy had left a truck in the driveway and my grandmother's car was in front of the truck and Mom couldn't drive the truck so I had to go out and move the truck so grandmom could get out and that was the first time I drove.

Roberta: So what was that like – did you strip gears a lot?

**Mr. Smoot:** That was the bomb because here I am driving now you know. That was almost as good as smoking cigarettes.

Laura: And you were allowed to, that was the best part.

**Mr. Smoot:** Right.

Laura: They let you do it.

**Mr. Smoot:** They had to let me do it because I had to move it out of the way so grandmom could get out you know. He used to let us drive. We had a pig pen down on the lower part of our lot and Daddy used to bring slop and stuff for feeding the pigs and we could drive the car down to the pig pen and bring it back you know so of course naturally we went out across the field, a little extra you know. It was great, having fun.

Laura: Now you said you worked on a farm, was it that farm was that was up in that area, some German guy owned it?

**Mr. Smoot:** Mr. Zeitler. No, we didn't work for him. I know which one you are talking about because their land backed right up to our land in Glasgow. It was Mr. Conner, he lived right across the street and his farm consisted of People's Plaza. You know where People's Plaza is now? That was all his farm then and I worked right across the road for him.

Roberta: What was the name of the other guy you just mentioned, Zeitler?

**Mr. Smoot:** Zeitler.

Roberta: How do you spell that?

Laura: Z-e-i-t-l-e-r. I talked to Charlotte Depresco and she lives in that area now and she remembered they lived on the Zeitler farm and her parents worked there.

**Mr. Smoot:** I had an uncle and an aunt – an uncle who worked for him when he had the cows and that stuff in there. Zeitler owned most of Glasgow too.

Laura: A big farm too.

**Mr. Smoot:** Zeitler and Conner I think were the two people that owned most of Glasgow.

Laura: And that was just your basic farm – pigs, cows, a little bit of everything.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. Mr. Conner really didn't have pigs and cows. He did mostly corn and stuff and he sold sweet corn to the farmers and we would put it on a truck and take it to Wilmington to the merchants and stuff.

Roberta: Did you ever drive that far?

**Mr. Smoot:** Not then, later on. My Daddy would have had a fit. I probably wouldn't have been able to sit down if he knew I was driving on the road. My father was strict. He didn't take no wooden nickels.

Roberta: You were talking about church being center to your life and to your family. Do you think it was a major influence in your life?

**Mr. Smoot:** I do. I really do. Between church and the Army. I think every young person, either boy or girl, should belong to them two. Especially the Army.

Roberta: Do you want to explain? Do you want to talk some more about that?

**Mr. Smoot:** The discipline. Just like they took the prayers and stuff out of school and the spankings you know like Miss Boddy when we were here at this school. Miss Boddy used to spank us when we – and she had the privilege to do it and if it was bad enough you got another one when you got home that night you know. So you would try to keep it quiet. You got warned and you didn't want her to tell your parents because you know you would get another one you know but I think that kept us in line and stuff like that and like I said I had a father that didn't you know he was very strict. He kept us in place and we had to do. Actually we had our chores to do and stuff like that. I was almost grown, playing ball, an organized baseball team but we still had to go to church. I had to go to church! Before we could play ball.

Roberta: That brings two questions. What was your army experience like?

**Mr. Smoot:** It was during integration. Army life was like living down South I think. You know your place. You know where to go, as long as you stayed in your place and did what you were supposed to do things were fine. There was a lot of things that we couldn't do but you knew that so you didn't worry about not doing it.

Roberta: Did you get drafted or did you sign up?

**Mr. Smoot:** I got drafted.

Roberta: How old were you?

**Mr. Smoot:** 22.

Laura: That was during the Korean War?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, there wasn't no war. 1957.

Roberta: When did they repeal that? They still had that draft and then they went to volunteers.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, volunteers.

Roberta: Was that in the '60's?

**Mr. Smoot:** They had volunteer then too, I think. You could volunteer then. But I think in the '60's they came out with that. A lot more people just volunteered. People had got a little better where the older boys had to stay home to work, they couldn't volunteer and go because a lot of them had to stay home and help either raise the siblings or help make money to raise the siblings and stuff like that. We were just a little bit fortunate than the other ones.

Roberta: How long were you in the army?

**Mr. Smoot:** 3 years.

Roberta: You talked about organized baseball.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: Do you want to tell us a little bit about that? How long was baseball a part of your life? What's the earliest you remember?

**Mr. Smoot:** A long time. I guess I could say I was pretty good at baseball. I would say when I started to play – in Ogletown High School. I mean we played on the field and stuff like that before then but it didn't become organized until I played on the Middletown High School team. Then I went all the way until they called me up for pros and two or three days before I went in the service.

Roberta: What was the team that called you?

**Mr. Smoot:** Pirates, Pittsburgh Pirates.

Roberta: No kidding, that hurt, huh?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. Me and another boy in Newark, R. J. Hubbard and because I didn't go he didn't go.

Roberta: Is that right?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. We tried to talk him into it but I guess he didn't want to. They were the family that had moved up here from Virginia. I guess he just didn't want to go by himself. So he missed out on all that.

Roberta: Do you know Ron Whittington?

**Mr. Smoot:** That name rings a bell.

Roberta: He is a baseball historian, local. He does Judy Johnson.

**Mr. Smoot:** I heard that.

Roberta: He's pretty good.

Laura: You remember just playing baseball out here during school? Did you play when you were that young?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. We played back and forth between baseball here. They had a thing called May Day and that was a big – you know where different schools came and we played baseball and the girls played volleyball, dodgeball and all that stuff you know. Sometimes I think we even had a net to play volleyball you know, but yes, we did play then.

Laura: Some students had said there was kind of a baseball field out here.

**Mr. Smoot:** There was right down in the corner here.

Roberta: Did you have competitions during May Day between the schools?

**Mr. Smoot:** Between the schools, yes. We got all dressed up – it was a big day.

Roberta: Let me go back again, another question came up and it might be kind of irrelevant but I need to ask it anyway. When did you realize that baseball clicked for you? You were really good you know and it was just something that you had to have, had to be involved in.

**Mr. Smoot:** When I moved to Glasgow there was a man, Rudolph Valentine, he had this team that we played down where Kohl's is now. Do you remember when the roller rink was there? We had a diamond behind the roller rink. That's where we would play our games and we played all the teams down in Maryland and Wilmington and you know places like that so it became a great part of our life because it's something you like to you. You like the competition. Earls played on that, the boy that came from this school, Howard, Jerry, Lindell.

Laura: Do you remember what that team's name was?

**Mr. Smoot:** No I don't. It might come to me.

Laura: Now Rudolph Valentine, he lives on Pleasant Valley Road, right?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes he did.

Laura: Someone else spoke to us about him. Lena Satchell told us when this school was closed and everybody was told they had to go to Middletown but that there was no bus Mr. Valentine...

**Mr. Smoot:** Got a bus.

Laura: Yes.

**Mr. Smoot:** He was our bus driver.

Laura: You rode on that too? On that us?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes I did. That's how we got there. We got put off the bus.

Roberta: What happened?

Laura: Did you misbehave?

