

**August 2009**

**Interview with Mary Elizabeth Rees Cotten**

**By Isabelle Chewning and Mary Claire Cotten Kay**

[Information enclosed in brackets is not on the audio, but is included in the transcript for clarification, or for editorial purposes. Additional voices on the audio are: Mary Claire Cotten Kay (daughter of Mrs. Cotten); Edwin Cotten (husband of Mrs. Cotten); and Cory Cotten-Potter (grandson of Mrs. Cotten).]

**Isabelle Chewning:** My name is Isabelle Chewning. Today is August the 23rd, 2009 and I'm interviewing Mary Cotten for the Brownsburg Museum at her home in Fairfield.

**Mary Cotten:** Well I just don't know how much I can tell you.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh, I think you're going to do alright.

**Mary Cotten:** I was away for so long that-- I can answer questions but I just can't make -- you know.

**Isabelle Chewning:** That will be just fine. We were thinking-- Mary [Cotten's daughter, Mary Claire Kay] wanted you to talk a little bit about the picture in the book [Mary Claire Kay is referring to a photo of Brownsburg's "Avenue of Trees" in Remarkable Trees of Virginia by Nancy Ross Hugo and Robert Llewellyn.]

**Mary Claire Kay:** Yeah, we wanted to tell you, Mother wanted to tell you about the trees, and who actually planted the trees.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. Yeah there's a mistake about the trees.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh really? Tell me who planted them.

**Mary Cotten:** Those trees were not planted by Walter Rees. They were planted by--

**Mary Claire Kay:** The Mitchell

**Isabelle Chewning:** Mr.--

**Mary Claire Kay:** Mr. [Henry P.] Mitchell.

**Mary Cotten:** ...Mitchell, who owned the farm to begin with. My grandfather [Thomas S. Rees] bought the farm from Mr. Mitchell in...

**Mary Claire Kay:** In 1906.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. And he was the one who planted the trees.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And do you know why he planted them or does anyone know what the purpose was? Did he just want an avenue of trees coming up to his farm?

**Mary Cotten:** Well I have no idea. I didn't hear anything like that.

**Isabelle Chewning:** But Mr. Mitchell owned the farm before your grandfather.

**Mary Cotten:** Mm-hm.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And who was your grandfather, Mrs. Cotten?

**Mary Cotten:** Thomas S. Rees.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Let's just get a little bit of background on you for the tape. You told me earlier that you were born in the farm house.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And which-- can you tell me which house that was? Was it the house across from Mr. Walter Rees's house?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, well that was my grandfather's house. That's where Mary Claire lives now, the big brick house [2315 Brownsburg Turnpike].

**Isabelle Chewning:** So that's the house where you were born?

**Mary Cotten:** No, I was born across the road [52 West Airlie Lane].

**Mary Claire Kay:** In the house that Gail [Heslep Clark] and her husband live in.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And would you say on the tape what your birth date was? Do you mind telling us?

**Mary Cotten:** When my first...

**Isabelle Chewning:** When you were born.

**Mary Cotten:** I was born August 13th 1918.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And you look great.

**Mary Cotten:** Well thank you.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And you were born at home.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you know if there was a midwife?

**Mary Cotten:** I have a feeling there was because so many people used—oh, I can't think of her name now. She lived around...

**Isabelle Chewning:** Virginia Gilmore or Mariah Fisher?

**Mary Cotten:** Virginia Gilmore, I believe.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Several people have told me that she was the midwife when they were born.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. Now the doctor, Dr. Hinkle, was the doctor there.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Was he from Brownsburg or was he someone from Lexington?

**Mary Cotten:** He was from Brownsburg, as far as I know.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And he delivered the babies?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** What were your parents' names?

**Mary Cotten:** My mother's name was Mary Steele Terry [ph?] and she was from a small place called Cashadow [ph?], Louisiana.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh really.

**Mary Cotten:** Mm-hm.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And how did she get up to Virginia?

**Mary Cotten:** Well my mother's mother died when she was I think about-- she was very young, about eight years old and she was sent to cousins in Virginia to live.

**Mary Claire Kay:** I thought she died when she was a baby.

**Mary Cotten:** That's right. You're right, Mary Claire. She died when she was a baby and they had a problem and I don't know to this day what they did about that-- they would not allow a black nanny to ride on the train or come with-- bring her. And I don't know how they managed that. But she had a black nanny and that created quite a problem. So I don't know what they did about it.

**Isabelle Chewning:** But she somehow got to Virginia and lived with her cousins?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh she lived with the McNutt family. And then she lived with the [Charles Reid] Sterrett family at Rockbridge Baths. And they had four girls in that family. And she went from there to school. She went to-- there was a school up in the mountains. I've never-- I don't know the name of it. And none of the people who have lived long enough to tell me remember the name of the school. But she was-- she ended at Southern Seminary, which was called Southern Seminary at the time. It's called something else now I think [Southern Virginia University].

**Mary Claire Kay:** Didn't she go to school in Lexington, too, Mother, that school in Lexington?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh she did go. Yeah you're right. She went to-- she lived with the Winthrow family in Lexington when she was young. And what was I going to tell them?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Well there was a school in Lexington, I think it was in the building where Artists in Cahoots is now [1 West Washington Street].

**Mary Cotten:** I don't know anything about Lexington anymore so I couldn't-- I can't help you with that. At the time McCoy's grocery store was underneath in the building.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And the school was upstairs?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** I think that was the building.

**Isabelle Chewing:** So she met your grandfather then?

**Mary Claire Kay:** She [Mary Cotten's mother] met her father, because we're talking about Mother's mother.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah.

**Isabelle Chewing:** Right. Sorry. So she met your father.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, uh-huh. She went to Rockbridge Baths to live with the Sterrett family.

**Mary Claire Kay:** That was before she went to school in Lexington, wasn't it?

**Mary Cotten:** No.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Afterwards?

**Mary Cotten:** Afterwards.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay, and then she went on to Southern Seminary after that.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And then she met your father.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And they were married. Do you know what year they were married?

**Mary Cotten:** I do not know. I don't remember.

**Isabelle Chewning:** What was your father's name?

**Mary Cotten:** Frank Brooks B-R-O-O-K-S Rees, Senior.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And he had brothers, your uncles?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yes, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Can you tell us who they were?

**Mary Cotten:** Let me see. Well the first one was Uncle Henry. Let me see Uncle Henry, Uncle Walter. No.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Uncle Henry was first, then your daddy.

**Mary Cotten:** Uncle Henry, Frank and Uncle Walter and Uncle Charlie, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** So they bought the farm in 1906 and did all the brothers help with the farm?

**Mary Cotten:** Well no. They-- well Uncle Charlie, well let me see. Uncle Walter helped with the farm and daddy and...

**Mary Claire Kay:** Uncle Henry for a while helped with it.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah that's right.

**Mary Claire Kay:** But then he left.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh he left and went to Tennessee.

