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Joseph Carlton
No. 84-011
August 10, 1984

Q: I am talking to Mr. Joseph Carlton, in Toano, and I understand you have been in this area a long time. Mr. Carlton, we'd like you to share some of your experiences of where you've lived and what you've done and some of the changes you've seen in the County during the past few years. When did your family move here?

A: 1901, around there, I think or 1890 or 1891, I reckon.

Q: Where did you live?

A: That white house there across the street from the old G.E. Building, with two great chimneys on each side. That's where I was born, in that old house. But those chimneys weren't there then, they were put on there around 1950.

Q: Is that where the Pottery is?

A: No, out here in Toano.

Q: Tell me about the Hotel Felix--your parents managed it, right? How many rooms did it have? Was it a two-story building?

A: Yes. Great big old flopping house.

Q: Refresh my memory, was it around the corner?

A: It was up the street there. It was right up the streets there on the main street. Remember the Wilkerson and Geddy Store?

Q: Yes -- uh huh.

A: It was just the other side of it with a lane separating it -- lane going down to Mr. Geddy's house and that great big old house was sitting up here, another house here, and Walter Martin's house was there, the Bank Building there, the Norton and Farinholt Store was there -- you don't know that -- those are all

gone. These three buildings were the original business houses in Toano and on this side of the road there were a whole lot of little stores, and when you came to Toano, you came to a right good size town.

Q: I understand Toano was very busy at one time? Had a bank and hotel.

A: Right. There was a lot of money changed hands in those days; good money, too.

Q: I imagine so. What do you remember about going to Toano school? Were they strict on the students then? Did they paddle them?

A: Yeah, they paddled some of them.

Q: How long a school day did you have?

A: From 9 until 3, with a one-hour recess in between.

Q: Did you carry your lunch?

A: No. Fortunately, I could go home to have my lunch.

Q: Did you play sports?

A: Some sports. I played baseball on one of the grade school teams. They had about a half dozen grade school teams going on sometimes. The high school boys played in that diamond; they occupied the whole thing. In that field on the side across the road, we'd go and make us a diamond so we could play. And all the little graders played baseball around any spot they could get!

Q: Did you have any girlfriends?

A: We all had girlfriends, I guess, and boyfriends too.

Q: Do you remember any of your school teachers? Any that made an impression on you?

A: All of them made an impression on me, but not all to the best. I had one man

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teacher, in high school I had a principal, Mr. Edwards. He wasn't too strict on us. They would call one of our classes in, and assign us another lesson, and he'd pick up his hat and say, "Well, I'm going out up to Toano." And he'd go get him a Coca Cola. And we'd spend the balance of our time in the stairs somewhere, and when the class time period was up, I presume he came back. For a while, we thought we had a nice little stunt there. But we didn't learn science or math class or nothing.

Q: What did you study?

A: American history; the same topics.

Q: I understand your father was a farmer?

A: No, he wasn't a farmer; he never was.

Q: But he grew watermelons, right? Tell me about the watermelons he sold.

A: The watermelon crop? We'd had a crop of watermelons and we shipped them to Boston, Massachusetts. They requested him to send them 2 cents for the freight charges, or something that the watermelons didn't bring. My father said the people up there stole his watermelons and they had the cheap to ask him for 2 cents.

Q: I guess he didn't farm much after that.

A: They didn't get the 2 cents either.

Q: How old were you then?

A: I was about 7 years old at the time. After that experience, we returned to Toano. They opened up the Hotel Felix. In that time, for 17 years, my mother educated her children--one boy and one girl; and the boy was me!

Q: Did your parents build the hotel, or was it already there?

A: No, we just rented it. Then the railroad came in here and changed the route. At that time, the present route was toward the back of Toano on the north side, and the railroad engineers lived with us about 6-7 years. The traveling people, the commercial travelers, I should say, and we had all sorts of times

-- good times, bad times, frustrated times, and everything else in those 17 years.

Q: Can you remember what you charged for a room at the hotel?

A: Yes. Fifty cents for a meal, and 50 cents for lodging: \$2 a day. That was a regular price most everywhere you went in those days.