**Mr. Smoot:** Ornerly. I can remember one time, you know how you put chains on for the snow, you know? So in the bus there is a wheel well, you know you would sit over the wheel well so I sat over the wheel well. I don't know if I had a pencil or a ruler or something but as the bus would speed up you know, thump, thump, thump, I would hit that wheel well and when he would slow down, I would slow down. He stopped about three or four times to check that to see if that chain was loose you know and somebody finally told him that it was Billy Smoot and off the bus.

Laura: I hope he let you off half way.

**Mr. Smoot:** It was on the other side of Summit Bridge.

Roberta: So was this on the way home or to school?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, on the way home.

Roberta: So you had to walk the rest of the way.

**Mr. Smoot:** And then I got another beating when I got home. My Mom and them didn't play that.

Laura: He must have been somebody pretty special. He was coach of the baseball team.

**Mr. Smoot:** He was kind of special in our lives because anything that he could do for you like if you were going somewhere and you really didn't have a way or something, Mr. Valentine would see that you got there.

Laura: Do you know if he would happen to still be alive?

**Mr. Smoot:** No he's been dead.

Laura:            Been dead a long time?

**Mr. Smoot:**    He's been dead a long time. He used to have a little auto mechanics shop over there. He used to repair cars.

Roberta:         Did he have children?

**Mr. Smoot:**    Not that I know of.

Roberta:         Was he married?

**Mr. Smoot:**    No. I guess that's the reason he could spend so much time with us, not being married.

Roberta:         Perhaps he saw the importance of what he did.

Laura:            You are the only other person that has ever brought him up. We were kind of wondering more about him.

**Mr. Smoot:**    He was our coach.

Roberta:         Tell us more of what you remember about him.

**Mr. Smoot:**    Other than being, I think it was a mechanic and he was coach of the baseball team and he drove that bus. Those are the things that I can really remember. And like I said if you needed a ride somewhere and he knowed that you needed it he made sure that you got there.

Laura:            Somebody told me that they thought his house was that one on Pleasant Valley that's still there, when you are headed out towards 40 it's on the right very shortly before you get to Glasgow Auto Body. It's supposed to be a log cabin underneath all the siding. You're not sure?

**Mr. Smoot:**    That's the Money's house.

Laura:            That's the Money's house?

**Mr. Smoot:** You are talking about that old wooden house?

Laura: Yes.

**Mr. Smoot:** No, that's the Money's house.

Laura: That's the Money's house, so he lived before that?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, he lived before that. You know how you turn into the industrial park?

Laura: Yes.

**Mr. Smoot:** Right there. His house was right along in there somewhere.

Laura: So he's on the other side.

**Mr. Smoot:** The house is on the same side of the road but it was back up the road further about a half mile from that house.

Laura: That's interesting that that is the Money's house.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes that's Mr. And Mrs. Money's house. In fact I think Mr. Money had passed not to long ago – 4 or 5 years ago. Jimmy still lives in Wilmington but he works at that kennel down there on Pleasant Valley Road.

Laura: Oh really.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, Jimmy works for them.

Roberta: Are they the Moneys that have that – I think on 301?

**Mr. Smoot:** No.

Roberta: Ok, it's a different family?

Laura: Now you know the Moneys bought the old schoolhouse that was probably before your time. I know it was. It was down here on the corner and the

Moneys moved that down Pleasant Valley Road but that's probably not the same building. One of the Grinnages, Mr. Grinnage's sibling, I think, his sister married a Money and then lived out there. You mentioned Pilgrim Baptist and you still go to Pilgrim Baptist, right?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes I do.

Laura: So you have been there your whole life and your Mom still lives in this area, she is 96?

**Mr. Smoot:** 96 years old. She lives in Glasgow with my sister. Well we trade off you know, we help. When she goes on vacation we stop in. She comes to my house.

Roberta: Let me ask you when you were growing up what were race relations like? Do you remember any incidents or any concerns?

**Mr. Smoot:** Maybe like I say for instance I say we used to walk home. When we first moved to Glasgow we had to walk from here to Glasgow so maybe some smarty would pass by and say the "N" word or something you know, or something like that but it didn't – it may have bothered you more then than it did now you know because the "N" word is just the "N" word now it doesn't make no difference but some smarty would come and try to say something about you know like when you were walking or something like that but other than that – but like I said you knew your place so you stayed in it.

Roberta: Was there a reaction either from you or the other children when somebody would come by and say something?

**Mr. Smoot:** Probably not. Well you know, maybe just holler back if they wasn't that far away you know but it wasn't no stopping and having a conversation or something like that with nobody.

**End of Tape 1 Side A.  
Begin Tape 1 Side B.**

Roberta: This is side 2 tape 1 an interview with Mr. Smoot and the question was concerning whether or not he or his family experienced discrimination in any form that he remembered.

**Mr. Smoot:** No, like I said most times you really didn't go eat anyway because we didn't have that kind of money to go eat so and like I said most of the time we just stayed in our place. I experienced that more when I got away from home after I got married and began to come more like – well after I came back from the service, I got married while I was in the service, and I came back and I was driving for Mayflower, Mayflower Moving Company, and we experienced it then you know because you would pull into a truck stop and you would see a great big sign there “Colored” pointing around the corner. The big truck stops, the big 76 truck stops, were about the only one that had where black and whites went together you know because they were bigger and all but so I mean the ones that had them colored signs up there you just didn't bother. I mean we didn't buy no fuel or nothing like that from them. We did not participate. I mean you knew where you belonged and you just stayed in your place.

Roberta: As you got older, did you or do you remember participating in any events to resist discrimination? Campaigns? Anything like that?

**Mr. Smoot:** I can't remember now. Like I say you were busy doing church work or playing ball or something you know.

Roberta: It jus wasn't something that really immediately affected your life, you were in a community that was pretty self-sufficient.

**Mr. Smoot:** In Newark you had your own surroundings where you just stayed. They had two stores, three stores, because Miss Grinnage, what's the lady's

name that had the trailer park down on Pleasant Valley Road, right across from Money's house. She used to own a bakery in Newark and we used to go in there and then they had the co-op right up on the corner and then they had another store down there so you stayed in there and then when you went downtown you could go in the market, they would allow you in the market.

Roberta: Where was the market downtown in Newark? It was very different than it is now, right?

**Mr. Smoot:** It was on Main Street somewhere. They had a market on Main Street until they built the Acme in the Newark Shopping Center.

Roberta: So was it a market like people with carts and open stands?

**Mr. Smoot:** A market.

Laura: The woman that owned that trailer park also owned a bakery?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, Miss Brown.

Laura: Brown?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, Miss Alberta Brown her and Mr. Brown used to own a little bakery in Newark, right on New London just before Church, just before the church. They had a little green shack and then she came down here after her husband died, had a little trailer park and beer garden or whatever it is in there.

Laura: I think that little bar is still there.

Roberta: What other black businesses

**Mr. Smoot:** In Newark?

Roberta: Just in your recollection.

**Mr. Smoot:** Bobby Saunders had the co-op on the corner there of Cleveland Avenue and New London. Bobby and Dot Saunders.

Roberta: Just Saunders? S-a-u-n-d-e-r-s?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. The other store on Cleveland Avenue I think it was owned by white people, it wasn't no black business. Mr. Chambers had a liquor store right next to the Elk's Home. Mr. Chambers had a little bar next to his brothers, yes he did, next to his brother's co-op and at the co-op you could buy hamburg, hot dogs and canned goods you know, stuff like that. I think at one time when they first started I think he even had a gas pump there.