**Edwin Cotten:** [Edwin Cotten is Mary Cotten's husband, and Mary Claire Kay's father.] He told me he went to the Bank of Brownsburg before he went to Tennessee.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Oh yes. Oh yes. Uncle Henry when they opened the bank in Brownsburg, he went to work. He was the first teller.

**Mary Cotten:** That's right.

**Mary Claire Kay:** In the Bank of Brownsburg.

**Isabelle Chewning:** How interesting.

**Mary Cotten:** I had forgotten all about that.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Yes, I had too. And then he left from working in the bank in Brownsburg and he went to Tennessee.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. And he married a beautiful girl in Tennessee.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Who was from Mississippi, wasn't she?

**Mary Cotten:** I really don't know.

**Mary Claire Kay:** I don't know maybe she was from Tennessee. Her name was Inez.

**Mary Cotten:** Inez, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewing:** And did they stay in Tennessee?

**Mary Cotten:** No. Uncle Henry managed what was called a plantation then in Tennessee. But they-- she became involved with the manager of the plantation, and so they were divorced. What am I leaving out, Mary Claire?

**Mary Claire Kay:** I don't think you're leaving out anything. I think it was shortly after that or not long-- too many years after that that Uncle Henry developed Tuberculosis.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. Uncle Henry was in the...

**Mary Claire Kay:** In a sanitarium in Kentucky, I believe, wasn't that right?

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, uh-huh, that's where he died.

**Mary Claire Kay:** He died in a sanitarium in Kentucky.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And then there's the story about Uncle Charlie leaving the farm.

**Edwin Cotten:** Now wait a minute, Uncle Henry was buried up here at New Providence [Presbyterian Church], wasn't he?



**Mary Claire Kay:** Yes, he's buried at New Providence.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And then there's the story about Uncle Charlie leaving the farm.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, Uncle Charlie didn't care for the farm work at all.

**Isabelle Chewning:** It wasn't his thing.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-uh. And he took the mules out in the woods to get wood one winter, and he left the mules standing in the woods and said, "This is not for me." He came home, packed his suitcase and went to Lexington and got a job. [Laugh]

**Isabelle Chewning:** [Laugh] That's a good story. So then that left your father [Frank] and your Uncle Walter on the farm together?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** With their parents.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah.

**Isabelle Chewning:** When was Mary Claire's house [2315 Brownsburg Turnpike] built? Was it built when you were...

**Mary Cotten:** That was my grandparents' house.

**Mary Claire Kay:** That house was standing, that house was built-- the original part of that house was built in the late 1700s.

**Mary Cotten:** Mm-hm.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And then it was added to and we don't know how or when but you can tell that it was in more than one part, built in more than one part. And my great-grandfather, mother's grandfather [Thomas S. Rees], he and his wife and all the boys [Harry, Frank, Walter, and Charlie Rees] moved into that house. Now I don't know if the house across the road was built at that time or not. And originally he [Thomas S. Rees] purchased over 2000 acres. And during the first couple of years he had a couple of good wheat crops and plus he sold...

**Edwin Cotten:** It wasn't 2000 acres.

**Mary Cotten:** What'd you say, Eddie?

**Edwin Cotten:** It wasn't 2000 acres.

**Mary Claire Kay:** How many was it?

**Edwin Cotten:** Nine hundred.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Because there was...

**Mary Cotten:** And he sold, yeah.

**Mary Claire Kay:** He sold a good portion to pay for the rest.

**Mary Cotten:** To Mr. Tom Huffman.

**Edwin Cotten:** Yeah that was up there, and then they had it on each side [of Rt. 252] which was -- the whole tract was about 9000 acres-- or I mean 900 acres. They sold him three, somewhere over three hundred, three or four, so it left between five and six hundred acres on both sides of the road there.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay.

**Edwin Cotten:** And then your daddy [Frank B. Rees] built that house you were born in.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh, yeah.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay, so the house that Gail and Ron [Clark] are in now [52 West Airlie Lane] was built by her father.

**Mary Cotten:** Mm-hm.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And that's where you were born?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, mm-hm. Eddie, I had something else on my mind when you said that. Shoot. I left out something.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Oh well we'll figure it out.

**Isabelle Chewning:** It'll come back to you when you read the transcript and then you can fill in the blanks then. So your uncle Walter and your dad and your grandfather all farmed there together.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Now I was talking to Mary [Lipscomb] about the big barn the other day [behind 52 West Airlie Lane]. That's an amazing big barn.

**Mary Cotten:** I don't know much-- anything about the barn really except everybody said it was the biggest barn in the county.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Well I can certainly believe that because it's enormous.

**Mary Cotten:** And I remember-- do you remember how many windows it had in it?

**Mary Claire Kay:** I don't.

**Isabelle Chewning:** It has a lot.

**Mary Cotten:** Small windows.

**Isabelle Chewning:** On the lower level?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh and I was-- my brother and I were guilty with shooting some of those windows with a BB gun.

**Isabelle Chewning:** [Laugh] How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**Mary Cotten:** I just had one brother.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And his name was Frank Jr.?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And you got into trouble with the BB guns, huh?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yeah. [Laugh]

**Isabelle Chewning:** Uh- oh. We're getting some confessions on this tape.

**Mary Cotten:** The BB gun was taken away for a while. [Laugh]

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh was it?

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Well did you go to school in Brownsburg?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. I went there till I graduated high school.

**Isabelle Chewning:** So you started there in the first grade?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you remember any of your teachers?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh golly no.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Were you there when Miss Trimmer was the principal?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yes, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** So you remember Miss Trimmer?

**Mary Cotten:** Well, uh-huh.

**Edwin Cotten:** You mentioned the English teacher, I don't remember her name.

**Mary Cotten:** The English teacher.

**Edwin Cotten:** The English teacher, you mentioned her.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh that was not at Brownsburg, that was when I was in the school in Richmond.

**Mary Claire Kay:** That was in Richmond.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did you have Mrs. Rosenell Patterson for math?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh, I did that.

**Isabelle Chewning:** I've heard a lot of people say she was a very good teacher.

**Mary Cotten:** She was very good. And every once in a while instead of having class we'd walk in class and she'd say, "Well I'm going to read you a story today." And she would read us the *Uncle Remus* book which we all loved to hear because her pronunciation was so good.

**Isabelle Chewning:** That's a nice change from math, isn't it, to have somebody read you a story instead of making you do math?

**Mary Cotten:** It really is.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you have any memories of school? What was your graduation like?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh boy. I don't remember graduation. I graduated, that's for sure, but I don't remember anything about it really. It was nothing special.

**Isabelle Chewning:** What year did you graduate?

**Mary Cotten:** Let me see. I went through grade school and high school there.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Probably around 30...

**Mary Cotten:** Thirty-eight, I believe. I think it was '38.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Thirty-six or thirty-eight.