Q: What kind of beds did you have? Feather beds?

A: Some were comfortable beds, and some were not very comfortable. But the transit and commercial people, they had the best of everything--clean sheets and clean beds.

Q: Did you have to clean the rooms and change the beds?

A: We had a maid to clean the rooms and fix up the rooms like they should be, see that water was in the room and waste water was carried out. We didn't have any bathrooms like today. It was a complete country shack. It should have been torn down, before it was ever rented out as a hotel.

Q: It sounds like it was prosperous and busy. How old were you when they got out of the hotel business?

A: I was about 21-22 years old.

Q: Then what did you do?

A: I got a job with the barrel factory here in Toano. Mr. Branch can tell you all about the barrel factory, because his father ran it. I was under one of the bosses. Mr. Taylor was the supervisor.....he was the big shot over there. He ran it, but Branch paid off the hands on Saturdays.

Q: I bet your salary wasn't extremely high, was it?

A: My salary wasn't too much. Wasn't anybody got over \$20 a week.

Q: Toano was a busy place then? Right?

A: In the potato season I recall, one of the buyers came in here from Detroit, Michigan. I understood he deposited a \$50,000 check with the bank in Toano, and when that \$50,000 was up, he wrote another one....and how many more, I don't know. But during the potato season, he would write a \$100,000 or more in the 2 months. So for the month and a half, while the potato buyers were here, we really had a right good income from the farmers. Sometimes they made money and sometimes they lost. Could open up a good store anywhere for \$1,500 to open up a new business.

Q: Tell me the names of the stores you remember in Toano.

A: All of them carried groceries. Most of them carried whiskey and wine. I counted up one time about 15 stores in Toano and only three stores that a lady would venture in, but they wouldn't go in the other stores. They could go in Marston's Store and Branch's store, and R. E. Richardson's. Later on Martin and Farinholt opened up a store, W.C. Martin. At that time some of the stores, some of them went out of business and new little ones sprung up.

Q: Who was the first to bring in gas?

A: D. W. Marton had a pump right in the front, under the little walnut tree. The railroad tracks ran right out in front of his place.

Q: Who was the first one to buy a car in Toano?

A: The first time an automobile was in Toano was a car named "Metz". And a Reverend White, the Methodist minister, he had the first car. I don't recall what year that was, but it was the early time.

Q: Do you remember the Diascund train depot?

A: I never did go to Diascund, but I remember the train going by.

Q: Did you ride the train to Richmond?

A: Once in a while.

Q: The trains were busy then.

A: Now you're hitting an experience we had when the trains went through here about 6 o'clock, going to Richmond and beyond--it was a through train. They had had a wreck up the road, or something, and that train had to stop in Toano; it was held up. And the word got around that there was a hotel or a place where they could get something to eat; and the people were getting kind of hungry when 7 o'clock came around held up about an hour. The passengers came over here to the Felix Hotel and grabbed up the food that was being served on the table where the regular boarders were sitting around to eat. They grabbed up a biscuit or anything on the table to eat, they just grabbed it up. They wanted to take it to the coach. My father tried to collect what they could from them. They took the silverware and all the dishes, cups and saucers that they could carry back over there and ate what they had, and the next morning they were all sent down, washed and clean. My father ran over to the depot about 9 o'clock the next morning when the train came in in the morning from Richmond to get all the dishes back; they didn't have enough to serve breakfast! That was a terrible experience! To be sitting down and everything grabbed off your place -- there were 18 plates.

One experience I had, my mother was taken sick and when I came home for lunch from school, she told me I had to stay home and prepare the evening meal. The main meal was supper at that time, and I'd have to cook it all by myself. It was all laid out for me. About the time we were ready to eat for supper, we had two extra people. So 18 people plus the two extra people counted us to 20, and it kind of upset my appletart, and I had to cook two more meals all myself to serve and it was about 9 o'clock that night before the people got to eat.

Q: Did you have to wash dishes?

A: I had to wash dishes afterwards and clean up the whole mess that I'd made in the kitchen. The next morning I got up ahead of my mother and she came in to help me a little bit and later on the servants came back.....I guess that must have been on a Monday morning.