Roberta: Barbershop anywhere?

**Mr. Smoot:** Barbershop was around the corner just before, on New London between the church and the store.

Roberta: Who owned that, do you know?

**Mr. Smoot:** Archwell Watson was one of them that worked in there. I do know.

Roberta: Do you know how to spell that? It's the first time I have heard that.

**Mr. Smoot:** No I don't.

Laura: You are the first person we have talked to that had a connection with that side of town. That's quite a hike for you from where you lived.

**Mr. Smoot:** Well we usually didn't walk there because Daddy had a car. My father owned a car.

Laura: But even then it was quite a distance.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes it was.

Laura: A lot of other people that we talked to from this area didn't really frequent up there that much.

**Mr. Smoot:** Well see like I said we were in the area because of church.

Laura: Right.

**Mr. Smoot:** And church sometimes lasted all day. On Sundays we started Sunday School, then you had morning service and then after that you had afternoon service, 6:30 you had BTU and then back to night service. They had 3 services plus all that other stuff so sometimes you mingled with the people that was from the church, you know, stuff like that and I think that was one of the reasons that we had more on site right there because of that, you know.

Roberta: There wasn't talk of these businesses.

Laura: No. Most people we talked to so far didn't know a lot of people from that area.

**Mr. Smoot:** Oh no, we knew just about everybody in Newark.

Laura: Did you happen to know Bob Anderson? He's the principal of Glasgow but I'm not sure if he goes to Pilgrim Baptist or isn't there another church on New London?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, there is 2 more churches on New London.

Laura: Ok. He might go to one of the other ones.

**Mr. Smoot:** Mt. Zion and there is a St. Johns, St. Johns is right on the corner of Cleveland Avenue and New London and Mt. Zion is up on the hill. As you go down New London you go up the steps there is another church up off there.

Roberta: What's BTU?

**Mr. Smoot:** Baptist – like a Bible study thing. They only ran it for like a half hour or so. I can almost remember the time and everything. We had to be back to church.

Roberta: I was going to ask you, in-between these different activities, services, did you go out?

**Mr. Smoot:** Sometimes Daddy and them would leave us in Newark and sometimes we had to come home. They would come home to eat or whatever and then come back. To rest or whatever and they would leave us up there and then most of the time they would make sure we would come home. That's how we began to know the area. When we left, say for instance like we graduated, I graduated from Glasgow School and we went to Middletown, everybody on this side of the creek, all black people on this side of the creek, went to Howard for their high school. Like 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 but we went to Middletown. I graduated from Middletown twice. In the 10th grade and in the 12th grade. Because when I first went to Middletown the grade only went to the 10th and then everybody on the other side of the creek or Summit Bridge I should say, went to Delaware State for the 11th and 12th year. So the black people on this side had to go to Howard but in the meanwhile Redding had started building their school so in '52, or '50 somewhere, anyway '53 or '54 I graduated from Middletown again in '54.

Roberta: So you first graduated in '52?

**Mr. Smoot:** Correct, graduated 10th grade in '52. Went to Howard for my 11th year and went back to Middletown and graduated. We were the first to graduate from the new school. '54.

Roberta: 1954, that's when the Wilmington schools integrated.

**Mr. Smoot:** Bucky Money, Bundue and all of them came down here and Newark, that's the first year they became undefeated. Newark High was undefeated that year. In '54.

Roberta: In what sport?

**Mr. Smoot:** Football. Bundue Hall, Bucky Money, Alvin Hall all of them came from Wilmington back to Newark.

Roberta: Bundue Hall?

**Mr. Smoot:** Bundue.

Roberta: What was the first Hall? B-u-n-d ?

**Mr. Smoot:** Don't ask me that.

Roberta: I only ask this because it's for the transcriber.

Mr. Smooth: His name was – what was it – we called him Bundue – what was his real name?

Roberta: That wasn't his real name? That was his nickname?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: That's what happens when you grow up, all you know is their nicknames.

Laura: Now when you went to Middletown you played baseball but you didn't play football?

**Mr. Smoot:** We played all sports. Baseball, track, basketball.

Roberta: I want to ask you a little bit about what you remember about politics. In the area when you were growing up, its voting like, let's see, you graduated in '54. You didn't go into the army until 22, so did you vote before you went into the army?

**Mr. Smoot:** No.

Roberta: What about your parents, do you remember them talking about any voting problems, any inducements to vote a certain way?

**Mr. Smoot:** I can remember people would take cars and come and get you to carry you to the polls. Now whether they were enforced to vote their way or not I don't know that.

Roberta: You never heard your parents talk about that?

**Mr. Smoot:** I kinda remember and maybe its coming back into where we are now where you see people like passing out things like that but you know they were there to promote you to vote for their candidate or whatever.

Laura: Just like today.

**Mr. Smoot:** Just like today I would think. But I don't know whether about him coming to get me to carry me there you had to vote their way or not but I do remember people kind of had cars that day that got paid to haul them people back and forth to the polls. How you were supposed to vote or whatever was in play and I guess it was you know, they were paying you know that you surmise you feel that it was the way it would have to be, until you got in that car and you would vote how you want.

Laura: So you don't remember any politicians using this schoolhouse to speak to people and get together?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, I don't. It may have been.

Roberta: How many years did you go to Iron Hill?

**Mr. Smoot:** Four.

Laura: First through fourth.

Roberta: Ok, first through fourth.

**Mr. Smoot:** First through fourth.

Roberta: Ok. Let me ask you about the military stuff.

Laura: Where did you serve in the military?

**Mr. Smoot:** I was inducted in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and I went from there to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and from Arkansas to Fort Hood, Texas.

Laura: Did you have a specific job in the military?

**Mr. Smoot:** I was TDY through ROTC. That would mean you have special duties. I drove a bus to carry them cranky, little cry-babies back and forth to the field. They didn't walk, they didn't march, they didn't do anything. They went by bus. So I drove a bus there for almost a year and a half.

Laura: ROTC students.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, ROTC students.

Laura: My son went into the army and he is National Guard and I agree 100 % with what you said because he went a boy and he came back a man and now he is at the University of Delaware and he signed up for an ROTC course and he said I can't take this, they are a bunch of little cry-babies. They don't know. I've been to boot camp, and he said the same thing. He dropped the class.

**Mr. Smoot:** They didn't eat in the mess hall, they didn't eat out on the ground, they didn't do any of that you know. Like I said we bussed them where the rest of us had to march.

Laura: That's interesting. I guess we could move on to the school.

Roberta: Ok. The questions that I am going to ask you about the school are not in any sequence, they are just kind of going to jump all around. Let me start with the day. What do you remember how the day began? Like what time

did you have to be here? What was it like when you came to the school yard and you walked through the door?

**Mr. Smoot:** Well we were full of fear because my mother and father went to work so they dropped us off. So a lot of times in the wintertime we were the ones that started the heater. They had a heater downstairs. You know we started the fire and then if we hadn't finished our homework or something we would do our homework just waiting for somebody else to come down the road or through the woods. A lot of them came through the woods to come here. We just sat here and waited for somebody else to come.

Roberta: Were you here before the teacher?

**Mr. Smoot:** Oh yes.

Roberta: So you could just walk in the school?

**Mr. Smoot:** Uhm I think we had a key. By her knowing that Mom and them dropped us off first I think I remember sometime having a key or something or maybe a key was put somewhere where we could get it or something like that.