**Mary Cotten:** I think it was '38. And now, what next?

**Isabelle Chewning:** What was the school building like? Do you remember what it was like at all?

**Mary Cotten:** There was the stucco building where the high school was. And then there was the old wooden building.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And did you go to school in both of those buildings?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** The old academy was...

**Mary Cotten:** The old academy, uh-huh, yeah. And let's see what else.

**Mary Claire Kay:** You used to tell me about if somebody didn't feel good there was a teacher or somebody...

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yeah.

**Mary Claire Kay:** ...they would send you, talk about that.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh. Well, the teachers boarded at different houses in the community.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh they did?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. And there were several who boarded down at Mr. Rufus Patterson's place. Now I don't know how to tell you where that place is.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Is it the stone house on the road going towards Fairfield?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** So that's where Milton and Betsy Reid live now [Sleepy Hollow, 2645 Sterrett Road]?

**Mary Cotten:** Where what?

**Isabelle Chewning:** The people who live there now are named Reid.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh really.

**Isabelle Chewning:** So some teachers boarded with Mr. Patterson?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh and...

**Mary Claire Kay:** And if somebody felt sick --

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yeah if some-- if one of the students felt sick, one of the girls felt sick they-- the teacher would allow her to go down and rest at that house.

**Mary Claire Kay:** In one of the teacher's bedrooms right?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** So it was a little school infirmary.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah. It was the closest thing we had to an infirmary. And let me see. What else is interesting?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Well, you used to-- you couldn't catch a bus to school because you were too close.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yes, that was terrible. We thought that was terrible. We could not ride the bus, it went right by our house and we could not ride because they said we were within a mile of the school. And the mailman came by, Mr. Charlie Berry, came by with the mail twice. He came by twice a day. But we could not ride with him. He said that-- what excuse did he have? Something about he couldn't allow anybody to ride with the mail. So we...

**Isabelle Chewning:** So then did you have to walk?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, I walked many a times when my hands and legs would get so cold I could hardly move. I'd go to school and thaw out after I got there.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And there was a culvert between your house and the Potter's house [2610 Brownsburg Turnpike].

**Mary Cotten:** There was what?

**Mary Claire Kay:** A culvert. You know that big hole -- culvert -- where the cows would go through [under the road]?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** You used to be scared of that.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, I was really afraid of it because we had no idea who might be down under that thing. We had, at that time, tramps. You'd see a tramp every once in a while. And I was scared to death, so some of my friends...



**Mary Claire Kay:** The Potter girls.

**Mary Cotten:** Huh?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Potter girls.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, the Potter girls would walk with me but they were not allowed to go around the curve there. They had to stay within sight of the Brownsburg. And let's see who else?

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did your brother walk with you?

**Mary Cotten:** No, because he was always playing ball.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Was he older than you or younger?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh two years older. And he was always playing ball or doing -- he had something else to do. I can't remember his walking with me at all.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Mrs. Potter would allow one of the girls to walk as far as the curve and watch you get past the culvert and on the road closer to home.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And then they would turn around and go home, right?

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah that's right.

**Edwin Cotten:** Did you run?

**Mary Cotten:** What?

**Edwin Cotten:** Did you run?

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did you run?

**Mary Cotten:** No.

**Edwin Cotten:** I would have!

**Mary Cotten:** I would have walked up in the field above that culvert, and the road -- there was a roadhouse there where the road equipment was kept.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Where was that, Mrs. Cotten? Where was the roadhouse?

**Mary Cotten:** It was-- right, now how do I tell where that was, 'cause it was...

**Mary Claire Kay:** It was on the other-- it was on the same side of the road as my house right?

**Mary Cotten:** No, uh-uh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** It was on the other side?

**Mary Cotten:** It was on the other side of the road.

**Mary Claire Kay:** The same side of the road that your house was on?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. And that's why...

**Mary Claire Kay:** I thought the scales were on that side of the road.

**Mary Cotten:** They were but they were closer. The scales were near your house.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay then the roadhouse was where the equipment was kept.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh, that's right.

**Edwin Cotten:** Was it close to that culvert?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Was it close to the culvert?

**Mary Cotten:** What the...

**Mary Claire Kay:** The roadhouse?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yeah, uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay. So somewhere in that curve on the left hand side of the road going from Brownsburg there was a house where road equipment was kept, which was close to where that culvert was where the cows would walk under the road. And then past that again on the left -- and I remember these being there when I was a child -- there was a set of scales where they'd weigh the cows.

**Mary Cotten:** And...

**Mary Claire Kay:** And a chute to get them in the trucks.

**Mary Cotten:** My grandfather owned the land down to the...

**Mary Claire Kay:** To the edge of Brownsburg.

**Mary Cotten:** ...the edge of Brownsburg, uh-huh, on that side.

**Mary Claire Kay:** On both sides, actually.

**Mary Cotten:** Well yeah, that's right. And let me see what else.

**Isabelle Chewing:** What kind of farming did your grandfather do? Did he have mostly cattle or sheep or?

**Mary Cotten:** No, mostly wheat was the main crop and --

**Isabelle Chewing:** That's what he needed that big barn for.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah. And sheep, we had sheep. I remember sheep shearing well.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. I always felt so sorry for the sheep because see, to me they did it the time of year when we always had a cold spell after that. I was so afraid the sheep were going to freeze.

**Isabelle Chewning:** They look so pitiful when they're just sheared don't they?

**Mary Cotten:** They really do.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Especially if it's cold.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And how about threshing the wheat -- was that a big exciting time in a farm family?

**Mary Cotten:** Well that was quite an operation, uh-huh. They had to hire people to come in and help with that.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Didn't your grandmother cook for all those people too?

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, my grandmother cooked for -- in the middle of the day for those people, those men, and...

**Isabelle Chewning:** Who did they hire? Did they hire some of the black men in Brownsburg?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** They also had a threshing crew they hired didn't they?

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, that's right. And at the time of cutting corn they had to hire someone to help with that. Let me see, what else?

**Isabelle Chewning:** Were they mostly local people that they would hire?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** How about...

**Mary Cotten:** We had one man, Press [Preston] Carter, who-- my father had another job and he was traveling some and away from home. And he had Press Carter, a black man to stay on the farm, to work on the farm in his place. And let me see what else.

**Isabelle Chewning:** What was your father doing when he was traveling?

**Mary Cotten:** He was Deputy Commissioner of Revenue.

**Isabelle Chewning:** I see. That's a big job.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. He would sometimes have to go as far as Goshen and when he did he would stay overnight somewhere over there.

**Isabelle Chewning:** So on the farm most of the work was done by horses and mules?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. We had-- I haven't been able to remember-- we had a pair of mules and I haven't been able -- one was named Pat and I can't think of the other mule's name. [Laugh] I've tried and tried but we had mules and Pat -- I mean a pair of horses.

**Edwin Cotten:** One of the things that you told her was driving the lambs over to Decatur.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yes uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Tell us about that.

