

Interview With Mary Louise Stilwell
March 24, 2010

AL = Allan Buddle

MLS = Mary Louise Stilwell

CR = Christine Ridarsky

AN = Ann Buddle

AB: Well, Mary Louise, we're very pleased that you're happy to sit down here with us and have a visit about you, your background and your family and your life. And before we start I want to...so that the recorder recognizes our voices, would you say a couple of things in the recorder just so that they recognize your voice and then we'll each do the same thing.

MLS: I don't know what to say.

AL: Well, you just said it.

MLS: I just said it, all right.

AL: That's fine. And, I'm Allan Buddle. And...

CR: I'm Christine Ridarsky

AL: And my wife, Ann is here and she just left for a minute, but she'll be back to identify herself. And this is...

AN: I'm Ann Buddle and I immediately started coughing as soon as the machine was turned on.

CR: And today's date is March...

AL: 24th, 2010

CR: 2010 and we are at the home of Mary Louise Stilwell on...

AL: Stilwell Road...

AN: West Covert Road...

AL: West Covert Road. [laughing] In the town of Covert, in the County of Seneca. How's that for a start.

AN: OK.

AL: Um. Could you start by telling us when you were born?

MLS: I was born June 8, 1924.

AL: And where was that?

MLS: It was on what they call Chicken Coop Hill, now. Schuyler County.

AL: And what were your parents' names?

MLS: Arthur Swick, and Ilah Evans. I-L-A-H, Ilah Evans, was my mother's name.

AL: And how was the last name spelled?

MLS: E-V-A-N-S.

AL: OK. Thank you. Uh, do you have any brothers and sisters?

MLS: I have one brother, and one sister.

AL: Are they alive? Are they still with us?

MLS: Yes, my brother still lives in the house where I was born.

AL: OK, and his name is?

MLS: Carlton Swick.

AL: Carlton Swick. And your sister?

MLS: My sister is Alma Switzer. She lives over on Aiken Road in Tompkins County.

AL: OK. And were they older or younger than you?

MLS: Younger. My sister is four years younger and my brother is seven years younger.

AL: And probably not necessary to ask this question, but what was their occupation, what were you parents' occupation?

MLS: Farmers. Everybody's always been farmers in my family.

AL: Uh huh. And the farm itself was on...where was the farm?

MLS: Before I was born?

AL: Yeah.

MLS: That was on Chicken Coop Hill.

AL: Uh huh. Well can you tell us about the farm?

MLS: The farm. It was a small farm, I think it was...Dad worked it on shares, he moved in April before I was born in June. And he worked it on shares, Agnes Wright owned the place, her name was Agnes Wright. And he worked it on shares 'til, I think it was 1939 and then he bought the farm. I think it was about 120 acres and he paid \$3500 for it. I remember. And that was a huge price, he didn't know if he could afford it or not, but he paid for it in a few years, he had a few cows and a few chickens, pigs and just a small farm.

AL: Do you remember about how many cows he had, and did he milk with a...did he have anything to milk with other than his hands?

MLS: [laughing]. Milked with his hands. No he had I don't know, seven or eight, something like that, maybe 10. I'm not sure. Not very many.

AL: Do you remember when electricity came to the farm?

MLS: Yes, I do. The electricity didn't come to our farm until everybody else had it. We had it, because we was a mile...the line was a mile each side of us, and not enough houses in between so they wouldn't build the line. So, after Dad bought the place, I think it was in '39, something like that, he got what they call...I don't know what you call it...system that they had 16 or so batteries down cellar to run it and we had to have a 32-volt system. And when we wanted the lights usually we had to have that gas engine

going down there to charge up all those batteries. We had to keep water in those batteries and it was, I don't know just when it was we got electricity it was several years after that before they finally built a line down through there, so we had electricity. It was a great day when we could get rid of our 32-volt radio and get a refrigerator that worked, and get a freezer. We was very happy to get electricity.

AL: What did you do for a refrigerator before you had electricity?

MLS: Well, we put stuff down cellar to keep it cold. And earlier we had an icehouse up the road, there was an abandoned house and the neighbors all got...cut ice off from, I think it was Mecklenburg Pond, in the wintertime they'd have a whole bee, all the neighbors, and they'd pack it up there in that icehouse, we called it icehouse, it was a regular house but nobody lived there. And then in the summertime when we wanted...we had an icebox that we put ice in that didn't work very well, we didn't use it very much, but we did some. But mostly when we wanted ice cream we could go up there and get a cake of ice and make ice cream in the summertime. That's the only way we could have ice cream.

AL: yeah, well back to that...the electric for a minute. Was the thing that you had in the cellar, was that called a Delco Plant?

MLS: Yes, it was. I couldn't think what it was.

AL: I couldn't either until it finally came to me. How did they get the blocks of ice from the Mecklenburg Pond up that hill?

MLS: Horse and wagon, or horse and sleighs, depending on the weather, I guess.

AL: That's quite a pull up that hill, for the horses.

MLS: Yes, it was.

AL: Do you remember what you did the milk that you produced?

MLS: Yes we had a cream separator, and mostly we'd bring it in, like the one I've got out here, like turn the crank and then we had these little, I call them disks, that the milk went through and then it separated and then the skim milk came out of one place and the cream out of another and the skim milk went to the pigs and chickens and the cream sold it and put it in cans and when a can got full we either took it to Trumansburg Railroad station and shipped it to some place, I don't know where, New York City. I don't know where it went to. And of course we used part of the cream to churn our own butter.