Laura: It was pretty cold when you got here in the winter.

**Mr. Smoot:** In the winter, yes. We were the ones that made the fire.

Laura: Was it like a wood stove heater?

**Mr. Smoot:** It was a wood heater, with one register. I don't know if that's the one you have out in the hall or not but there was one big grate.

Roberta: For the whole school.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: Who kept the wood supplied?

**Mr. Smoot:** I have no idea, I don't know if it was the State. There was wood then they had coal, you know after the fire got going we put coal on the fire and then we would rake it out that night to make it level off to ...

Roberta: Kind of bank it a little bit.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes and if it went out that day we would make it the next day or whatever.

Roberta: Did you bring your own lunch?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. There were some times that I don't know if it was the State or whoever, had like beans or something to make soup out of and something like that and then we fixed it on the heater, hot, so everybody could enjoy that one pot.

Roberta: Who did the preparations?

**Mr. Smoot:** Most of the times it was Miss Boddy, our teacher, or some of the girls or something like that you know.

Laura: Did you have Miss Boddy for all 4 years?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes I did.

Laura: Did she have a car?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes she did. That's how she came to school.

Laura: Did she have a Packard by any chance?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes she did

Roberta: Ok that's right, she was the one with the Packard.

Laura: That's interesting.

**Mr. Smoot:** And then right after that, right just before we left or right after we left, Miss, what was her name – the lady from Newark –

Laura: Minnie Ryder?

**Mr. Smoot:** Minnie Ryder.

Laura: She came after Miss Boddy.

Roberta: You said she came your last year?

**Mr. Smoot:** It was either our last year or right after we left.

Laura: Do you know what happened to Miss Boddy? Did she just move onto another job?

**Mr. Smoot:** That I don't know. I don't remember that far.

Roberta: Once the teacher came how did the day progress? What happened after the teacher came to get the school going?

**Mr. Smoot:** We opened up. We had to salute the flag. I think we repeated The Lord's Prayer and then she would start with a class and give everybody else something to do. Next class. That's how she moved right on through the school.

Roberta: Did she start with one grade?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes she did.

Roberta: The same grade each time or did she...

**Mr. Smoot:** It was either one or two grades, I am trying to remember where she had because a lot of times some of us was bigger than others so she would put us in charge of the next class to help with whoever, or who was the smartest you know to help with homework doing different things and stuff like that.

Roberta: How many students on an average while you were going, were there?

**Mr. Smoot:** 30? 30, 40? Maybe 6, 7, 8 in a class. Then some classes were quite naturally bigger than other ones. I don't remember first grade and grades like that – what the other kids were like in the other grades, you know. I sorta can remember some of the bigger kids, the older kids you know like Bobby Congo, Joe Boy and my sister. You know, them. But after you didn't remember too much.

Laura: How much older was your older sister than you?

**Mr. Smoot:** Three years.

Laura: She attended here as well?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: At the same time then?

**Mr. Smoot:** I guess she started before I did. I don't remember that, but I think she did.

Roberta: So she was still here when you started?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: So she was 3rd grade or 4th grade when you were in 1st grade?

**Mr. Smoot:** I'm pretty sure she stayed here because Libby never went to Glasgow. She never went to Glasgow. I think right along about that time was when she went to Howard so Dad and them took here to Newark to catch the bus to go to Wilmington. Rev. McNear drove a bus from Newark to Wilmington everyday to take them and bring them back to Newark.

Roberta: So your sister went to Howard in 7th grade?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. In fact she graduated from Howard.

Roberta: So she stayed there.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, she stayed there.

Roberta: That must have been a big jump.

**Mr. Smoot:** And then Evelyn and I went to after we graduated from Glasgow we went to Middletown.

Roberta: Now explain that to me again, you were the same family, you lived in the same house but your sister went to Howard.

**Mr. Smoot:** Right.

Roberta: And you and your younger went to...

**Mr. Smoot:** Well you see she was beyond grade school, she was in what you call high school now, it's middle school now but it was high school then, so she went to Newark. Daddy and them took her to Newark every day to catch the bus to go to Howard and we went and caught the bus to Glasgow and went to Middletown after we graduated from grade school. I left here in the 4th and I think Evelyn was in the 2nd or 3rd or something like that and after completing that we went to Middletown.

Roberta: I kind of want to go on with the progression of the day. Games? What kind of games do you remember?

**Mr. Smoot:** Hopscotch, kickball, we played volleyball and the older classmates played baseball. You would choose up sides and whatever. We shared candy or whatever we had. Goodies that you had around lunchtime.

Roberta: So you brought candies to school?

**Mr. Smoot:** Candies and cake. Whatever you Momma had at lunchtime. I can remember Jimmy Money he had the best lunch. That woman could pack a

lunch. A lot of times we would do Jimmy's homework and he would give us his lunch, just for doing his homework.

Roberta: What did he have? Now his parents had the bakery, is that right?

Laura: No, that was the Browns.

**Mr. Smoot:** I don't know, there was just something about his lunch. That woman could really fix lunch. A lot of times stuff that Mom and them had we had to fix our own lunch. She would see that we had but we had to be almost self sufficient around my parents. I think that gave us a great start in life. Being self sufficient and stuff like that. There was enough stuff there but if you didn't fix it you didn't...

Laura: You went hungry – that was your problem.

**Mr. Smoot:** There was a lot of times when Mom fixed dinner you couldn't go and substitute because you didn't want that and go eat peanut butter and jelly. You know you ate this and there wasn't going and substitute a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Roberta: What about other visitors to the school you know during the school year? Do you ever remember school officials?

**Mr. Smoot:** I think we had a nurse – I don't know if it was on a monthly basis or if the teacher would ask her to come, like that. And then we had a superintendent or something and they would come every so often and maybe spend an hour or two hours or something going over our daily work or whatever she had to see how we were planning, you know. I guess she wasn't allowed to stand around them any way you know because you had to go about your business you know. What they talked about - we wasn't allowed to stand up and listen or whatever, you know.

Roberta: So they were there more for observing?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Laura: That's interesting you remember that.

Roberta: That young.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: What did the nurse do? You said she came about once a month?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, I don't know if she checked records or what she did or see you. I do remember a fascination and things that we had in school. I do remember them.

Roberta: What if somebody got hurt in school or they needed some kind of medical attention, how was that handled? Do you remember?

**Mr. Smoot:** She did it all.

Roberta: Ok, Miss Boddy, the teacher.

**Mr. Smoot:** She would cook, bottle washer, everything. Nurse. Most of the time we were the janitors. Everybody had to pitch in and do a job, the eraser thing you know, the chalk board, stuff like that. Other than that, she was it. She was cook, teacher, nurse.

Roberta: This ends Tape 1, Side 2.

### **Begin Tape 2, Side 1**

Roberta: This begins tape 2, side 1 interviewing Mr. Smoot at Iron Hill Natural History Museum for the Iron Hill School Restoration Project. Mr. Smoot

do you want to just continue, you were explaining what Miss Boddy did, she had many hats.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes she did.

Roberta: You know.