**Mary Cotten:** Well when they-- when time to-- when the lambs were big enough, they would drive them, several men would drive them on foot to Decatur to catch the train over there to wherever they were going to take them. I've forgotten where they took the lambs, where they sold them. But anyway that's the way they disposed of them.

**Isabelle Chewning:** That's quite an operation to drive lambs all the way from your farm over to Decatur.

**Mary Cotten:** Well it was then. It seems to me like they had, I don't know, quite a few men helping with that.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Were they raising beef cattle at that time too, Mother?

**Mary Cotten:** No, uh-uh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** That was later.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. Well we didn't raise beef cattle. The only time we raised-- my brother and somebody else had one-- raised one but we didn't have-- Eddie's mother used to think we had plenty of beef steak. She'd talk about the fact that we had beef steak all the time. And we never had steak, we had pork because we butchered about -- for the two houses, we butchered I think it was about 12 hogs in the fall, late fall, when it turned cold.

**Mary Claire Kay:** You would sell a lot of that meat and keep some of it, right?

**Mary Cotten:** I don't remember. That meat was canned. You know they had a cannery in Brownsburg at one time. And as I remember, my mother canned sausage in glass jars. She would fry the sausage first, put the sausage in glass jars and pour the lard over them. And that's the way we preserved that.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you remember where the cannery was?

**Mary Cotten:** No I don't. I really don't.

**Isabelle Chewning:** What's your memory of the-- had you left-- no you were still in Brownsburg during the Depression.

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Were you conscious of the fact that money was tight and people were...

**Mary Cotten:** I think I must have been.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you have any memories at all of what that was like?

**Mary Cotten:** Well I remember one thing. I thought I was old enough to have hose, silk hose and I didn't get them right when I wanted them. But I finally got them for Christmas after Daddy had, my father had cleared the fact that I was old enough with Aunt Bettie [Sterrett] Patterson. She wasn't really my aunt but my mother grew up in her home and with I think there were four other-- she had four sisters. So we considered her an aunt. And what was I saying?

**Isabelle Chewning:** You were talking about the Depression and silk hose.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, the Depression and silk hose. And oh boy, we thought we were something! I got silk hose at the Christmas that Caroline Patterson got them. We each had silk hose for Christmas and we just thought we were something special! Now let me see where do I go from there?

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did you have chores that you had to do on the farm?

**Mary Cotten:** Well no, I don't remember any chores I had. My brother had two cows to milk.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Did you have to feed chickens?

**Mary Cotten:** Feed chickens?

**Isabelle Chewning:** Or gather the eggs, did you have to do any of that?

**Mary Cotten:** No, not really.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did you have a big garden in the summer?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did you have to do chores in the garden?

**Mary Cotten:** No, I didn't do any chores in the garden.

**Cory Cotten-Potter:** [Cory Cotten-Potter is the grandson of Mary Cotten.] I remember yesterday how you told me you made your spending money when you were a teenager with the butter.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yeah, that's right. The way I made my money as a teenager, I churned the cream, and I skimmed the milk all the time to keep the cream off. And we had a spring house down there with cold running water through it, and I made the butter. We had one of these old churns you turned like that [demonstrates] and I churned the butter and sold it to Mrs. Bosworth in Brownsburg for, I believe it was a quarter a pound. I'm not sure.

**Mary Claire Kay:** That was big money back then.

**Isabelle Chewning:** It was big money!

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. Well she had -- some of the teachers boarded with her and she wanted good food for them. And the only problem we had with that, the cows would get into onions in the spring in the fields [laugh] so you wouldn't-- couldn't use the milk 'cause—couldn't use the cream to make the butter!

**Isabelle Chewning:** How often did you have to churn the butter? Every few days was there enough cream to make butter or did you do it-- I just don't have any sense of how often you had to do those things.

**Mary Cotten:** I really don't remember.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Well I guess it depended on how many cows you had and the amount of milk you were pulling in from the cows and some of that milk was used to feed the pigs, wasn't it?

**Mary Cotten:** Well...

**Edwin Cotten:** You have to churn it before it gets sour. So it depends on the speed.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you remember any of the businesses in Brownsburg?

**Mary Cotten:** Any businesses?



**Isabelle Chewning:** Mm-hm.

**Mary Cotten:** Mr. Bothsworth's store was there and then, let me see, there was a filling station across the street. I think Mr. Roy Huffman had that filling station.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Wasn't there a tannery, Mother? Was there a tannery in Brownsburg?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes there was, but not while I was there.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you know where...

**Mary Cotten:** That was after-- excuse me.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you know where the tannery was?

**Mary Cotten:** I don't know. I don't remember ever seeing that. I think that was after I went away to school.

**Mary Claire Kay:** You were telling me one time that you remember the time that that black man murdered the...

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yeah. What was his name? His last name was Carter.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Was that the name of the black man or the man who was killed?

**Mary Cotten:** No that was the black man. The man who was killed was Goodridge Whipple. The Whipple family was a fairly influential family there. And Goodridge was walking down -- there was a lane beside the black man's house and it went over the hill to somewhere. I don't know where that lane went but it was quite long, and Goodridge Whipple walked down that lane with his hunting dog and they -- I don't remember. Do you Mary Claire?

**Mary Claire Kay:** No I don't remember exactly what happened but I remember you telling me about your daddy coming home to get his gun.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Apparently they called up all the men to go look for the man who'd done the killing.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And your daddy came home and got his gun.

**Mary Cotten:** That's right. Several of the men got their guns and went looking for him. And that was sort of a scary time.

**Isabelle Chewning:** That must have been.

**Mary Cotten:** Let's see, what else should I remember.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did your family have a car?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, uh-huh.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you always remember having a car, or do you remember when you got the first one?

**Mary Cotten:** I don't remember when we got it. We had an old Model T first and...

**Mary Claire Kay:** Is that the one your mother would drive to Staunton?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes uh-huh. [Laugh] She would drive to -- there was-- that was a toll road, I think [Rt. 252, Brownsburg Turnpike]. Did I tell you there were two places you had to stop and pay the toll?

**Mary Claire Kay:** I don't know how many places there were but --

**Mary Cotten:** But mother did a lot of shopping in Staunton, and she was known by the people at the toll gates and she'd just wave to them as they went by, telling them she'd pay on her way back. She

didn't want to lose that time. [Laugh] So she would stop on the way back and pay the toll. And there were two toll gates and I can't remember where the other one was. There was one at Newport.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh was there?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh. But I don't remember where the other one was.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Well she must have been pretty progressive to learn to drive. I don't think all the women drove back then.

**Mary Cotten:** No, uh-uh. I'm sure they didn't.

**Mary Claire Kay:** She was pretty independent, wasn't she?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes she was.

