

INTERVIEW of a KENTUCKIAN

SAM COLEGROVE

VANCEBURG COUNTY, KENTUCKY

This interview took place on May 31, 1983 in Sam Colegrove's livingroom. Sam recalled his boyhood in the Kentucky hills up to his permanent move to Michigan when he was thirty years old. He enjoyed reminising as well as I did listening. He had a few photographs to show me, but none to spare unfortunately. One was a picture of him at school with no shoes on his feet, as well as other classmates. Sam still has a very strong Southern accent and therefore I wrote the whole interview out first (eighteen pages) and typed it in a manner that Sam spoke.

Sam: This is Sam Colegrove, I live in Michigan now, but I did live in Kentucky. I did live thar all my life. I was born and raised in Greenup town in Big Sandy, and we lived thar for awhile until I was about six years old and we moved from thar back to Vanceburg. I lived thar until I moved here to Newberry.

My mother's name was Lori Bell Colegrove, before she was married she was Kimbler and my dad, his name Samual Sest Colegrove. And as far as I know they war born and raised in Kentucky.

Interviewer: Do you know what part of Kentucky they were born in Sam?

Sam: No, no I don't know.

Interviewer: What do you recall about living in Kentucky?

Sam: I've got a half brother, my mom was married twice. The first time she had John, my half brother. Than I have a whole brother, he's dead now--his name was Lenard and I had a sister Aretta.

Interviewer: Does your sister and brother still live in Kentucky?

Sam: Yes, my brother John is in bad health though, he's in a wheelchair he has a breathing machine. My half brother was born in 1911 and I was born in 1924, I'm the baby. (chuckles)

I don't remember too much about growin up. We had a rough time in trying to make it. My mothar, she raised us over a wash-board and John, after my dad died, (he got shot working in the coal mines) he worked in my dads place in the coal mines to help mom raise us kids until we were big enough to go out on our own. My dad lived about a year after that. Mom raised us on a wash-board--you know--wash clothes, makin a livein and like that. And after I go old enough I worked on the railroad in about 42 and I worked thar until the 50's and about 55 I came up har. I was thirty yars old when I came up har.

Interviewer: Is that when you met Arlene?

Sam: Yah, I met her in Hydes Camp out North thar.

Interviewer: What did you do there Sam?

Sam: When I first came har, before I come over har, I came to Traverse City. I got a chance to pick cherries. My brother John, he lived in Hulbert than. I wrote him a letter and told him I wanted to come to visit him and I worked with him all that summer in Hulbert. We did cutting--wood, cordwood and logs, hemlocks, peeling and all that.

Then I come to Newberry and I worked for Jack Hyde--It wasn't too long and I got a job at Atlas in thar and I worked for party close to three yars. Than I got nervous and had to quit that job. All those guys with those big sheets of wood hollerin at ya, I got nervous so I chalked it up and than I went back to work in the woods. And than I got down so I couldn't do nothin and I had to go to a T.B. sanitarium for

thirteen months. I went to Morgan Heights--on the other side of Marquette thar. Acocks was my Doctor. He's a nice feller--he's still docterin. He's not in the T.B. business anymore. He's got a little office on the othar sid of Marquette, you know, whar that rock wall is by the prison? Off the right thar, comin this way, ne lives in a little yellar house--he got a little office of his own thar, in his house. Last time I went thar, I stopped in to see him. Than I had to go all the way back up to Morgan Heights to get my x-rays. The guys I know in Morgan Heights thar, said it all takes time. (Pauses)

Interviewer: Sam, when you came up here for the very first time, did you say you were quite young then?

Sam: Yah--I use to come to Michigan alot to cut cordwood, I was thirteen years old thar. I worked all my life in saw mills and everythin else trying to make a livin. I was too young to sign my own checks, I had to get an older man that was a friend of mine to get my check and sing it then turn the money over to me. One time a camp foreman wanted to take me in and give me room and board and have me wolk just for that. I told him I could make more on my own then just room and board--he just wanted to take advantage of me. (chuckles) I tried to work and go to school all at the same time--things were tough.