**Mr. Smoot:** She wore many hats. Like I said we came in in the morning and we would open up with the Pledge of Allegiance, then you had to repeat The Lord's Prayer and she would continue on from class to class or she would start over, I just don't remember that part. But I do know she kept her older kids and her smarter kids or whatever, just to sort of help run the class or keep us in order or stuff like that. Then we had a 15 minute recess I think in the morning and then we would come back in and do some more studying or drawing or doing whatever and then we had lunch. I think it was either a half an hour or 45 minutes and after that we played and we came back in and I think we had another 15 minute recess in the afternoon and then it became the end of the day and everybody went their way. We started walking. We had to walk home.

Roberta: What do you remember that Miss Boddy offered in addition to the required classwork, music, extra programs, that kind of stuff?

**Mr. Smoot:** We sang. That was something else too. We had some nights we came back for a recital for different grades you know. That was like, it was almost like the May Day thing. People would come back to meet parents and stuff like that for the musical at night or whatever. I can't remember if it was once a year or twice a year but it was done. She was a great lady. Say the days that it rained things like that I think she tried to pile everybody in that little Hudson of hers to try and get them home to make sure we didn't have to walk. A lot of times she went to Wilmington so she would go down to 896 and whoever could ride down that far with her so we did. After a while we had a wagon. We came to school with our little

wagon – up the top of that little hill right there we could ride almost from the top of that hill to Cooch’s Bridge because there wasn’t that many cars coming down 896 you know. We would just get in there and I would give a push.

Roberta: Did parents participate in these evening programs?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. That was the only thing they came to because most of them had to work and you know you didn’t have sick time and things like you did now so if you didn’t work you didn’t get paid. Back then you wasn’t get paid that no much way so you could pay your bills you couldn’t miss no time. You had to do whatever. We had to do for ourselves. We had to be in place and stuff like that.

Roberta: What do you remember about reading material in the school other than the textbooks, do you remember whether there was a library? Extra books to read?

**Mr. Smoot:** I am trying to think. I think there was a truck or a bus or something came by and exchanged books. They would bring some or take some or something like that if I am not mistaken.

Roberta: Something like a book-mobile?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, like a book-mobile.

Laura: We had that when I was a kid. It sounds like it was the same thing.

**Mr. Smoot:** Right. They dropped off some books so you wouldn’t have the same books all the time. They carried books on I guess to another school or whatever.

Roberta: Who chose what books got dropped off?

**Mr. Smoot:** I think they did. I don't know if Miss Boddy had anything to do with it or not but I think they just had a certain amount of books that they would exchange.

Roberta: Do you remember what the lighting situation was like in the school when you were here?

**Mr. Smoot:** Well this one here had windows on both sides. I do know that. In the summertime we used to take and push them or prop them up cause you could hear cars and things outside especially in the wintertime so there was windows on both sides.

Roberta: Did they have screens?

**Mr. Smoot:** No.

Laura: I think they were they those tilt ones. Do you remember them tilting out?

**Mr. Smoot:** That was some of them. There was screens in some of them and some of them were not and I think I remember like some men in a truck, like State men, or people would come by and would fix that at a certain time or something like that.

Roberta: So the State did maintain the school then?

**Mr. Smoot:** They tried. Other than what we would do. We would have to sweep and clean. Some of the playground out front and stuff. Make sure we picked up the paper. A lot of times while she was teaching class she had some of the bigger kids out front picking up paper and doing whatever so she had her hands full to keep everybody busy.

Roberta: Did parents participate from the standpoint I guess the equivalent of what would be the PTA today?

**Mr. Smoot:** PTA was big. Was it before the marking period or after the marking period it was sometime along in there we had a PTA. Where parents participated a great deal. The ones that had a way to get here because they were very interested in how their kids was doing and stuff like that.

Roberta: How did you do at report card time?

**Mr. Smoot:** Well we aren't going to talk about that. That's not for the record.

Roberta: Do you still have a copy of any of your report cards?

**Mr. Smoot:** No I don't.

Laura: Some people actually had theirs. I know I have mine.

Roberta: I think I do have mine.

**Mr. Smoot:** I think my wife has one.

Laura: Does she?

**Mr. Smoot:** But she's a teacher too. She's smart.

Laura: Your wife went to the other school.

**Mr. Smoot:** She went to the other school.

Laura: She went to the school on New London and it is now the George Wilson Community Center. Another Du Pont school.

Roberta: Was that the name of it? What was the name of it?

**Mr. Smoot:** New London something.

Roberta: How long did she go there? From...

**Mr. Smoot:** From 1 to 12.

Roberta: 1 to 12? We'll have to get her.

**Mr. Smoot:** She graduated from there and went to Newark High. She graduated from Newark High.

Roberta: What's her name?

**Mr. Smoot:** Peggy Thompson, then.

Laura: You said she was a teacher, where did she teach?

**Mr. Smoot:** She teaches now. She's been teaching for 40 years.

Laura: Really? Where does she teach?

**Mr. Smoot:** She started in Wilmington. What is that – Northeast? Then she went to Willingboro.

Roberta: She taught grade school? When I say grade school, 1 through whatever. What grades did she teach?

**Mr. Smoot:** I think they were different grades.

Roberta: But she taught elementary school students? She didn't teach just one subject, or did she?

**Mr. Smoot:** I think she just taught one subject. I think. I know she teaches one now.

Roberta: What does she teach?

**Mr. Smoot:** Language arts.

Roberta: And she teaches that where?

**Mr. Smoot:** Springer Middle School.

Roberta: Oh I know where Springer is, that's in my neck of the woods

**Mr. Smoot:** Shipley Road. She's been there for the last 5 years. After she left Willingboro she went to Virginia. Warrenton, Virginia, she stayed there like 11 or 12 years and we got married and I moved down there and she just wanted to come home and she got a job.

Roberta: Did you meet her in Virginia?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, I met her here, at the Pilgrim Baptist Church.

Roberta: So both of you went to the church.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, we are from here. Childhood sweethearts.

Roberta: That is nice. So when you were here the heating system was a furnace downstairs.

**Mr. Smoot:** Downstairs

Roberta: Was it like a crawl space? I know some people remembered the potbellied stove.

**Mr. Smoot:** No it was like a thing where you pulled the heater up and walked down the steps.

Roberta: So you could stand up?

**Mr. Smoot:** Well we were little people then, yes. You might be able to stand up for a little bit.

Roberta: What about, do you remember and this might be telling tales in school, do you remember you know kids do stuff you know, any kind of little incident that you remember, kids teasing, that kind of thing, practical jokes?

**Mr. Smoot:** Oh yes. All the time, throwing rocks, happen to break a window and people wouldn't tell on one another till they found it and that was some of

the things too that the men in that truck had to come and do. Fix the windows and do stuff like that.

**Roberta:** Some things stand out more than others. Do you have an experience where something where either you or somebody else was involved in and it was pretty funny?

**Mr. Smoot:** Not really, we used to go down to snowball cars and things, what cars would come by you know. We would try to throw snowballs at the trucks and things as they would come by the road. There wasn't that many there you know. More cars come by here in an hour than would come by in a whole month or two months. Maybe longer than that, it might have been a whole year. There wasn't that many cars then. Like I said because when they came up the road one side was paved and the other side wasn't so if you were coming this way you had to stop and get off so you could let this one by and then get back on the road and continue on.

**Roberta:** Did those changes over the years, I mean that is a drastic change from then till now. Did those changes bother you or were they so gradual that it was just part of the pace of life?

**Mr. Smoot:** Part of the pace of life I would say. Because then they widened the road and paved both sides and then after that they widened it over further like it is now. Like I said I wasn't here all the time because I had two tours away from here. Took me away and when I came back they were gradually moving and opening up and building new stuff.