**Isabelle Chewning:** She did most of her shopping in Staunton instead of Lexington?

**Mary Cotten:** Well she would make at least two big trips to Staunton. And I can remember Daddy would give her twenty-five dollars. [Laugh] See the price, how the price of things, was a little different then. She would come home with quite a lot of things that...

**Mary Claire Kay:** Your grandfather used to let you ride his horse, too.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh yeah, uh-huh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And wasn't it Eugenia Buchanan that you would ride with? Was that who you rode with some? Who was it?

**Mary Cotten:** No. It was Eleanor Whipple.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Oh, okay.

**Mary Cotten:** Grandpa always had a good riding horse and he would let me ride it, and one time I brought that horse-- I was-- Eleanor was a bad influence. [Laugh] She decided we should race the horses. So we started up around over the-- have you ever heard of Fern Valley? Well, it was--

**Mary Claire Kay:** That's on the road going to--

**Mary Cotten:** Lexington, old road going--

**Mary Claire Kay:** It's right down there before you get to Bustleburg. Between our house [2315 Brownsburg Turnpike] and Bustleburg.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh, I know, that little woods there.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, we'd go through the woods and there was a man. His name-- everybody called him crazy-- said he was crazy—He was named Madison. And boy, we would go through Fern Valley in a hurry and--

**Mary Claire Kay:** You all were scared, weren't you?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, indeed. Scared to death of him. But he was -- his problem was he just was not right. But we didn't know the difference then. But the prettiest ferns grew in that-- there was a branch running through that area, and the prettiest big ferns grew in there, so it was called Fern Valley.

**Isabelle Chewning:** I had never heard that.

**Mary Cotten:** Really?

**Mary Claire Kay:** And your father put in that spring.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yeah, that's right. There was a spring -- there was water coming out of the mountain -- excuse me -- and my father put pipes in so the people could get the water.

**Mary Claire Kay:** A little concrete trough.

**Isabelle Chewning:** That's still there.

**Mary Cotten:** It is?

**Isabelle Chewning:** I think it is.

**Mary Claire Kay:** It is. It's still there.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh.

**Mary Claire Kay:** You were going to tell us--

**Edwin Cotten:** --That your grandfather furnished water for Brownsburg.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yes. That's right. Excuse me. My grandfather furnished water to Brownsburg at one time. He put the pipe in and -- let me see-- he charged, I think it was a dollar a month, wasn't that right?

**Edwin Cotten:** I think so.

**Mary Cotten:** But I remember one place in Brownsburg that people refused to connect for that water and they used a cistern. And if you've ever tasted cistern water, it is the worst, vilest, smelliest thing in the world. And when I would visit at their house once in a while, I could not drink the water. It was just so smelly.

**Isabelle Chewning:** You must have had a good spring to furnish water to all those Brownsburg houses. That must have been--

**Mary Claire Kay:** Did it for a number of years.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, well, I think we had -- it was a right sizeable spring. It wasn't out of the ordinary I'm sure.

**Isabelle:** Must have been good water!

**Mary Cotten:** Well, it tasted mighty good.

**Edwin Cotten:** Something you didn't mention, I think, is that the fact that your grandfather gave the black church [Asbury United Methodist Church] an area for a graveyard and then you--

**Mary Cotten:** That's what I was going to say a while ago and--

**Edwin Cotten:** --You and Frank gave another acre later on.

**Mary Cotten:** To the black people in the area for a graveyard.

**Edwin Cotten:** Sounds like Mr. Rees was right community oriented.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, he was.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Absolutely.

**Edwin Cotten:** --He would do that and I was impressed with that.

**Mary Cotten:** And there was what we called the blue woods [?] over there across from where you [Mary Claire Kay] live, and I loved to go down there and this spring water flowed through the little woods, around the edge of it, and I'd pick violets. Violets, lots of violets grew there and I'd go down there and get a big bouquet of violets frequently. And what else was I going to say?

**Edwin Cotten:** That old road leaving Brownsburg going to Bustleburg. Was that the same road that they have there now or was that old road up higher?

**Mary Cotten:** The old road was higher.

**Edwin Cotten:** That's what I thought.

**Mary Cotten:** And it went to the back of our farm, really.

**Mary Claire Kay:** That's right. The road that came from Brownsburg going to Bustleburg originally was not down there low where it is right now. Originally it came out of Brownsburg, but I guess the new road was put in after you were born. No, before you were born, sometime in there. Because you walked the new road to Brownsburg to go to school because of where the culvert was and the scales,

but years before that, that road from Brownsburg actually went up and went behind the house that I live in [2315 Brownsburg Turnpike].

**Isabelle:** Oh, really?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Yes, the old road was up behind it and then back down somewhere else. It was not in-between my house and the one across the street [52 West Airlie Lane].

**Mary Cotten:** Now, the trees that were planted along the road to Brownsburg were planted by Mr. [Henry P.] Mitchell.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Yes, we talked about that earlier, and Uncle Walter probably replaced some from time to time and your daddy-- I mean, your grandfather replaced some of those trees. But Mr. Mitchell was the one who originally planted the trees. And prior to the Mitchells owning the property, the McChesneys owned that property. And the Mitchells bought it from the McChesneys sometime around the mid 1800's, maybe right after the Civil War, and then they owned it-- the Mitchells owned it up until you all bought it in 1906.

**Mary Cotten:** There was a brick, I think, in the house you live in [2315 Brownsburg Turnpike] that has a date on it. And I don't know, I've-- I don't know exactly where that brick was put. It was placed there on purpose.

**Mary Claire Kay:** I'm not sure where that is.

**Mary Cotten:** I just don't remember much about that.

**Isabelle Chewing:** How about the barn on your property, Mary Claire? Do you have any idea when that barn was built?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Do you know the barn, the little barn up behind my house?

**Mary Cotten:** That was the stable. And I don't know when that was built, but it wasn't a very big stable.

**Isabelle Chewing:** How about the big bank barn up by you? The red barn.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Are you talking -- Mother, when you say the stable, are you talking about the carriage house directly behind my house or are you talking about the barn further up the hill?

**Mary Cotten:** The one further up the hill.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay, so the little barn was what you all used for a stable.

**Mary Cotten:** That's right.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay, now, do you remember who built that barn? Did your granddaddy build that barn, or was that there when he moved there?

**Mary Cotten:** I think he built it.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay. But when you moved there, the Mitchells or somebody had already built the big barn across the road. Do you know who that was built by? Was that the Mitchells who built that barn, you think?

**Mary Cotten:** I do not know.

**Isabelle Chewing:** I think it was. But are we talking about the bank barn, the red bank barn?

**Mary Cotten:** Big, long barn.

**Isabelle Chewing:** Behind your house, is that the stable?

**Mary Claire Kay:** That was apparently the stable.

**Mary Cotten:** Yes.

**Isabelle Chewing:** So you finished school in Brownsburg and then you went to Richmond to school?

**Mary Cotten:** I went to--



**Mary Claire Kay:** William and Mary first.

**Mary Cotten:** In Williamsburg and went to William and Mary and then--

**Mary Claire Kay:** After you left William and Mary, you went back to Richmond.

**Mary Cotten:** Went back to Richmond.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And went to the Pan Am school in Richmond.