Q: Did you cook on a wood stove?

A: Yes, we'd feed the fire and do the cooking, and all that . . .

Q: How long have you lived here in this location?

A: About 50 years. There wasn't a tree or grass on the place. A J.A. Banks owned the place, and we rented it from him and my mother had a little garden in the front yard where everyone could see the garden. She was an intensive gardener.

Q: Where was your mother from?

A: Down on the York River. But I was working at the Mill when we moved here at the time with the expectations of building a house or moving away from here, but we stayed and we found out Mr. Banks was willing to sell and we bought the place and I've been here ever since.

Q: So, you have enjoyed this little town, right?

A: I've lived here practically all my life.

A: And you know most everybody here?

A: Well, I did at one time, but today I don't know the first person I see on the street in Toano now. Every one of them have changed.

Q: What about the county government? Has that changed?

A: Yeah, to some extent. My father was a Magistrate in this town, so was Mr. Porter and Mr. Jennings. We called him Mr. Plum Jennings. They would write the warrants and try the cases, have a preliminary trial and sometimes they'd turn them loose and sometimes they'd send them down to Williamsburg Court. Nowadays the law has changed. I don't know what it is. I try to keep out of the law if I can.

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Q: And the Sheriff was Sheriff Trice. Right? Did he cover all of James City?

A: Yes. At one time he was the only sheriff. He didn't have a deputy sheriff. Hew was also the sheriff of Williamsburg. Finally, they got a policeman down there to take care of Williamsburg that sort of relieved the county sheriff to some extent, but he was still Sheriff of Williamsburg. All that is changed now. Now we have the Sheriff Department and the Police Department of James City County. We're growing.

Q: Where did Toano get its name?

A: I don't know. The railroad brought that name in here, but I found out later there is a place in Nevada has the name of Toano which means "High Plateau" or "High Hill" and the elevation of Toano, Virginia is somewhere around 100+. "Elko" was another name they brought in -- that's out there in Nevada -- that's a town. But Toano seems to be a sort of an area.

Q: So, the railroad seemed to name a lot of towns as it progressed. Toano was formerly known, or named ~~Byre~~ ^{Burnt} Ordinary. I don't think that was a railroad name . . . it sure didn't apply to the people on the railroad. Lanexa is an Indian name.

Q: I guess the railroad brought that one in too. How do you think our county is going to grow in the next few years?

A: I reckon it'll grow.

Q: What can you tell the people who listen to your information? What advice would you give them for a long life? You've lived a long time; do you get up early and eat certain foods?

A: I'm not sad about that. If you take care of yourself and the good Lord takes care of your health, I reckon you'll get along. But who wants to live a long time?

Q: You look in good health. Do you want to tell us how old you are?

A: Cut that off!

Q: Mr. Carlton, you just shared with me some of your love for Jesus Christ and your attendance at Olive Branch Christian Church for so many years. Tell us a little bit about your experience there. I understand you've been a Sunday School teacher, and a deacon, and held many jobs in the church. Tell us about your experience in the Lord's work.

A: I've been a member of Olive Branch Christian Church all my life. I joined the church, and held different offices and things. I was Treasurer of the church for 17 years, I believe, and I was deacon, and later an elder, and several other things that I was interested in. I've taken a lot of interest in the church and the cemetery. We have the cemetery in very good condition now and we have sort of a memorial fund that's been given them, and it's accumulated enough money to keep in perpetual operation and everything looks very well now.

Q: I understand it was your grandmother and grandfather that helped found the church.

A: My greatgrandmother helped organize the church at Hill Pleasant, Virginia where Mr. Harold Hunt is now living. And it was established in 1835, or 1833. My grandfather, Mr. Hammond, my mother and my aunt would drive from the York River homeplace up there in the morning, have a service, and then go my mother's grandmother's for dinner on Sunday. I don't know what time in the afternoon or night they got back home. It was an all-day trip for them in that period and day. I've kept up the good work as best I can.

Q: Now I understand why so many people love you and always said to be sure to talk to you for an interview, because of all the good work you've done.