**Roberta:** You said two tours?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

**Roberta:** Military?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, well I was in the military for 3 years. I was talking about when I went to HUD.

Laura: You worked for HUD?

**Mr. Smoot:** I worked for HUD and I was in Florida for 8 ½ years and then I went to Houston for 12.

Roberta: If you were in Houston it probably wasn't a big shock to come back and see the changes.

**Mr. Smoot:** Oh yes.

Roberta: Because Houston had big changes early on.

**Mr. Smoot:** They surely did. Well I went to Houston when it was down. That's exactly when I went there. It was '86. It finally come back up.

Laura: Just to clarify, you went here from 1st to 4th grade and when you went here you lived down at Cooch's Bridge and when you were about 10 you moved to Glasgow? Is that right?

**Mr. Smoot:** Somewhere along in there.

Laura: And when you moved to Glasgow you continued to go to school here.

**Mr. Smoot:** Right.

Laura: Until the 4th.

**Mr. Smoot:** Right. And they asked my mother, they didn't have enough kids down there to keep the school open.

Laura: To keep what school?

**Mr. Smoot:** Glasgow.

Laura: Oh, the Glasgow School, the one on Fraser road.

**Mr. Smoot:** Right.

Laura: Oh so that's where you went after you left.

**Mr. Smoot:** And that was a two room school. We had been upgraded now. There was two rooms down there. They still didn't have as many kids down there as they did here.

Laura: That's what somebody else told me too that they remembered that that school over there had two rooms. They didn't have a lot of students.

**Mr. Smoot:** No they didn't. Well they asked Mom to petition Mom to move us from there since we had moved to Glasgow so that we could go to Glasgow so they could continue that school. When I got over there they put me back in the 4th grade.

Laura: Oh they did?

Roberta: Why?

**Mr. Smoot:** They didn't have no kids.

Laura: That's weird.

Roberta: That is. Rather than try to pull in extra students.

**Mr. Smoot:** I had to repeat the 4th grade.

Laura: Wow.

Roberta: How did your parents feel about that?

**Mr. Smoot:** I don't know how they felt but I know how I felt. I wanted to jump on my parents. Well they didn't know that that was going to happen.

Laura: Right.

Roberta: Sure. And there wasn't anything they could do about it to correct it?

**Mr. Smoot:** Well my grades – you were talking about my report card – I don't think I was smart enough to go the other way. They had to do what they had to do I guess.

Laura: Do you remember who your teacher was over there?

**Mr. Smoot:** No.

Laura: That's ok if you don't. It's funny you remember Miss Boddy tho' when you were younger.

**Mr. Smoot:** I remember Miss Boddy and Minnie Ryder.

Roberta: Both of these ladies had a tremendous impact. People remember very well.

Laura: Yes.

**Mr. Smoot:** It will come to me.

Laura: Ok, that's fine. I was just curious. So when you went here – I don't remember anything from 1st to 4th grade so I am impressed with what you remember but do you happen to remember at all how looked, like where they were pictures, or where the chalkboards were?

**Mr. Smoot:** There were chalkboards all the way across the front and Miss Boddy's desk was in the middle. There was something about that hole, I don't know if it was a closet

Laura: There was a closet on this side. Some people have said there was a stove back there but that might have been before your time. Like a wood stove.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes that had to be before my time because there wasn't no wood stove there. The stove that we had was in the basement. In the basement we just pulled up the door and walk down the steps that's how we checked our wood pile and that's where they shot a crow right through the window.

There was a little window in the front – like an opening and they shot the crow in there. But I am trying to think...

Laura: There was something back there?

**Mr. Smoot:** There was something in that corner there. I can't remember what there was, like, what am I trying to say, storage place or

Laura: Ok. That's make sense because there is not a lot of space in the building for storage. Ok, but you remember a chalkboard up there, do you remember any pictures of the Presidents or anything like that?

**Mr. Smoot:** There was a picture of President Lincoln somewhere. I don't remember George Washington, I think it was Lincoln or maybe it was both of them on each corner or something like that. Lincoln sort of dances somewhere.

Laura: That's what other people remembered too is Lincoln being there. Was Miss Boddy musically talented? Did you have a piano or something?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes we had a piano.

Laura: You had a piano. Do you remember where that was?

**Mr. Smoot:** In this corner I think it was. I think it had something to do with this corner.

Laura: That's what we heard from other people too.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, somewhere in this corner. There was something, I don't know whether it was a closet or something there, something that I can't remember about that corner over there.

Laura: This is probably something you won't remember, do you happen to remember what color the exterior of the building was? Most people don't remember.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yellow.

Laura: Yellow you think?

**Mr. Smoot:** Was it yellow or gray?

Laura: Ok, we've heard both.

**Mr. Smoot:** I think it was yellow.

Laura: Did you have any playground equipment?

**Mr. Smoot:** We had one of them, I think it was a see-saw or something. There was a tree right there, over here between there and Mr. Burkes property. He was a mean old man too, he was. He had pigs and stuff like that you know and he would see them kids out there near that wood pile and he would stand out there and watch them just like, you know. I don't know if it was one of them spinning things, I'm pretty sure it was a see-saw or something by the tree, there was a tree right there. I think that's what it was. We used to play volleyball over here. That's where we used to put the net up and play volleyball in that corner. Did they tell you about the well where we used to go down and get water?

Laura: Some people mentioned that, yes. Did you have to go down and get water too?

**Mr. Smoot:** We had to go get the water, yes.

Laura: You didn't drink the water that was in here?

**Mr. Smoot:** No.

Roberta: What about the woods? How close were they to the school? Was it about the same distance?

**Mr. Smoot:** About the same distance. There was a big path there, a lot of kids came through them woods. And went home that way too. Right by the creek, the well where you got the water from.

Laura: The Smiths I think lived there.

**Mr. Smoot:** The Smiths and some of the Earls.

Laura: You mentioned Mr. Burke lived over here and he had pigs.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes he had pigs and stuff all back in there. I think his property ran back further than the school's property did. Now I don't remember if they owned in the woods or not but I'm saying his property was cleared back a little bit further than what the school's property was.

Laura: He didn't have any kids that went to school here though?

**Mr. Smoot:** No.

Laura: Did the Salminens live around here then? Do you remember that name?

**Mr. Smoot:** The who?

Laura: Salminens, they were Finnish. They had a chicken farm. Maybe that was Burkes' then.

Roberta: How do you spell that?

Laura: S-a-l-m-i-n-e-n. There is still a Salminen that lives there now.

**Mr. Smoot:** Those chicken farms were there. Down the field and up the hill. We used to go there and buy eggs. Some of the people that didn't have that much money they would go there and they would sell cracked eggs. You could go there and buy them you know.

Laura: Do you remember any of the houses in this area real close to the school, besides the Burkes? Someone else said there were a couple of frame

houses down here close to the road but I don't know if they were there when you went to school.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes there was. I think there was one house over there.

Laura: Do you remember the Biddles?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, the Biddles were black. They wasn't white.

Laura: Yes. So Mr. Burke was white?

**Mr. Smoot:** No He was a black man.

Laura: He was black too ok.

**Mr. Smoot:** No, him and his wife.

Laura: And the Biddles?