AL: You mentioned that you had an engine to run the Delco Plant. Do you remember what that engine was like, what it looked like, anything about it?

MLS: Oh, yes, I remember what it looked like but I don't know...it was just a...it was down cellar near the batteries and I don't know probably 3 foot high, or a foot and a half wide or something.

AL: Was it what they used to call a "hit and miss" engine?

MLS: I don't know.

AL: Did it have 2 fly wheels on the side?

MLS: I think probably did, I'm not sure.

AL: OK. Well, you must have...you have shown us this picture of the school that you went to at the intersection of Chicken Coop Hill Rd and Voorhees Rd. Can you tell us a little bit about your school

experience?

MLS: Well, I didn't start out at that school, I started, I went down the road and went to, they called it the Beehan School, that's down where Phil Switzer lives now. Out there on...was about a mile, a little over a mile down the road, and I walked down there. I started school there and went there for two years. Then I think, I don't know, they didn't like the teacher very well or something that they had, and that was a bigger school, that was I think 18 or 19 went there all grades. And I went there for 2 years and then I went up to...this was a mile up the road, when I went to that school, my teacher, my cousin was a teacher that year, Florence Swick, she was the teacher. And it was...let's see, less than 10 of us in the school. We went up there, walked up there every morning and every night. In the wintertime we had, I think there was 5 families, no, 4 families went there. So we took turns, we'd fix a dish of like scalloped potatoes or scalloped corn, or some casserole. Each one had, we had four families, so we'd take for 4 days, each had a day that they'd furnish, they took that, and the stove that was in the middle of the schoolhouse had a flat place on the top where you could set your casserole, it kept it nice and warm, and for the 5th day, my aunt lived across the road and everybody would bring a potato and we'd take it up there to her house and she'd bake a potato in her oven then somebody would go up and get the potatoes when it got noon, and then we had our dishes there and somebody washed the dishes. We had our own cafeteria.

AN: How did you wash the dishes Mary Louise?

MLS: Well, we carried water from my aunt's up the road, and that was on another, on the top of the stove so it was warm water and we washed the dishes.

AN: Did you have a pump at the school?

MLS: No. The water all came from my aunt's place up across the road.

AN: What was your day like, when you went to school, when you arrived, what happened?

MLS: Well, we always started with the pledge of allegiance to the flag and then a prayer, then each class would have their... we had I don't know how many grades, several grades, and each one would have a class. We'd go up front when it was our turn to have class and then we sat back and done our homework and I don't know...we had recess at 10:30, 15 minutes for...we had recess. We'd go out and play ball or do...depend on what the weather was, sometimes we'd go outdoors and sometimes we didn't. And we had an hour at noon and at 2:30 in the afternoon we had another 15 minute recess and then after 4 o'clock we was out. Go home.

AN: Did you go to school September to June?

MLS: Yes.

AN: Yes. And what grades did you have in this school? Did it go up through 6th or 8th or...?

MLS: It went up to 8th grade.

AN: And then when you graduated at 8th grade what would you, where would you have gone then if you were going...

MLS: When I graduated at 8th grade we had to go to Mecklenburg School to take our 8th grade regents. And then if we passed that, we could go to High School, and we had another Aunt lived up the road and most of her children went to school and she drove a car and took us to Watkins to school. Then the last

couple years of high school, they'd got a big school bus, a big blue school bus. Bill Robbins drove the bus and we had this car took us down to Reynoldsville, we met the bus, then we rode on that to Watkins High School.

AN: To go back to your one-room schoolhouse, who was the teacher there? You said she was your cousin.

MLS: My cousin, Florence Swick.

AN: Florence Swick. And...

MLS: She married a Skilling after that.

AN: And where did she live?

MLS: She lived just down the road on Voorhees Rd, the first, well it used to be about the first house up from Reynoldsville, her father, Fred Swick, lived on the farm, Wernicke's lived there later.

AN: So she didn't have to board around then?

MLS: No.

AN: Some of the teachers did.

MLS: Yes.

AN: Do you remember what books you used or what kinds of lessons you had or...

MLS: No. Not really.

AN: Do you remember what the inside of your schoolhouse looked like?

MLS: Yes. It had a big blackboard in the front, whole side of the wall and then the teacher's desk was in the middle and then, the stove and then the desks, we had our own desk.

AN: Were the desks attached to the floor?

MLS: No.

AN: Or could they be moved around?

MLS: I'm not sure. I think they could be moved, but I don't know.

AN: I was surprised to hear you saying 8th grade regents, I never knew that they had regents then in 8th grade.

MLS: Yes, you couldn't go to high school until you passed those regents.

AN: What kind of tests did you have in your one-room schoolhouse?

MLS: What kind of what?

AN: Tests. Did the teacher just make up tests to see how you were doing?

MLS: I think so. I'm not sure.

AN: But she probably got you to recite, did she?

MLS: Yes. No when my cousin was a teacher, why she gave a prize to the one that got the highest

average. And my cousin went to school and, John Voorheis, whatever he did was a little bit better than me, so he always bragged, that he got better marks. Because a lot of times he'd get the prize and once in a while I would, but on our 8th grade regents he got his average of his whole grade was a ½ a point more than I was and he was always bragged about it for the rest of his life how much smarter he was than I was. [laughing]

AL: Half a point!

MLS: Yes, half a point smarter than I was.

AN: Mary Louise, what would the prize have been?

MLS: Oh, a book or, a story book, or...I think I've got one. Elsie Dinsmore books or some of those books...wasn't a very big prize but it was, we thought it was.