Interviewer: Sam, can you remember anything tragic or humorous really funny that happened on your travels to Michigan?

Sam: No, the only thing is the I can remember that happened thar was funny is I stuck my head out from the tarp holder so I could try to see, and I stuck my head out and I had somethin like a fish hat on and the next thang I saw (laughing) was it rolling down the road like a sheel--and I never did get it back.

It wasn't too farr before we had to pull off, we walked back up thar and we couldn't find it. I spose maybe somebody else found it and picked it up. (pause) Thar wasn't too much funny stuff agoin on than.

Interviewer: What kind of a vehicle did you call that truck you came back and forth in Sam? (Tarpolio)

Sam: It was a big semi truck with a load of people in the back. All crowded up on the benches and a place on the floor where the little ones lay and like that and rest. Yah--famlies and the whole works came over like that. It looked like a tarp over the back of the truck--just like the old covered wagons use to be. Yup. (pause)

Interviewer: How many people came on one trip?

Sam: Oh--I'd say about twenty-five or thirty. Yah, each time. Well that wasn't my first time, I had been back and forth alot.

In the summer time, when it was warm up here, when we'd get into the woods up here, we'd come up and cut cordwood and then we'd go back in the fall of the yar. Than guys that we knowd real good we'd get a gang together and come up to Traverse City and pick char-ries. And that last time I come up, I come up with a man by the name of Authnor Practor--he stayed up here for awhile and went on up north somewhere and got killed in his old truck. It jackknifed and he we nt over a hill and it killed him. And that was the last time I came up from down Kentucky to pick cherries. My brother came over on Sunday and picked me up and I had a couple other friends with me and they stayed for a shole summer just about and than they went back. They didn't like the wood work too much. (chuckles) They were my friends from town and I lived out in the country of Kentucky. We was friends--I mean the whoe darned town knowd me. (chuckles)

Interviewer: Was it a little country town?

Sam: Yah--a little smaller than Newberry. It was in the hills, ain't too big. I'd say twenty-five yars ago or thirty, they had a sign along side the road 1,500. (chuckles) I knowd it grown biggern that, but that's the way they kept it. (pauses)

Interviewer: Sam, you mentioned about your schooling earlier, can you tell be a little about that? How old ere you when you went to school and how old were you when you had to drop out?

Sam: You can drop out when yar sixteen yars old and tha's when I dropped out. I was the biggest one in the class I was just about as big as I am now. Because I got ashamed of goin and sittin thar in the grades with the othar kids you know, and I didn't like goin than. They wanted to teach me than when I got that old you know, but I said no, you wouldn't learn me when I was small yar not goin to learn me now and that's when I quit. (pauses)

Interviewer: Did they have all of the kids in one classroom?

Sam: They had a big classroom, but they each had separate places and like that. The first grade would be ovar on that side, about half way, and than the third grade in the back and the fourth up in front of them. The eighth grade was as high's it went and they was all in one big room. Thar was alot o kids, thar was about twenty kids in my grade alone! (pauses)

Interviewer: Did you have just one teacher?

Sam: Yah--one teacher takes care of them all. We heated the room with one of them pot belly stoves right in the middle of the build- ing with coal. Yah--When I got to be about fourteen the teacher gave me the key and told me to come build a fire in the mornings and that's what I done and I got frosh water for drinkin and like that

thar.

Interviewer: Did you have a Male teacher?

Sam: Yah--well, sometimes his wife would come and teach when he had to go somewhere or if he didn't feel like come in. It wasn't too bad, but hell, with me I just get to school about time for dinner, bout noon, and I just knowd somethin was up! And somebodied come along and the teacher come look for us big ones and we'd have to go and fight the fires! We'd have to go in the woods and rake around the fires and keep the fires from gettin away. We would have to do that for a few days. We used rakes or hoes to keep the leaves back and watchd so the fire wouldn't go over it. (pauses)

Interviewer: Did you live very far from school Sam?