**Mr. Smoot:** And the Biddles, yes.

Laura: Somebody else mentioned the Biddles house sometimes when the heater was heating up that (this might have been after your time) they would go down to Biddles, to their house, till it got a little warmer in here.

**Mr. Smoot:** I don't remember that because we were big enough to keep the heater running.

Roberta: It might have been before the heater took as long.

**Mr. Smoot:** Like I said, we used to come in here and get the fire started. I can remember my father helping. He would just show us how to, make sure we knew.

Roberta: What about across the street? Were there houses? Or was that land that was orchard or farm?

**Mr. Smoot:** That was farm land. Not farm land just like wood land or something. I think the closest houses on the other side of the road that I can remember is the Bullocks and that was down there by the church, where the church is now. He had a big lot there, in fact he was an auto mechanic too and I think he owned I think all that land down there too and it would come into where we are into that project where we are now where Charlan is I don't know who owns Charlan, the land where Charlan is now?

Roberta: Charlan?

Laura: Charlan is a subdivision. Did you go to school with any of the Bullocks?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Laura: Do you remember which one?

**Mr. Smoot:** Charles and what was her name? Geraldine? Geraldine Bullock. Carl.

Laura: Carl, Junior I guess. Or no, yes, I think so. Do you remember any other people that went to school with you?

**Mr. Smoot:** I have a whole bunch of them right here.

Laura: Oh, cool. See he is prepared. Didn't I send you some questions ahead of time?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes you did. Josh Grinnage, Patricia Grinnage, Evelyn Grinnage, what was Hank's name? And Hank, his last name was Black. Joe Boy Congo, Bobby Congo, Jimmy Money, Howard Earl, Ernest Earl, Evelyn Moseley, Stanley Earl, Billy Congo, Mary Congo, Herman Congo. What was the Smith's boy's name? There was a Smith girl too.

Roberta: I can't remember, did we interview Smiths?

Laura: Yes. Reverend Smith.

Roberta: Yes.

Laura: I'm trying to remember his first name.

**Mr. Smoot:** Evelyn or Libby Smith.

Roberta: Allen...Oliver...something Oliver.

Laura: Yes.

**Mr. Smoot:** Stanley Williams, Alan Moseley. I remember a lot of them.

Laura: Wow, you remember a lot. I think it was Oliver Smith.

Roberta: Allen Oliver Smith.

Laura: Allen O. Smith, yes. Was it Allen Smith you mentioned?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Laura: And he had a sister?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes he did have a sister.

Laura: And they lived up here, up on Iron Hill Road, I think.

Roberta: I think that's what he said.

Laura: Yes, he went into the army too. He ended up in Alaska

**Mr. Smoot:** We went to Alaska last year. It was nice.

Laura: Yes, they went out on that cruise.

**Mr. Smoot:** If you've never been, that is an experience. The glaciers, the whales.

Roberta: That's what I hear.

**Mr. Smoot:** The mountain goats

Roberta: The ones that kind of like hang on the side that have no idea how they got there?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. That was something. One of the best trips we ever had.

Roberta: This ends tape 2 side 1.

**End Tape 2, Side 1**  
**Begin Tape 2, Side 2**

Roberta: This is tape 2, side 2.

Laura: It looks like you made some notes before you came are there things that you want to share with us that you remember?

**Mr. Smoot:** I was just trying to remember the names and stuff like that and the years and grades you know, I don't remember how old I was or anything so I just tried to put it in perspective where the years I started and stuff like that.

Roberta: Any of that is helpful.

**Mr. Smoot:** If I go back in the grades, like I graduated in '54. From '41 to '44 I had to be here at Iron Hill.

Roberta: That was one of the questions that I was going to ask you.

Laura: That was during the war.

**Mr. Smoot:** Then from '44 to '48 I was in Glasgow. From '48 to '52 I was at Redding. '53 I was in Howard and '54 I graduated from Redding again.

Roberta: That's high school?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Roberta: I remember 1954 and Wilmington schools integrated and I just remembered, what's it going to be like because I went to Lore School which is up there off of Fourth Street, something like that, I think DuPont Street, up in that area.

**Mr. Smoot:** What school?

Roberta: It was kind of scary. I think it was Charles B. Lore School.

**Mr. Smoot:** Lore?

Roberta: Lore School. There is a big playground across the street. I can't remember what else was around there. It was a big school, big.

**Mr. Smoot:** VanBuren?

Roberta: Not VanBuren.

Laura: That's Warner.

Roberta: That's Warner. Lore was on the other side of town. What I wanted to ask you was tests. School tests. Do you remember even at your grade level, probably 3rd, 4th, if there were tests that were required that you had to take, you had to study and prepare to take?

**Mr. Smoot:** We took I don't know if you call it, a year end test or something like that, it was the last report card or something like that. It almost tells you whether you passed or failed or no like that. It was like in April, May, June or something like that. One of them months. I think that was the big test that we had, other than the tests you had during the year you know.

Roberta: Do you remember what subjects were covered in those test, probably a little bit of everything you took during the year?

**Mr. Smoot:** We had what you called arithmetic then, you called in math in high school. It was arithmetic. Spelling, reading, and writing. I think that was

the main subjects until we got to high school. Then we had geometry and all that.

Roberta: Did they have any history or geography in the younger, elementary schools?

**Mr. Smoot:** Maybe history I think. We were taught every country, state, stuff like that.

Roberta: You talked about May Day and I think there was something called Field Day?

**Mr. Smoot:** I think Field Day and May Day was the same thing.

Roberta: What about corn shucking or were you too young to remember anything like that that was a contest or an event?

**Mr. Smoot:** I don't remember that.

Laura: You mentioned that when somebody got in trouble you got it at school and you got it at home too and you said Miss Boddy would spank you. Did she have any particular method?

**Mr. Smoot:** A ruler.

Laura: On the hand?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. Or on your leg or something like that. She would hit you on the head or something. You would hold out your hand and get so many whacks.

Roberta: Did this depend on the offense?

**Mr. Smoot:** No, I think it was just her if she could remember. I think she had so much to remember so I think she probably forgot half the spankings anyway.

Laura: Do you remember anything in particular of anybody getting in trouble at the school? Any particular incident?

**Mr. Smoot:** Maybe some kids would bring cigarettes or something to try you know and they would be out there and somebody would tell on them you know or something like that. Somebody would holler a cuss word or something like that you know. That was a big thing then you know. Those words that she heard that were foul language.

Laura: That wasn't accepted.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes it was.

Laura: Did you students know about the attic? How you could get up into the attic?

**Mr. Smoot:** There was a hole or something in the vestibule or something.

Laura: Yes, right in there – the boys cloak room.

**Mr. Smoot:** Is that where it was?

Laura: Yes, you go in that little room.

**Mr. Smoot:** What do they keep up there? There was something they kept up there. I think that's what them men did in the trucks too. I think they kept like lumber or something up there to repair stuff.

Roberta: So it was like a storage area?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. Like repair stuff, yes.

Roberta: So they didn't bring things from the truck they just..

**Mr. Smoot:** Well I guess they did if they knew what they needed but if they knew it was here.

Laura: They kept stuff up there.

Roberta: Was that off limits to the students?

**Mr. Smoot:** Other than when we just got too nosy or something and went up there.

Roberta: Did anybody ever get in trouble for going up there?

**Mr. Smoot:** Not that I can remember. Like I said she probably had so much to do she probably didn't know where we all were at one time anyway.