AN: Oh yes, the recognition.

MLS: Yes.

AN: Did you enjoy your schooling?

MLS: Yes, very much.

AN: And tell us about high school. You've told us how you've gotten there, but what was that like?

MLS: Well, that was a big mess the first day of school, coming from a one-room schoolhouse and the big room, where we had to go to different rooms and I never knew where I was or anything. But I enjoyed it, I took homemaking and that's where I spent most of my time.

AL: Where did you go to high school?

MLS: Watkins.

AL: Oh, in Watkins Glen.

MLS: That's the middle school now. Down there, and I took homemaking class, we had, I don't know, English class and civics class and history, I don't know, but I liked the homemaking part. That's what I liked. We had English all four years.

AN: I was just going to ask what did you enjoy the most...

MLS: homemaking

AN: ...and what did you learn the most from...and what did you do in homemaking?

MLS: Oh, we learned how to cook and how to sew and all the different things, we had our kitchen and we made different things, we made fudge and I don't know.

AN: Sounds like my kind of class. [laughing]

MLS: We learned how to make a bed and kind of, vitamins and things you were supposed to plan in your menus.

AN: Did that come in handy then, when you were older and married?

MLS: Yes, I always see a lot of things that I learned in homemaking. I learned how to tat and sew, I never learned much about sewing, I tried to learn, but I wasn't very good at sewing, I was more cooking.

AL: That's more important anyway.

AN: That's more important. [laughing]

AL: Do you recall any school bus kinds of stories?

MLS: No, I don't think so.

AL: No? Everybody has school bus stories.

MLS: No, our bus driver was Bill Robbins, he was married to my cousin, and all he had to do was, he'd look up in that mirror and you could see him back there looking in that mirror and everybody would quiet down, they was very well behaved, we never had any fights or arguments...

AL: Uh huh.

AN: Was discipline pretty good in school too?

MLS: I guess so. I never heard...

AN: Yes.

MLS: I took, biology and we had a teacher then, his name was Mr. Garman. I don't know how he ever got to be a teacher but, the way he marked us on our biology was just before report card time he'd call our name, we'd stand up and then he'd write down what our mark was, and I never learned one single thing in biology, we had one guy in there, we had a fish tank in the biology class and he had to clean that fish bowl every day. We just never had much of a class. [laughing] All the rest of the classes, we had to do things, but that one was different than the rest of them.

AN: Did you pass biology?

MLS: Oh yeah, I got 90s in biology! [laughing]

AN: Did you have regents in the high school?

MLS: Yes.

AN: Did you have biology regents?

MLS: I didn't take biology regents. I didn't get that far, I took geometry regents, I failed that, and that's the only thing I ever failed in school.

AN: Well, we'll never tell your cousin, who got a half a point higher.

[laughing]

MLS: He's gone now. So we won't tell him for sure.

AL: When you lived up on Chicken Coop Hill Road, do you remember where, did you go to church somewhere?

MLS: We went to Reynoldsville Church.

AL: You went to Reynoldsville. And how did you get there?

MLS: Oh, my dad drove. We had a car.

AL: You had a car.

MLS: We went to church.

AL: Do you remember anything about the car?

MLS: Yes, we had a Model T first and then I remember when he sold that Model T and got a Model A. It was a green Model A that was a really special car.

AL: What was special about it?

MLS: I don't know, it was just a nice special car.

AL: It was new and it was green...

[laughing]

AL: Did it have a rumble seat?

MLS: No. It had a regular seat in the back.

AL: Uh huh. When you were down in, of course you probably wouldn't have on Sunday, but did you, when you needed some groceries, something that you couldn't grow yourself, where did you go for your groceries?

MLS: We usually went to Reynoldsville, they had a grocery store, once in a while we went to Perry City, they had a little grocery store. And then special occasions, maybe once a month or so, we'd get, go to Watkins, I think it was A&P Store, then we'd take some eggs and swap them for groceries. Get bananas with a stem. Bring a whole stem of bananas when we went once in a while.

AL: You know, someone must have had some responsibility for those chickens that produced those eggs. Did you have any chores that you had to do?

MLS: Yes, I helped feed the chickens and once in a great while I got to milk a cow, but not very often, I didn't like the cows too much.

AL: You didn't like the cows.

MLS: We had sheep and I, we had a big iron kettle out there in one corner of the barn and one of those pumps that you pump and that was my job to go out there and pump that kettle full of water so those sheep could drink. And, it took forever to get that thing pumped up, or filled up, that was one of my jobs. Whatever there was to do we always helped to do it.

AL: You mentioned pumping water with a hand pump, um, what was your water supply for the house, do you remember?

MLS: Just a little well with a pump that was outside, a big high pump, and I don't know how...anyway it turned a crank to get your water. I don't know except there was a pump and it would swing this way I guess.

AL: Did you ever have a windmill, on your farm?

MLS: No.

AL: No.

MLS: It was just a dug well, I don't know, probably wasn't only 10 or 12 feet deep and every time, once in a while Dad would have to clean that out, it would get dirty or something, I don't remember. We had a

cistern under the house, for water run off the roof that we used to wash clothes and hands and stuff, but we couldn't drink that water.

AL: The cistern, how was that made? Do you remember what that looked like?

MLS: I don't know, I think it was built up with stone.

AL: Well, when you got your chores done, were there any other...were there fun kinds of things, any games or any organizational things that you went to?