Sam: Oh--about five mile, I might have to run to make it bare footed and the frost cracking between my bare toes. (Off the tape, Sam said he was always so happy to see a fresh cow pie along the way to step into it to get his feet warmed up! He didn't think he should say that on the tape.) We lived down in the hollars, people har call them valleys, but we called them hollars down by the creek. It was pretty--I loved it it the spring, all the flowers and stuff smelled so good ya know. (pauses)

Interviewer: Were your schools located in or near the town?

Sam: No, that was a country school. It was about sixteen or seventeen mile away from town.

Interviewer: So how did you get to town?

Sam: Walked!! Or we might ride an old wagon with a horse or and old mule. Usually walked and no shoes. Times warn't good. Some-times we had sombodies hand-me-downs. I remember one time, mom

went to the commensary store, you know, like a second -hand-store and you could buy things that were used, and she bought me a pair of shoes for ten cents. They war old lady shoes is what I called um. They come plumb up to thar. Nine inches or so and they had buttons that came across, and they had something like a hairpin they used to catch and button them. I was ashamed to war them to school too-- women's shoes--(chuckles). We had to war whatever we could get! In the winter time, I war gunny sacks. Down thar, we called them coffee sacks, we use to get coffee in tham. We would make tham mocasin style to keep warm. We used the twine from the bag, just pull it through and wrap it around. We sometimes used just any old shoe we could find, maybe just the sole of it, maybe nothin; we wrapped our pants down in like that--good and snug--they war warm. We would be playing all day long, they'd get pretty ragged by the time dark id come! (chuckles) The kids that had to do-- they war shoes. But like me, my brothers and sister had to war whatever we could get. Tham were the good old days though, we had good times. (chuckles, pauses)

Interviewer: What other things did you do for entertainment besides play ball?

Sam. We went to the shows weekends. I remember what they wanted ten cents to see a show. (chuckles) The first show I ever saw was a silent, black and white show --something about Lawrence--it was all quick motions you know, it all moved so fast back in tham days you know, that you really had to keep your eyes on it or you'd miss a lot of it, like that. It's a flash--than it's gone! (pauses)

Interviewer: Did you have any farm animals?

Sam: Yah--we had goats, mules, horses, and a cow. Course, my mother,

sister, and brothers, we never had a home of our own. We lived at Big Sandy's--we stayed at an aunts and uncles up thar. When we lived up thar, they wanted to dump slate from the coal mines in that big hole in the back of the house war we lived and the house was in the way. We had to get out or they would have buried us up right in it, we had to get out! That's when I was six yars old. That's where mydad was buried at Big Sandy's and I was back thar once in the night and I never got to go ovar and see the grave or notin.

My mom never remarried, she had to raise us as best she could. I remember seein blood run all down her hands from scrubbing clothes on the warshboard all the time. She washed clothes mostly for the company--guys that came in from the coal mines--they stayed at a hotel or something like that. She would wash all thar clothes. She had to pump the water right thar, just like the old camps from around har, they nad pumps yars ago. I seen water so low down thar that you might have to go to the river or the creek and bring yar warshboard and hand -wringers and hang the clothes over brush right thar. They had to haul water from that same place, carry it on thar backs, wheel barrows, or whatever you could get for drinking water and to warsh in and like that. (Guys that worked in the mines stayed in that company place.) That was back about thirty-five or so in Hoover's time. Hard times than and people were scratching just to get somethin to eat. We had gardens some of the time, if we could afford the seeds to put in. Most of the time we couldn't afford to buy the seed. We'd plant tomatas, a few beans and some- thin like that. Raising potatas was hard--they growed about the

size of marbles, we never had special fertilizer or like that. We had an aold mule and plow to do the land, nobodied help--you had to do it all yarself. The neighbors had about the same as we did you know, we did what we could. If we had to build a house or somethin like that they'd all help out as much they could. Not like now adays, no one helps anyone! (chuckles)

Interviewer: What do you miss about Kentucky?