**Mary Cotten:** A Miss Lao [ph?] was the head of the Pan Am school in-- which was basically a business school, and I was just itching to get work, to go to work. And so she was-- Miss Lao was Hawaiian. Beautiful woman and-- let me see, something else I wanted to tell you but--

**Mary Claire Kay:** What about that little teacher at that school who said, "The best scent of all--"

**Mary Cotten:** That was it. There was an English teacher at that school and she'd go around all the time, "The best scent of all is no scent at all. The best scent of all is no scent at all."

**Mary Claire Kay:** She didn't want you to wear perfume. You were not allowed to perfume at school.

**Mary Cotten:** No. You couldn't wear perfume, and I don't think that we could wear nail polish.

**Isabelle Chewing:** How long did you spend at William and Mary?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, I was there for just one year or two--

**Edwin Cotten:** Two years.

**Mary Cotten:** Two years.

**Isabelle Chewing:** And then you went to the business school?

**Mary Cotten:** Um-hum.

**Mary Claire Kay:** And then you went to work for one of the vice presidents at--

**Mary Cotten:** Well--

**Mary Claire Kay:** At Southern States, right?

**Mary Cotten:** Um-hum, did you ever hear of Southern States? Well, I worked there for many years. Mr. Wisner [ph?] was the director of Southern States, and I went there not knowing-- I mean, they just sent me on a temporary basis. I was in the secretarial group at Southern States and all of a sudden they told me-- Miss Williams, who was Mr. Wisner's sister-in-law, told me to go downstairs, that they had somebody down there that wanted me to work for them. And it turned out to be the-- oh, Mr. Gordon was the assistant to Mr. Wisner.

**Edwin Cotten:** Probably assistant general manager, or something like that.

**Mary Cotten:** And I worked-- gosh, I just don't know how many years I worked there but--

**Mary Claire Kay:** Until Daddy swept you off your feet?

**Mary Cotten:** Well, that's true. [Laugh] I met him at a Halloween party.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh, did you?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes. Southern States had a-- they had some kind of party for the employees every year.

**Edwin Cotten:** And she could never give me up after that!

**Mary Cotten:** [Laugh] Well, anyway let's see. What have I left out there?

**Isabelle Chewning:** Mary Claire had told me that you were friends with the Buchanan girls? I had interviewed Anne [Buchanan McCorkle]. She's down in Harrisonburg. I just enjoyed her so much.

**Mary Cotten:** Anne's the only one living then, I'm sure.

**Isabelle Chewning:** She's just so, so much fun, such a nice person.

**Mary Cotten:** There's was Margaret and Eugenia, Elizabeth and Ann, four Buchanan girls.

**Isabelle Chewning:** She said they had a good time growing up, the four of them.

**Mary Cotten:** I'm sure they did.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And my aunt, Mary Sterrett Lipscomb, said she was always so envious of them because they were girls and they had each other and had a good time all the time. Did your family go to New Providence [Presbyterian] Church?

**Mary Cotten:** Um-hum.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did you go to New Providence?

**Mary Cotten:** Um-hum.

**Isabelle Chewning:** And so you were friends with the Buchanan girls from church and from school?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yeah.

**Isabelle Chewning:** How about electricity? Do you remember when electricity -- had you already left before--

**Mary Cotten:** No. I remember when we got electricity. Boswell Jones put the-- did the wiring in our house. Did you know of him?

**Isabelle Chewning:** I don't think I've heard of him before.

**Mary Cotten:** Well, he was-- well, I don't know how to tell you about him except he was a good-looking man and he was-- Everybody thought he and Annabelle Hyde [ph?] were going to get married and it surprised everybody else when she married a man from Fairfield. [Laugh] Let me see.

**Isabelle Chewning:** I'm going to turn this tape over for a minute.

[Audio stops momentarily]

**Isabelle Chewning:** I turned the tape over. Electricity, we were talking about electricity. How about the phone? Did you have a phone in your house?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes. To me the phone was always there.

**Mary Claire Kay:** It was a wall phone, a crank wall phone.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, you've seen, I'm sure, one of those old wall phones.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you remember the telephone office in Brownsburg?

**Mary Cotten:** I used to love to go up there and sit and-- Miss Mattie Wade was such a nice person and Mrs. Supinger was her sister, but she wasn't too nice. Miss Mattie would-- I learned to work the switchboard when Miss Mattie was there, and I loved to work that switchboard.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh, I bet that was fun.

**Mary Cotten:** It was lots of fun.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Do you remember Supinger's Store?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did your family go to that store and--

**Mary Cotten:** Well, I'm really not sure about that. I think they went to whichever store they could find what they wanted. The Whipple store was across from the Whipple house and I remember Mrs. Whipple running across the street to get something to fix supper with frequently.

**Isabelle Chewning:** I've heard Brownsburg was pretty lively on Saturday nights. Did you ever go into town on Saturday night?

**Mary Cotten:** No. In Brownsburg?

**Isabelle Chewning:** Mollie Sue [Whipple] always said that everybody came to town on Saturday night. The women would sit in their cars, and the men would go in the stores, and the kids would all play in the streets.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Well, you were gone by then probably, Mother.

**Mary Cotten:** I think perhaps I must have been gone. I just don't remember that. But we haven't mentioned that book [Remarkable Trees of Virginia].

**Mary Claire Kay:** Yes, we did. We took care of that first thing. You've talked about so many other things you've forgotten that.

**Mary Cotten:** I've forgotten that. Well, I'm sorry that mistake was made in that book.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Well, it's just people not quite getting everything right. Oh, you know what? I believe Mrs. Jen Heffelfinger worked at the-- she worked at the telephone office, didn't she?

**Mary Cotten:** She worked at the bank.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Was it the bank she worked in? I remember when she was alive she told me a story about your grandfather coming-- and I guess it was the bank she worked at, whichever one it was. And she was having trouble adjusting the coals and stuff to get the stove to keep them warm. And he saw that they were having trouble and he went home and got a set of tongs and brought them back and gave them to her. And she kept those tongs all those years, and then some years ago she gave those tongs back to me before she passed away.

**Isabelle Chewning:** How nice.

**Mary Cotten:** At that time we had a black man who took care of that bank area and cleaned it. His name was Adam. And I remember as a child, Adam would come up and bring his lunch and he would sit down at the springhouse and eat his lunch and he always wanted some black coffee. And I told

him, I said, "Adam, if you don't stop drinking that black coffee you going to be blacker than you are!"  
[Laugh] That was sort of embarrassing to my family. Let me see.