MLS: No, we didn't go very much, we just, I don't know, played games or read books or I don't know, we usually after we'd worked all day or done things, we usually ate our supper and went to bed I guess.

AL: Yes. One game that I hear mentioned from time to time is fox and geese. Does that ring a bell?

MLS: Yes, that was played. You had to play that outdoors in the snow.

AN: Yes, yes.

AL: Can you describe for us what that was like, what fox and geese was?

MLS: I can't really remember, you had to run around, but I don't remember.

AL: Oh, ok.

MLS: We played flinch in the house, Old Maid, and I don't know, was it lotto?

AN: Yeah, Lotto.

MLS: Chinese checkers.

AN: Yes, yes.

AL: Was there a 4-H organization at that time?

MLS: There was, I never was in to 4H. They tried to start it several times but there wasn't anybody that was leader, or I don't know, and not much interest in it and we never got really active 4H, we just knew it was available in some places, but we just never did get to it, there wasn't enough interest to do it, I don't know, we never got into it much.

AL: I know you've been active with Searsburg Grange, can you tell us a little bit about the grange and what you did there?

MLS: Well, when I was younger we didn't, we weren't members and when we joined we went for a little while, but Dad was always too busy to go and we never went much. I never got much into grange until after I was married and after my husband died and, wanted some place to go, and that's what it's for. When I was younger I wasn't much of a granger, we was members, but that was just, paid our dues and that was about all we did once in a while we'd go.

AL: Do you remember when you had your first TV?

MLS: My first TV, we didn't have 'til after I'd been married several years.

AL: Uh huh.

MLS: And my daughter, she graduated from school and was a nurse in Watkins and she had an apartment down in Montour and worked the hospital there in Watkins, she had a TV, somebody gave her a TV and

then she decided she wanted to come back home to live so she brought her TV here and I don't know, I was about... how old I was, but our daughter was, well, she graduated and was a nurse so, anyway, she brought the TV here and it didn't work very good and my husband said if he was going to have a TV, he was going to have one that works so we got our first TV then.

CR: Do you remember any of the shows you watched?

MLS: Oh yeah, Little House on the Prairie and Waltons and Bonanza, I guess that was...there was some others ones, I can't think of them right now, but they were the main ones.

AL: They all sound familiar. Would you tell us a little bit about how you celebrated holidays, how your family...whether you had gatherings for holidays, or how you did that?

MLS: Well, Christmas we always went down to my grandmothers. And that was a big event, we didn't have...if the weather, if it was winter, yeah, it was winter always Christmastime [laughing], I mean if roads were bad, we could get the horses, we'd go in the sleigh down across, we'd go down our lane and over across the field and down across the corner of the neighbor's woods and into my grandfather's sheep pasture, and down his lane and into his barn. And that was the way we got to church. Otherwise we had to go down the road and up way this way because with the horses we could just go down across and get there, but...and that was Christmas, that was about the only holiday we ever did anything special I guess. Well, Thanksgiving we went someplace.

AL: One of the interviews that we've done, there was some discussion about a small pox epidemic and I just wondered, do you remember any kind of serious illnesses that affected the area anytime in your time?

MLS: No. All I remember is, polio. My cousin Clyde Johnson, he later was a town clerk for years down to Hector, and he had polio real bad and they were quarantined and I know Dad took food up and set it in the yard and then they'd pick it up. He was paralyzed so completely that he could only move just one finger a little bit. His mother, my aunt worked with him and he got so he could drive the car and go...he always had to go with a cane, but he was a very successful, he sold nationwide insurance and had quite a business, but I remember how that was, he was always in his wheelchair. But he did get so he could drive a car.

AL: Just for the record, since we've got the tape going, Annie and I got our marriage license from Clyde Johnson.

MLS: Did you?

AL and AN: Yes. That's right. We did.

MLS: He was my cousin, his mother was Dad's sister.

AL: We enjoyed talking with him when I was there. Even though I was too young to know anybody around the area. I enjoyed talking with him.

MLS: Before he was town clerk, my mother's uncle was town clerk for years, Zine Dean. He was town clerk when I got married.

AN: How did you meet your husband, Mary Louise?

MLS: [laughing] Well, I was just got through high school and he was Stilwell of course and I was, my family was Stilwells, my grandmother Swick was a Stilwell, and we'd gone to the Stilwell reunion, once

in a while Dad was always so busy he never went only once in a while but, we went once in a while. Anyway, there was a lady in Reynoldsville who went to the Stilwell reunion that was friend of my husband's mother and her daughter was having a baby, Louise Betzier, Donald Frederick Betzier was born she needed some help to take care of Bobby, so she asked if she knew anybody that could help and I just graduated from high school, so they asked me to go down there and do help with the housework while when she came home from the hospital with a new baby. So, I was going for two weeks, while I stayed 8 weeks there, she tried to get her brother interested in coming down. Well, he did come down to see the baby once in a while, but she tried to get him interested in me, I was too fat, he didn't want anything to do with me. [laughing] So, 10 years later they had the house down the road here that needed to be wired for electricity and a couple of my cousins did the job and they told my husband that he ought to come see me, while I don't know whether that was what they said or what, anyway I got a letter one day in the mail and he wanted to come up and see me so, he came and we went out and that was in May and we got married in December. [laughing]

MLS: I told him he couldn't find anybody else so he finally gave up. [laughing]

AN: And then did you move to this spot, then?