Sam: Oh--not much, I guess I miss the good times I had thar. I had to come har, I can get my breath better since I come har. I think my brother would have been better off if he would have stayed too. He stayed har farr a while, but he didn't like the wintars, so he didn't want to stay. Thar wintars are not as hard as har, but they are harder on ya! The cold down thar would go quicker through ya than up har. It's a damp cold. Like in March down thar, that wind feels like it goes right on through ya. Har it's springtime. I like it nar better, because when spring comes it starts warmin up. Down tnar, we were puttin out cabbage and stuff too, but still in the mornin the frost and the wind cuts loose. (chuckles, pauses)

Interviewer: What about moon shining Sam, did you ever get involved with any of that?

Sam: No--I never did get into that. My brother did and I rode with him, most everybody did moonshine, I never did fool around with any of that. They use to sit up one the hills with thar guns. They watched to see what you gonna do, you know, tend your own business and just go on is what I did. Stop, and they don't know you, they start throwing lead at you. (off tape--I knowed a couple guys that killed men in Kentucky, I don't want to tell on them, but they had to come up har to get away from the law.)

That's thar living--that's what they live on. Someone come tar it up on um--they would just give um some lead!

Well, my brother, he knowd quite a bit about it. I'd just sit in the car and go with him. I'd never get out of the car--I didn't want to be into it as anythang would happen, I wouldn't want any part of it, I didn't know notin! The authorities didn't mess with them much. Well thar was a hill ovar har and a hill over har (R&L) and a hollar thar (middle), you don't have much chance of getting away or escaping if you tried anythang. You see two before you get up thar, you can't get back in thar where it's at, they ain't vary friendly, and back in thar you ain't evar goin to make it back out! (chuckles) Mrs Terrian (neighbor) she was down thar, har this wintar, stayin with her boy, while she went to her sisters as well. She said he still carried a gun right with him all the time still. Things haven't changed too much down thar. (pauses)

Interviewer: Well Sam I have really taken up alot of your time and I sure appreciate it. Is there anything else you would like to add to all of this?

Sam: Well, I just about said it all that I know, tough, but good. too. Nobodied starved but, thar war times when I thought we might.

Interviewer: What was your favorite food at that time, that you were not use to getting?

Sam: Oh--like, ice-cream, milk-can milk from the store! Thar wasn't too much of what we didn't get a little of like in the summer time from the gardens, but in the wintar times it was a little different too. Yah--in the summer we had the drippings set back on the stove always, and we would pour it over tomatas and hot peppers crumbled all up and fried, and pour it over the top like that.

SAM COLEGROVE

Sam is married to a former Arlene Fair of Newberry, Michigan. Sam is fifteen years older than Arlene and they have eight children. They have six girls and two boys. Their oldest son is thirteen years old and is a downsyndrome child. They have three children living at home yet. They have several relatives that live here now but are originally from Kentucky. They also have several other relatives that still live in Kentucky.

Apparently all of Sam's family from Kentucky has had T.B. or some other kind of respiratory system. Sam thinks they all caught it from the coal mines in Kentucky and never went to the doctor to have it taken care of until it was too late. Sam is often times in and out of the hospital and is completely disabled because of his disease.

This is additional information which is not pertinent, however, after the taping, Sam spoke of this information.

MOONSHINE HORSE

After the tape had been completed, Sam told me about the horse his brother John owned and it was trained especially to ride for moonshining. When Sam rode the horse for pleasure he learned all of it's habits quickly. One foot in the stirrup and the horse was in full flight. If you were riding towards a fence the horse wouldn't go around it but would jump it. If Sam took it for a ride down the rode for a few miles, the horse would make such sudden stops in front of certain places, that Sam was thrown over the horses head several times, they were moonshine stops. If the horse heard someone yell to stop, it would run.

Sam chuckled through that whole story.

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3. Children work to help support family
4. Sam hospitalized at Morgan Heights
5. Age 13 working in saw mills
6. On the way to Michigan- Humorous story
7. Sams Schooling, embarassed by bigness and having to wear women's shoes to school.
8. Coffee sacks to keep feet warm in winter
9. Entertainment
10. Father's burial place
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12. Hoover's time
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16. Warm greas drippings over vegys, rare to get ice cream or milk
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