**Isabelle Chewing:** [Laugh] How about medicine? Did people worry about polio and things like that?

**Mary Cotten:** Well, not until-- when did that polio scare start? That was later, because I was so concerned about-- let's see--

**Edwin Cotten:** It started in the '30s. Polio scare, sometime in the '30s.

**Isabelle Chewing:** In the '30s?

**Mary Cotten:** Well, when did we get the--

**Edwin Cotten:** The vaccine.

**Mary Cotten:** --Had the vaccine?

**Edwin Cotten:** That was later on.

**Isabelle Chewing:** Was your family pretty healthy?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes.

**Isabelle Chewing:** Who did you use for the doctor if somebody got sick?

**Mary Cotten:** Well, we had-- There was a house in the village and a doctor-- we always seemed to have a doctor there, Dr.-- let me see--

**Mary Claire Kay:** Was it Dr. Bosworth? Was he--

**Mary Cotten:** No. Oh, shoot.

**Isabelle Chewing:** I think there was a Dr. Bailey and Dr.--

**Mary Cotten:** Dr. Bailey. He was a real good looking man and he was there for-- I don't remember how long but his wife's mother visited-- was visiting and she was driving toward Fairfield up that hill oh, from-- well, I don't know what you call the hill now-- what they called the hill then-- going to Fairfield and something happened to her car and she was killed over on that hill from--

**Mary Claire Kay:** Well, that didn't change Dr. Bailey living there, did it?

**Mary Cotten:** No. But Dr. Bailey left and we had another doctor. Can't remember who he was.

**Edwin Cotten:** Mary had an interesting story you might like to share. It's about the gypsies and your grandfather letting them camp.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yeah. We had gypsies come through the area every once in awhile. Not every summer, but I remember several times when they came by. Of course, people would call their neighbors to say, "The gypsies are coming. The gypsies are coming," so we knew to lock up our chickens and everything we had and everything we could. And what else was I--

**Mary Claire Kay:** Your grandfather always let them camp on his land.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yeah, he let them camp over there in the meadow across from your house and--

**Mary Claire Kay:** I guess he felt like they wouldn't steal from him if they were camping on his land.

**Mary Cotten:** I don't know, but he was right good to them. Well, he was always a generous person. He was good to everybody.

**Isabelle Chewing:** Does sound like he was really community oriented.

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, that's right. He was. And I thought he hung the moon. I was crazy about my grandfather.

**Mary Claire Kay:** He used to take you on a train all the time, didn't he?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh-huh.. He would take me on a train with him from Decatur to Harrisonburg to visit Aunt Sally. He had a sister down there. I remember one time Grandpa was going and he-- I was over with him and he told me he was going. He said oh, he was going on-- I guess it was afternoon train

and he asked me if I would like to go with him. And of course, that just tickled me to death. I wanted to go and I ran home. My mother had died before that and we had a housekeeper and she said, "Mr. Frank isn't here. You're not going anywhere unless he tells me you can go." So Grandpa got on the telephone and he called her and he said, "Miss Sally, I'm going to Harrisonburg on the train and I am going to take--" He called me Elizabeth, "--with me. I would like for you to pack her clothes." And that was all that was necessary.

**Isabelle Chewning:** What was her name? Sally?

**Mary Cotten:** Sally Moran. She was burned terribly. I don't know a thing about that fire. She lived in Brownsburg. Her family had a house next to Pete's Garage, have you heard of that?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Mr. Carwell's garage?

**Mary Cotten:** Uh huh. And I don't know what happened but anyway she was involved with a fire one time and her face was scarred badly. And she wore her hair, sort of, like, a mushroom to hide some of the scars up here on her head. Now, what was I telling you? What do I-- what was I--

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did you celebrate Christmas?

**Mary Cotten:** Celebrate Christmas?

**Isabelle Chewning:** You told me one time you got silk hose for Christmas one year.

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yes.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did your family have a big Christmas celebration?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yes. I nearly always got a china doll.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh, well that's wonderful.

**Mary Cotten:** And I broke more than one!

**Isabelle Chewning:** Did the whole family get together for Christmas?



**Mary Cotten:** Well, no. We didn't. I don't know--

**Mary Claire Kay:** Well, Uncle Henry lived far away and then he passed away. And Sid [?] and Uncle Charlie lived in Lexington, so really it was just your grandfather and your grandmother and Uncle Walter and your daddy and you and Uncle Frank [Frank Brooks Rees, Jr.] But Uncle Frank went to VMI. By then he was--

**Mary Cotten:** He went to-- down to Front Royal to work, and he married a girl from down there. So he was-- he spent--

**Isabelle Chewning:** Who are we talking about now?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Her brother, Frank.

**Mary Cotten:** My brother, Frank- Frank Jr.

**Mary Claire Kay:** So basically at Christmas it was you and your daddy and Uncle Frank and your grandparents and probably Uncle Walter, right?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes, but after my brother-- excuse me—married, we started going down to Markham--

**Mary Claire Kay:** For Christmas?

**Mary Cotten:** For Christmas.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Did you take your grandfather with you at that point to Markham for Christmas?

**Mary Cotten:** He was not-- he was no longer living at that point.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Well, because I remember he was alive when Tommy [?] was born.

**Mary Cotten:** That's right.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Because of the picture of all of them.

**Mary Cotten:** Of the four generations.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Yeah, how about other holidays, Mrs. Cotten, did you celebrate Thanksgiving or-

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yes. We always celebrated Thanksgiving and--

**Mary Claire Kay:** And of course you went to church at Easter.

**Mary Cotten:** What did you--

**Mary Claire Kay:** I said of course you went to church at Easter.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, Easter was a church time.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Where were you during World War II? Were you in Richmond at that time?

**Mary Cotten:** I think I was.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Remember during the blackout you were bitten by something when you stepped off--

**Mary Cotten:** I was bitten by a snake.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Or a rat? You stepped off the curb.

**Mary Cotten:** No, it was a snake. I found that-- well, actually I found out on a program from TV just recently that a snake makes a punch like that, two holes, and that's what I had, two holes right down there in the front of my ankle.

**Mary Claire Kay:** It was during a blackout in Richmond.

**Mary Cotten:** Um-huh, we were at-- we were going-- we never knew when we were going to have a blackout and, of course, everybody was supposed to be in their house and have no lights on the house

whatsoever, pull shades, dark shades. Another girl and I had gone out to get a sandwich, and on the way back the siren sounded for the blackout. Well, we started running as fast as we could to get in the house and I felt something hit me right there in the front of that foot. Just punched sort of. And I yelled, and the warden who was on duty that night came over to see what was wrong and I said, "Something bit me." And he immediately took me down to the nearest hospital and they did not know what it was there, but they used a suction cup for a long time. And let's see, my ankle-- I had a swollen ankle for a long time, too. A bad, sore ankle and what else now have I left out?

**Mary Claire Kay:** I don't know, Mother, you've covered an awful lot.

**Isabelle Chewing:** I think we've covered most of my questions. Do any particular people stand out in your memory-- Brownsburg people?