MLS: Yes, he was living here, him and his sister. His parents had both died and they were running, his sister run the farm just like a man, of course she did all the housework and all, and it was a kind of a tough job for her I think when I took over the house, I don't think she and I ever had any. It must have been hard for her. She had that bedroom and this room and those double-doors were shut so that was her...she ate with us. Like that. Then later years, the kids got so she couldn't stand them any more [laughing]. Later years she liked them real well, but then she had a chance to buy the place over across so she moved over there.

AL: Is this the place down on Six Corners?

MLS: Yes. The one, you can see it right over across there, where my son lives now.

AL: Yes.

MLS: And she lived there until she died.

AL: Was there ever anyone in your family involved in the military in any way?

MLS: My grandfather...great grandfather Stilwell was in the civil war.

AL: Uh huh. Do have any records from his service?

MLS: Uh, no, I've got pictures of him with his uniform on. When my father died, we had an auction and there was some ribbons there and things and for some reason, I don't know why, they went in the auction, we never saved them. And all of us have been sorry since that we didn't. All I've got is that picture up there on the wall. That's a thing...

AL: That would another wonderful thing to scan. Where is he buried?

MLS: He's buried in Jones Cemetery.

AL: Uh huh. Over on Bower Road?

MLS: Yes.

AL: Is his grave marked, do you know?

MLS: Yes. He's buried on the same place as my Dad's parents.

AL: Do you visit, some families religiously visit their family's graves every year on Memorial Day. Does your family do that?

MLS: Yes, my sister comes over and we put together about 12 jars and take them around. We take them up there to Jones Cemetery in Trumansburg, and Bennettsburg Cemetery in Logan.

AL: The Bennettsburg Cemetery in Logan?

MLS: Well, the Bennettsburg is what they call Hector Union Cemetery...

AL: OK, I know where that is...

MLS: ...I always call it Bennettsburg and Logan is over in Logan.

AL: Yes, I know what you mean.

MLS: My aunt's buried there.

AL: Uh huh.

MLS: But I guess...I think, I don't know, my great grandfather was Spencer and his brother was a, my husband's grandfather, or something, he was in the service, the civil war too. But none of our family that I know of was in WWII. Well, there were too, Harold Voorhees' son was killed in Vietnam, I think it was.

AL: Well, I've got another question, there were big weather events over the years, do you recall any, anything about the 1935 flood or any big snow storms or anything like that?

MLS: I remember the '35 flood.

AL: Do you? Uh huh. How did it affect you where you were?

MLS: Well, not too much because we was on the hill, but it come down the road and a cellar window was open and it come right down across our yard and filled our cellar steps and we opened the cellar door and there was right there, and all our canned stuff down cellar was all that slimy stuff on top of them and when the water went down, why we had to wash all those cans off. It was all sealed of course it didn't hurt the food but it was a mess to get to them. And the road, down the road was...we couldn't get out 'til they fixed the roads, neighbors all got together and filled it, 'cause it went around the bridge each way and took it right out so you couldn't get across. So they had to draw, I don't know how they did it, but put stone or boards across I guess so I don't know. I remember that part.

AL: Do you have any recollections of the depression. Did the depression have any impact on your family?

MLS: Not much, I don't think, we didn't, we never had much money, but...we had our food and we had our own cows and gardens and things, it didn't bother us really that much.

AL: Did you have any rationing coupons or booklets for gasoline or anything like that?

MLS: Yes. We had that, for gasoline and shoes and meat, of course we didn't have much bother with that because we had our own meat. We swapped coupons with the cousin that lived in Elmira, to give them our meat coupons, and I can't think what they give us. Shoes I guess, we needed more shoes than we had coupons for. I can't remember that, but I remember the little tokens we had.

AL: Did you know any of the families that were relocated up on the National Forest when Resettlement Administration came along? Or did you know about any of the families?

MLS: Yes. The house where my parents lived, they, my Dad's sister lived there then and they sold it to them and now everything is all gone up there.

AL: And again, what was your parents' names?

MLS: My parents was Arthur Swick.

AL: Swick, yes.

MLS: I saved a picture, I've got one of the house that they tore down, there's nothing up there anymore and I always felt bad about it. It's not too good a picture of the house, but that's...

AL: Oh, it's a picture. Oh, the beautiful horses way in the front.

AN: Oh, that's a wonderful picture.

MLS: I remember that horse. Dad had that horse, that was Roxy.

AL: Roxy.

MLS: That was a couple years before I was born, I guess they lived...

AN: 1920.

MLS: It's the only picture I've got of that house. I remember very distinctly what it was like, and there was a beautiful barn up there...

AL: Yes, I can see it in the back of the house. Well, maybe that's part of the house.

MLS: Yes, that's the house.

AL: That's part of the house.

MLS: The barn was on up the road, this way.

AL: And where was this now, in relationship to where the schoolhouse was?

MLS: Well, it's where the schoolhouse, it was the road, Chicken Coop Hill Road when right on by where the schoolhouse was and it went up to a T up there. Let's see, I can't remember, let's see and then you'd go this way and it was over in...the other way you'd come, where the picnic place is up there on, used to call it Blueberry Patch, now that road goes down and then it turns to go into Reynoldsville...

AL: Uh huh, I know where that is.

MLS: There used to be a road right down, runs right through there. But the '35 flood took that bridge out and they never fixed it, so that road was all abandoned.

AL: OK, I know where that is.

MLS: And so that was, the house was right down just beyond there, probably a mile below the Blueberry Patch.

AL: When I came to this area I did a lot of hiking and I remember hiking right down to where that used to be, but I've got a map here...