Laura: Well they say that after you went here somebody got in trouble for going up there.

**Mr. Smoot:** Everybody would tell you know especially when they first come in. After you were here awhile it was like anything else but the new ones used to come and tell on everybody.

Laura: Well that's not a good way to start out. Do you remember the desks at all?

**Mr. Smoot:** They were little square desks. I think the chairs were attached. There they are.

Laura: That little one. That's what I was going to show you.

**Mr. Smoot:** Something like that.

Laura: The big desk in the corner is a little bit more recent. So you couldn't really move your chair around – it was in one place?

**Mr. Smoot:** I think it was. They had different like, class, like rows. They were in rows.

Laura: Did you have to provide your own paper or pencils or anything, do you remember that? Whether you had to bring stuff to school?

**Mr. Smoot:** We would have to bring our tablet but I think we bought it. I don't think it was mandatory because I think the State or somebody provided paper and I think when they brought them beans or whatever we cooked I think they

would bring everything at one time, in one trip. Whatever we would need – crayons, chalk, you know, erasers and stuff like that.

Roberta: What kind of shape were they in? Were they new? Were they used?

Laura: The books you mean?

Roberta: Yes, the books and the pencils

**Mr. Smoot:** I think the books were used but the pencils and stuff like that I think were new because they had a portion of new ones. We had to keep the erasers clean and wash the blackboards off.

Roberta: Did students when they came in, either in the beginning of the day or after recess, did the girls come before the boys? Was there an order that they came in? Was there an order when they left the school at the end of the day?

**Mr. Smoot:** I think they used to line up outside when they came in school. I think boys on one side and girls on the other or something like that. Leaving the school, I can't remember too much, other than just leaving. Maybe some left before others or something like that because she was usually working with some and some had to stay and help her clean up or do whatever.

Laura: I guess I have one last question.

Roberta: I do have one more too.

Laura: You mentioned that Rudolph Valentine lived on Pleasant Valley Road, do you remember anyone else that lived on Pleasant Valley Road? The Moneys? Mr. Valentine?

**Mr. Smoot:** One of them Smiths used to live there. You called her name before. The reason I can remember her is she used to have spells or something. She used to be like an...she would set off and go...

Roberta: Epileptic?

**Mr. Smoot:** Epileptic. We used to call them fits but I think it was a spell or something like that. She would be sitting up and all of a sudden she would just go. She didn't know where she was or whatever you know. I think she used to wet herself at that time and they used to tease her. Kids are cruel.

Roberta: They still are.

**Mr. Smoot:** Kids are cruel. My wife said that. Don't let them find out something or they will be to no end.

Roberta: You don't remember what her name was?

**Mr. Smoot:** Erline or Arlene?

Laura: Erline sounds familiar.

**Mr. Smoot:** It was something like that.

Laura: Do you remember that there was a white school up here on the corner?

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Laura: Did you know anybody that went there?

**Mr. Smoot:** No.

Laura: You said you had another question.

Roberta: Yes, it's more just like I guess just some thoughts and some reflections from Mr. Smoot. The passing of time, how do you think it has affected you, how its affected your community.

**Mr. Smoot:** In what way? You mean for the better or for the worse?

Roberta: However you see it.

**Mr. Smoot:** I think mostly everything when it moves forward it's for the best. As far as affecting me is concerned it doesn't have no reflection on my life. My sister and I were almost 50 years old before we got off mountain so we were more fortunate than a lot of people because we had two parents. I think that took us a long way by having two parents.

Laura: I think you are right because I think some of the people we talked to pretty much were single parent families. Do you consider yourself one of the more fortunate families?

**Mr. Smoot:** I do. Very much so.

Laura: It sounds like it.

**Mr. Smoot:** Very much so. Say for instance like as old as we are too. I have heard people where they went to school with no shoes, especially down South. Or where they had to maybe put cardboard in the shoes to have you know like a sole on them or something like that. We may not have had exactly all that we wanted but we had all that we needed. My father and mother provided to where we had you know, I had shoes where I wore out shoes so fast that Daddy put these heel plates, steel heel plates on them where I couldn't even wear them in the house, but I couldn't wear them out either. We had one pair of gym shoes and we had a pair of Sunday School shoes that we wore to church and stuff like that. He would make me wear them shoes I couldn't like buckle them but I couldn't wear them in the house, not with them heel plates on them. By having two parents we were a lot fortunate. They provided. There wasn't no such thing as homeless. They have homeless now because they know that people provide for them. There were no projects because people took care of their families. Projects now, and I know from self-experience, I worked for HUD, people depend on that. My grandmother lived out here. She lived right around the corner and my grandmother had been out here 17 years and they were

gonna have children so they could just live on that. The projects weren't made for that. They were made to help yourself.

Laura: To get a leg up.

**Mr. Smoot:** To get a leg up and they ride it until they can't ride it no more. So we were very fortunate to have a mother and a father.

Roberta: It sounds like they were equally involved in your life, you know, both parents.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes. Well my father was a man that he knew almost what he was going to say when you asked him. Especially when we got older to have the car and asked for nights out and stuff like that. He would either say, let me think about it or go see your Mom. You know he talked to Mom. Mom was the more easier one to get our way than Daddy was. He either had to think about it and stand there and wait until he made up his mind to say what he was going to do. The Mom would say let me talk to Walter you know.

Roberta: That was good.

**Mr. Smoot:** But you really couldn't push one against the other.

Roberta: Right.

**Mr. Smoot:** They knew you couldn't play one against the other one. They knew how to play the game like we did when we had kids you know.

Laura: Kids try that still.

**Mr. Smoot:** Oh yes because we used to run to Mom all the time.

Roberta: I think most children do.

**Mr. Smoot:** She would say well let me talk to Walter and oh my goodness, we knew what it was then.

Laura: You said your dad worked at Dayett Mills.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes.

Laura: He worked there as long as you remember?

**Mr. Smoot:** Well, not as long as I can remember he left Dayett Mill and he went to National Vulcanized Fiber in Newark. In fact me and my whole family worked there. So many of us worked there that the man used to tell us, he would say “please don’t let nothing else happen in your family cause we wouldn’t have nobody at work.”

Laura: You said your Mom you thought she might have worked for the Cooches at one point?

**Mr. Smoot:** No. My aunt worked for the Cooches. Mom worked for Dayetts, the house.

Laura: Worked for Mrs. Dayett.

**Mr. Smoot:** Yes, Mrs. Dayett and I had an aunt that worked for Cooches.

Laura: Do you remember her name?

**Mr. Smoot:** Clara Suttle.

Laura: What was the last name?

**Mr. Smoot:** S-u-t-t-l-e.

Roberta: What did your Dad do at Dayett?

**Mr. Smoot:** He mixed feed, drove a truck and stuff like that. I used to ride with him when he took the feed and flour. They made flour and cornmeal and stuff

like that and take it to Philadelphia. Daddy used to drive the truck there and I used to ride with him.

Laura: That's neat.

Roberta: Do you have anything Laura?

Laura: No, I'm sure we might think of one or two things later if you don't mind we could give you a call. You have given us lots of information. It's been great.

Roberta: Mr. Smoot thank you so very much.

**Mr. Smoot:** My pleasure.

Roberta: This is the end of today's interview. Tape 2, side 2. This is Roberta Perkins and Laura Lee.