**Mary Cotten:** Well, let me see. The Whipple family and Mr.-- there were two-- oh, gosh. I keep thinking of Rice. It wasn't -- their name was not Rice. Dice.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Dice.

**Mary Cotten:** Dice, that was right. Mr. Charlie Dice and Mr. Walter Dice, Mr. Charlie Dice lived on the road that was going over to Fairfield [2597 Sterrett Road] and Mr. Walter Dice lived up in the-- how do I describe that house now?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Which house is it?

**Mary Cotten:** Well, it was the one down across from the school. Big-- it was a big, gray house.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Is that the house that Bob and Edna [Driver] live in?

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, that's right. Where Bob and Edna live now. [22 Hays Creek Road] That's exactly where it was and Mr. Dice kept apples-- lots of apples in his cellar and whenever he saw any of us out in the school yard he would bring a handful of apples out and give them to us. And Mr. Charlie Dice kept a small lard can of hard candy, and if you went to see him, you left with a handful of hard candy. Now, what else have I--

**Mary Claire Kay:** Anybody else in particular that you remember in Brownsburg or--

**Edwin Cotten:** Mary, remember you -- The only reason I know about it is because his son was my doctor. Bosworth. Do you remember me and Tommy Bosworth boarded with them to go to high school. Tommy Bosworth became a doctor and then Chris Bosworth [Tommy Bosworth's son] was a doctor, he was our doctor.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, Chris—Mother -- the high school didn't have a-- what am I trying to say? They didn't have a high school in Collierstown, and they didn't have a high school-- well, anyway Brownsburg was the main high school in the county. And some years Mother would take-- now, I remember she took the Fulwider girls who lived on the road to Lexington and-- until they finished high school and after that she took Coleman men-- boys until they finished.

**Isabelle Chewning:** So they boarded?

**Mary Cotten:** Boarded with us.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Was Tommy Bosworth one of the people who boarded with you all?

**Edwin Cotten:** <Inaudible>

**Mary Cotten:** No, I don't think so.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Daddy thought he remembered you saying something about.

**Edwin Cotten:** I thought. I'm mistaken. I thought you said Tommy Bosworth and he went on to be a doctor over on the Eastern Shore and Chris his son, a Bosworth also, he's a doctor down in Newport News. And of course I knew him because he was a doctor there, and we had him for a doctor long-term.

**Mary Cotten:** Let me see. I cannot think of anything else important.

**Isabelle Chewning:** Well, you've done a really good job.

**Mary Cotten:** Well, I'm real glad. I hope that you can make sense of some of that and--

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh, we will! We will.

**Mary Cotten:** --My rambling.

**Isabelle Chewing:** I enjoyed it so much and I thank you for taking the time to talk to me. If you think of other stories I'll come back with the tape recorder and we'll get those.

**Mary Cotten:** All right. I think I have said all I can possibly remember.

**Isabelle Chewing:** [Laugh] You did a great job. That was terrific.

[Audio stops momentarily]

**Isabelle Chewing:** We're back on the tape and Mrs. Cotten remembered another story to tell us.

**Mary Claire Kay:** You had been to a roadhouse and got caught at the roadhouse, right, that started it?

**Mary Cotten:** Anyway, Daddy-- my father forbid me to go to oh, what was the name of that place now?

**Edwin Cotten:** Springs-- Wilson Springs you told me.

**Mary Claire Kay:** She wasn't supposed to be-- your brother caught you at one of-- at the roadhouse. Didn't Uncle Frank catch you and he went and told your daddy-- or who caught you?

**Mary Cotten:** It was D.W. Whipple.

**Mary Claire Kay:** D.W. Whipple saw you at the roadhouse.

**Mary Cotten:** And he couldn't wait to get to church, the next day, to tell my daddy I was at this beer joint in Lexington.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Who were you with at the beer joint?

**Mary Cotten:** Do what?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Who was with you?

**Mary Cotten:** I don't remember, Mary Claire.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay.

**Mary Cotten:** I must have been with several other people.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Yeah, I think you were. I think there was another girl whose name you told me or maybe that was the girl but anyway, go ahead and tell the story.

**Mary Cotten:** Let me see, where was I?

**Mary Claire Kay:** D.W. Whipple told on you at church.

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, that's right. He told Daddy that he saw me at this beer joint and Daddy used to take me to-- swimming up in Goshen Pass, where—the old swimming hole up there, on Sundays. I knew there was something wrong with Daddy when he came home from church. He just was sort of solemn, and finally he said, "Well, I'm not going to take you swimming this afternoon. You disobeyed me. You went to this beer joint last night." And I knew who told him because I had seen D.W. Whipple there. And so I was thoroughly disappointed and I was irritated that-- because whatchamadoodle had told him. [Laugh] And so Daddy left to go swimming, and he had hardly gone until this car came by and Ernest Slusser [ph?] and let me see-- oh, gosh who else?

**Mary Claire Kay:** Was Eugenia Buchanan one of them?

**Mary Cotten:** Eugenia Buchanan was in there. Gosh, I can't--

**Mary Claire Kay:** There was another fellow in the car, wasn't there?

**Mary Cotten:** Yes.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Do you remember who that was?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, Henry. The boy, Charles Henry.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Okay.

**Mary Cotten:** And so where was I?

**Mary Claire Kay:** So you got in the car with them. They were going to go to Goshen, right?

**Mary Cotten:** Oh, yeah, they were going to Goshen and--

**Mary Claire Kay:** So y'all were on your way to Goshen.

**Mary Cotten:** We were on our way to Goshen and up at what we call Cedar Grove, we went around that curve. Oh, whatchamadoodle, the Slusser boy had stolen one of his father's cars and when we went around that curve, the car turned over. [Laugh]

**Isabelle Chewning:** Oh my goodness.

**Mary Claire Kay:** Went down the embankment, didn't it?

**Mary Cotten:** Yeah, went down the embankment on the other side of the road, and I had a beautiful black eye for a long, long time! [Laugh] We had a real nice housekeeper at home, and I went back to her. Well, she had gone across to keep house for my grandfather at that time-- and I went back to her. So she said, "Don't you worry about it. I'll take care of Mr. Frank." So-- she was afraid he was going to raise the roof because I had disobeyed him again. [Laugh]

**Mary Claire Kay:** Twice in 24 hours!

**Mary Cotten:** So I remember she saw him coming and she said, "Mr. Rees, this child has been through enough. You don't need to say a thing." [Laugh] So that took care of that situation.

**Edwin Cotten:** How much experience had that boy had driving a car?

**Mary Cotten:** He'd never driven before! [Laugh]

**Edwin Cotten:** [Laugh] That's a funny thing.

**Mary Cotten:** That's the fun part. He had never driven before, and I was mad because Daddy left me and didn't take me swimming so I just up and went! Oh, golly.

**Isabelle Chewing:** Thank you for telling that story. That's a good one.

[End of tape]



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