MLS: It was right up where that bridge used to be, it was just up the road, up east a little just a little ways.

AL: Can you...just east of that bridge, where that bridge used to be

MLS: Yes, I don't know maybe it was a quarter of a mile up, I don't know, it doesn't seem as if it was very far, but...

AL: OK. Well, maybe later when we finish with the discussion, we'll get this map out on a table somewhere where you can see it, and maybe you can point out where that house was.

MLS: OK.

AL: This was, this map was 1874, so more than likely that house would have been there.

MLS: Yes, it would have been there I think.

AL: But you don't remember that far back, do you?

MLS: No, I don't.

AL: I didn't think so. [laughing]

MLS: But I remember that house very well, because my aunt lived there.

AL: Uh huh, well we would love to make a copy of that picture too, because we have very few pictures of the houses.

MLS: That's the only picture I know, I don't know whether Ida Voorheis White would have any pictures of that house or not. Didn't everybody had cameras then.

AN: No, and you took very few pictures.

AL: Were there any other families or buildings that you recall? That were part of the relocation?

MLS: Well, no, on up that road there was Homer Johnson's place, and on over was where the Compton's lived, Floyd Compton's parents. And then on down the road was Dewitt Swick, Dad's uncle, lived down there but I don't know where they all...I think they all sold their places or they died before that something, I don't remember what happened to all of them. There's no buildings I don't think there now. I haven't been up that road, but I think there's still road up through there but...

AL: Well, about 4 years ago, Floyd Compton took us up and showed us where his farm was when he was a boy. He moved off when I think he said that he was 9 years old, when his family left up there.

MLS: Yes.

AL: But that was before, way before the Resettlement Administration bought up the properties. Well, at any time, you know, as your setting here in your chair thinking about things, if you ever remember or recall anything about the families or the properties up there on the National Forest that were, where the families were relocated or whatever, well, why just give me a buzz and I'll be right over here, to hear what you've got to say.

MLS: OK.

AL: Because it's really hard to find any information about those families and your picture is great, we have very few pictures.

MLS: That's the only picture I've got of that place. But I remember because my aunt lived there. Dad, his parents, I think must be my Dad was born in that house, but I'm not sure, I think he was and I think all the family, the children grew up there, and then my grandmother, she died in 1913, she had a leg amputated and then got more infection, and she lived, I don't know, she was 50-something when she died. And then my grandfather, I think the Voorheis family moved in with him for a while, I was trying to think, and then when they left, Dad stayed with him a while, and then when Dad got married, he moved in that house, and my Mom. And then his father died and they, my Dad and Mom moved over in Logan, and worked for Andrew Egbert over in Logan. And they lived in Logan, then in 1924 they moved, in April of '24 and then they moved to the place where they, where I lived. I was born in, two months after they moved from that, Logan down there so. Then my aunt and uncle bought this place and then, they was the ones that sold it to the government.

AN: Did your family ever talk about how they felt about the house being gone?

MLS: Yes, my Dad was pretty upset about it, that he didn't ...I didn't hear about the rest of them. He didn't like not having his home place he could go to.

AL: Was there any discussion about whether it was a fair settlement or not?

MLS: I never knew anything about that.

AL: That would be quite a ways back. Do you have some questions?

CR: No, not really. Do you have more that you would like to add? One thing I was going to suggest before we turn the tape off, I wondered if you would take us through this photo album of yours and talk about some of the pictures that you have.

MLS: Oh, OK. There are none, none I don't think are up there, this is the only picture, one picture and I think my uncle gave me that picture.

CR: Do you want me to hand this to you?

MLS: I can't remember what's in it.

CR: We're starting at the very front of the book with a photo that fills the whole front page.

MLS: That's Reynoldsville School.

CR: You can set it on the table here.

MLS: I don't remember...

AL: Now, is that Reynoldsville School is that were the community center is now?

MLS: Yes, that's where my mother went to school, I don't know which one is my mother here. I don't know, I've got other pictures of Reynoldsville School someplace, but I don't know where. I don't know who that is. I don't know.

CR: Are these mostly family photographs?

MLS: Yes, these are family. That's my mom's sister and her husband. That's Ralph Dean and Elizabeth Murray. There's my mom and dad's...mom and dad and aunt and uncle, it's on there, at their wedding day, they were ready to go to, I think they went to Binghamton for their honeymoon. But I don't think there are any historical pictures in here, maybe, I don't know.

AL: They're all historical pictures.

MLS: Yes, are they?

CR: Just go ahead and flip through them and see if any of them spur any memories for you.

MLS: [indicating] Well, that's my mom's two brothers. I think that's my mom there. That's my great grandfather McCoy, my grandmother Evans and grandpa Evans, he was a justice of the peace for Town of Hector for years and years. That's my mom's cousin from Elmira and two of my uncles, I don't know who they are but...

AL: And they're standing in front of a nice car. Do you remember what the make and model of that car was? I'm big on cars, you can see.

MLS: No, I don't remember the car. This is pretty faded, but this is me down there. My cousins.

AN: You're the little one.

MLS: Yes.

AL: Can I take a picture, or a peek at the other picture? That's a nice picture of a horse and a wooden-wheeled wagon.

MLS: This is my grandfather's, or my grandmother, when my mother was born. It's my grandfather and his family, my mother's mother and the little one and the two sisters and their two brothers. That's the house down there Mott Evans Road down on the way to the Inn. What is it, they've got some kind of a business down there, what is it? I don't know, up there.

CR: The house is still standing?

MLS: Yeah.

AL: Where is that road?

MLS: It's Mott Evans Road, the other side of, this side of Reynoldsville.

AL: Is it between...OK, down on the flat.

MLS: Yeah.

AL: OK.

MLS: It's the end of the road that's...

AL: Dead end.

MLS: Yes, dead end.

AL: There's a...

MLS: I don't know what their name is.

AL: ...I was back in that road a while ago and there's a marker in there for pauper's cemetery.

MLS: Oh yes.

AL: Can you tell us anything about that?

MLS: I remember going by the...I didn't realize there was a cemetery down there, but up the road, just

beyond that house, there used to be a barn or shed or something where my grandfather kept his car, every time he'd walk up that lane when he wanted to go any place to get his car, and that was the house where part of the town people had been staying there, that was where they...

AL: The paupers, you mean?

MLS: Yes.

AL: Uh huh.

MLS: My grandfather bought that, and I don't think he, I don't think they paupers were there when they...when he, I think it was right after that or something, I can't remember, but that was the...I remember that building he told was part of the (?) where they were.

AL: um hum.

MLS: I don't know. There's the Model T Dad, when he got...that's Dad and Mom the day they got married, I think, no that wasn't then. Maybe they was just going out, I don't know. That was his car. Probably Dad's first car.

AN: They look all dressed up, it must have been a special occasion.

AL: Can you read that date, on the bottom? 1918?

MLS: That would have been the year before they was married, must be.

AN: I think it's 19.

CR: Yeah, 1919.

AL: OK.

MLS: That's another picture of my grandfather and my great grandfather. My great grandfather McCoy was a village blacksmith to Reynoldsville. He went to grange dinner, not grange dinner, church dinner one day, election dinner and walked down the road and a car come down and killed him. That's still pictures of the house there.

CR: Do you know which house this is?

MLS: That's where my mother was born. Her parents', Mott Evans' place.

AL [to Ann]: Do you know where Mott Evans Road is?

AN: [inaudible]

AL: Uh, do you know where Betsy lives?

AN: Yes.

AL: Well, it's a...if you go back where ? used to live, it's an intersection, that road...take a right and toward the hill...

AN: OK.

MLS: These are just...

AN: They are wonderful old pictures. I hope your family will take good care of these.

AL: It's great that most of them have people identified.

AN: Oh, I know, I know it.

MLS: That's my great grandfather and my grandmother and my aunt Mildred and my cousin.

AL: Where's that picture, where's that?

MLS: That's down my grandfather's right across the road from where that house was, or right across the driveway, I mean, that was the barn.

AN: Yes, it's wonderful that they have the names on them and then the dates, so many of them.

MLS: I don't know who this baby is, I remember baby carriages when they looked like that.

AN: Oh, I love that baby carriage. It's an awful sweet baby too.

MLS: There's no name on that one, I don't know.

AN: Just 9 months. Whoever it was is 9 months old. Happy baby.

CR: These are just the types of things that if your family doesn't want these photographs, one of the historical societies I'm sure would be happy to take these and preserve them.

AN: Or maybe borrow them and make some copies, scan some of them.

MLS: This is Reynoldsville schoolhouse.

AL: That's where, I believe that's where we're going to have the meeting in May, on May 1st, in that building.

CR: Are there any other questions?

AL: One other question that comes to mind, Mary Louise, uh, if someone was sick in your family, did you, who did you call for a doctor?

MLS: I think I had to go to somebody who lived in Mecklenburg.

AL: You don't recall any names or anything?

MLS: I can't remember. Dr. Burton was later, but I don't remember who was there before him. I can't remember the doctor that when my grandmother had her leg off, what his name was Dr. Vose.

CR: What happened to your grandmother that required her leg to come off?

MLS: I don't know, whether she had a blood clot, I always thought maybe she had diabetes, but Ida White, my cousin, said she didn't think that she had diabetes, so I don't know what was the matter with her.

AN: They never seem to discuss things like that in front of young people back then.

MLS: Yes. They didn't know about diabetes then. But, um, she had this blood clot and then it got gangrene in it and they had to take her leg off and she didn't live very long after that. I don't know that you've ever talked to Ida White or not.

AL: Actually, I haven't talked to her personally, but uh, Denny Teeter, who lives over in Logan, has talked with her and collected some information from her, and that was read at one of our programs, during that last year. She talked about airplane crash up on Potomac Road.

MLS: Oh yes, I've got pictures someplace of that.

AL: Have you? Do you have other pictures, or any other kinds of things that you know, that you have tucked away somewhere that might be of interest to our project?

MLS: I don't as I have.

AL: OK. If you think of something at some time, we'd love to look them through. You have any more questions?

AN: I think we've learned a lot.

AL: Have we worn you out?

MLS: No.

CR: Is there anything that we have not asked you about that you would like to mention?

MLS: I don't know, I can't think of anything.

AL: Well, we've talked about your parents, and your grandparents and your great grandparents, and your uncles and your aunts, what, how many children do you have and where are they?

MLS: How many do I have? I've got four children, my oldest one, she lives up on Lodi Covert-Townline Road.

AL: And her name is?

MLS: Libby Cathings. She works down to the, I don't know what you call it, bird seed place and she's a manager of...

AN: Oh, Pine Tree Farms.

MLS: ...assistant manager or something in the office now. She started out in the, working out with the bird seed and now she's got an office job. She lives there. And then I got the next daughter lives up the road here in the next house up here, June Vondercheck, she's a nurse in Ithaca hospital, she's been there thirty-some years. And then my son, he owned the farm, which he just sold, and we had a big auction here a week ago and everything's going. All the things that was, used to be here since the farm's...the farm, farm has been in the family for over 100 years and he just...well his health is bad and he's worked himself to death and the price of milk has been so bad compared to what you could get and so he's sold the farm, so...and he lives over in that field, across the field this way. And then my youngest daughter is MaryAnn Compton. She married Floyd Compton's son. She works in the bank, Cornell Credit Union, she works, got a bank job.

CR: And how many grandchildren do you have?

MLS: I've got twelve. And the youngest one just got back from Iraq for two trips to Iraq. So, MaryAnn's son works down to Maguire's, if you have to want a car, why you could drive in there he'll be right out there to pester you. [laughing]. She's got a couple girls too. I don't know, one of them works in Connecticut...

AL: As I've sat here looking out the window I see out across Cayuga Lake to the hill on the other side, which is just probably Cayuga County or Tompkins, I'm not sure which right over there. But do you have any memories of what you've seen over the years as you've looked out the window?

MLS: No.

AL: No?

MLS: I haven't been able to figure out what was, where things were over there. I've been over on that side and looked back and I couldn't find this place from there, so. That Milliken Station is right down there, you see the smokestack from that, that's about all I know.

AL: Well, I think that we probably have just about worn you out.

MLS: No, you haven't.

AN: It's been a fun morning.

AL: It's really been great to hear your stories.

MLS: That's the one thing I can do is to talk. It's about the only thing I can do left.

[laughing].

MLS: I can't walk very good or do anything, I can't do much 'cause I have to hang on to get my balance and I'm so afraid I'm going to fall, that I, they don't want me to drive anymore, so, I do drive down to church sometimes, but...

AL: Well, when the next grange meeting is, I'll give you a call and I'll pick you up and we'll go to the grange meeting.

MLS: Well, I don't know, I don't even dare go to that anymore.

AL: Don't you?

MLS: That I might have...if I ever had to go to the bathroom up there, what would I do?

AN: Yes.

MLS: I certainly couldn't go, that bathroom situation isn't very good...

AN and AL: No.

MLS: and it scares me to think, I probably wouldn't have to, but what if I did?

AN: But what if you did, yes, but what if you did.

AL: Yes.

MLS: Then what would I do?

AL: Uh huh.

MLS: That was, is my main...thing I like to know where I'm going.

AL: Yes.

AN: Well, even where they had the picnic last year it was a little bit of a walk to the bathroom, there was a hill, and...they'll have to have the meetings at your house, that's all.

CR: I wanted to ask you about the photograph you said was of the Hubbell family, do you mind if I grab it?

MLS: No. Probably it's dusty.

CR: what is your relationship to the Hubbell family?

MLS: Uh...

AL: Look on the back.

MLS: My grandfather's Evans mother was a Hubbell. I've got a picture, another old picture out on the other wall in the dining room of the Stilwell family.

AN: Oh, you have one of the Stilwell family?

MLS: That's my husband, is about, I don't know 8, 10 years.

AN: May I take that one too?

MLS: Yes, you can go get that one. They're on the wall over the side of the table.

CR: I'm curious about the Hubbell's because in my own research, I'm doing some work studying the Wickham family and James Hubbell had married one of the Wickhams. And I see he's in this photograph somewhere.

AL: where was this picture taken?

MLS: That was taken in Trumansburg, as you go out South Street, just about as you leave the city limits of Trumansburg.

AN: Here's the Swick family.

MLS: ? and Margaret lived there.

AN: Oh, Stilwell, not Swick, Stilwell.

AL: Everybody was so dressed up in pictures back when these pictures were taken.

MLS: I know it. Now people don't even dress up for a funeral, used to, if you went to a funeral you had to wear a hat and gloves...

AN: And something dark.

MLS:...yes.

AN: Now this is your husband's family, Mary Louise, right?

MLS: Yes.

AN: These are the Stilwells.

MLS: This is my husband, right there [indicating].

AN: Right there, OK.

MLS: And this is, I don't know, his parents. I knew part of them there.

CR: So your husband's the one seated at the front row, third from the right?

MLS: Yes.

AN: I think that's 4th from the right.

MLS: This one, this lady, this little boy, that little boy there is Clyde Johnson.

AN: Oh.

MLS: A baby.

AN: All right, there's a...in the 3rd row, one, two, three, four, fifth woman from the right is holding a baby and that baby is Clyde Johnson. We should have recognized him. [laughing].

MLS: He was born in 1914, so I don't know when that picture must have been taken.

AN: I would say maybe 1915 then, perhaps.

MLS: I would think so, something like that, he's not very old.

CR: I've got my digital camera, would it be OK if we took some photographs of the photographs?

MLS: Sure.

CR: Want to do that Allan?

AL: Sure. And we'll how that, how they come out.

AN: Do you want, should we turn off the recorder while we're doing this kind of stuff.

CR: Yes, we can do that.

AN: I'll see if I can...

CR: Are we done with the recorder in general?

AL: I think so, unless Mary Louise has something else she wants to say.

MLS: I can't think of anything else.

AN: Christine, remind me how to turn it off.

CR: Just push the red button.

AN: OK.

I hereby grant permission to the Backbone Ridge History Group to use this transcript in accordance with the signed Oral History Interview Release Form, and to the best of my knowledge, I certify that this transcript is a true and accurate record of the recorded interview.

Mary Louise Stilwell

Date

Printed Name of Witness

Signature of Witness

