

Transcript of OH-00037

John Wesley Thompson

Interviewed by
John Wearmouth

on
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Typographic Note

- [Inaudible] is used when a word cannot be understood.
- Brackets are used when the transcriber is not sure about a word or part of a word, to add a note indicating a non—verbal sound and to add clarifying information.
- Em Dash — is used to indicate an interruption or false start.
- Ellipses ... is used to indicate a natural extended pause in speech

Subjects

Thomas Stone National Historic Site (Md.)
World War, 1939-1945
United States Naval Powder Factory
Excavations (Archaeology)
Architecture
Agriculture
Horse racing

Tags

Habre de Venture
Beehive Lodge

Black masonic Lodge

Transcript

John Wearmouth [JW]: This is John Wearmouth interviewing Mr. John Wesley Thompson at his home on Rose Hill Road near Marshall Corner about what a mile and a half from Port Tobacco would you guess John? The date is April 25th, 1991. This is part of the Charles County Community College Oral History Program. While John is not a native of Charles County he's lived here many, many years. In fact since 1946?

John Wesley Thompson [JT]: 46.

JW: 46. He has lived right here pretty much on this location since then. Not exactly in this house but he's lived on Rose Hill Road since that time. He's a native of the State of North Carolina and was born there July 8th, 1920. We're gonna be discussing with him his life at Habre de Venture while a member of the staff of the family who lived there, the Peter Vischer family. We'll talk to him some about the changes in the Port Tobacco area and black history. He's a member of the Beehive Lodge over at Pomonkey. John you were as I said born in North Carolina, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

JT: Well I have three brothers and four sisters.

JW: And how many are living today?

JT: All living.

JW: Where did you fall in the age range? Oldest youngest?

JT: I was the first boy but the third child. I mean fourth child.

JW: What did your father do to support the family?

JT: Farm.

JW: Okay just the plain old hardworking dirt farmer?

JT: Right.

JW: What was the big crop for him?

JT: Tobacco and cotton.

JW: Okay and this was what a smoke cured cotton down there? A smoke cured leaf?

JT: Smoke cured.

JW: Okay not like the air cured leaf that—

JT: No.

JW: Is popular in Southern Maryland. Okay and you went through high school. As you were growing up you probably had to help your dad a little bit on the farm.

JT: Oh yes.

JW: So one of the first things in life you learned was how to farm?

JT: How to farm.

JW: Did your father help his sons through school like by paying them a little something for the work on the farm or was it just for room and board?

JT: Well he always would give us like an acre of tobacco or an acre of cotton.

JW: Okay that's a good idea. So what you made was all yours to keep?

JT: All yours.

JW: About how many acres was he farming?

JT: ...About 30 acres.

JW: Okay and that was a lot of work to keep a family going on 30 acres.

JT: Right.

JW: Then let's see your dad was born in 1873 and he was descended from a free black family?

JT: Right.

JW: Were there any stories ever told about how the Thompson's way back got their freedom and what way did this come about?

JT: Well see my grandfather died before I was born and my grandmother she just always talk about the family of people that she said they felt so much of them till they just gave them.

JW: I see okay. This did happen quite often. Did you ever hear the name of the white family mentioned?

JT: They was Thompson but there was only, after I was born, there was only two ladies left living. Because they was right at the house with my grandmother when she died.

JW: So there was real friendship there.

JT: Right.

JW: Alright I won't dwell too much on your life in North Carolina but you did go through high school at [Hillsborough]?

JT: Right.

JW: And you graduated what year?

JT: Hmm.

JW: Now we got a problem here. About 19 what, 1938, 37 would you say?

JT: Must've been 37.

JW: That should be. How many of your brothers and sisters got through high school?

JT: All.

JW: Okay and that was pretty remarkable wasn't it in that time?

JT: Yes.

JW: For an entire family to get through high school. Okay so what got you thinking about coming up in here into Maryland? This was a heck of a long way to come.

JT: Well I got up here by being through error. A man was recruiting for Indian Head and he was telling me about how much money people was making. I come up here I was pretty well deceived.

JW: Oh really?

JT: Because I came up here and had to work for less than I was making less than I was making in North Carolina.

JW: Oh no. Just before you came up here what were you doing in North Carolina?

JT: That's when I was working in [National munitions]. We were doing the filling—finishing work on 20 ml [inaudible].

JW: 20 millimeter shells?

JT: Yeah.

JW: What were they paying you an hour down there?

JT: I was getting 85 cents an hour when I first started there as a machinist and came up here and we wasn't making about—I don't know it was 6 dollars or something like [inaudible] was making when I first started.

JW: And this was a federal job.

JT: Right.

JW: Federal employment. Were you married when you came up here?

JT: Yes.

JW: Okay and I should say my wife and I have known you and your wife for about 35 years believe it or not. What was your wife's maiden name?

JT: She was a Holeman.

JW: Okay a Holeman I'll get that down here. And her full given name was Lorene?

JT: Lily Loraine.

JW: Lily Loraine Holman. Is there a d in that? Holdman or Holeman?

JT: She spelled it H-O-L-E-M-A-N.

JW: Okay Holeman alright. When did you get married now what year?

JT: I got married in 44. Of course I married just before I came to Indian Head.

JW: So the two of you came up together?

JT: No she came about a month after I came. I had to find living for her for—

JW: Where did you live over there?

JT: I lived in it was called [Perry Wright] at that time but it's called Woodland Village now.

JW: Alright I know where it is. It's almost backs up to the Mattawoman doesn't it?

JT: Right.

JW: [Inaudible]. They've been in the news ever since for one sad reason or another.

JT: That's right.

JW: But I think things are looking up for them now but it's been a hard road, a hard road.

JT: Yeah.

JW: So how long did you live there now?

JT: I only stayed there for about 18 months.

JW: Did you rent a house or live with someone?

JT: Rent a house. See at that time the government had all those houses.

JW: So that was the counterpart to the white housing establishment.

JT: Right.

JW: On the other side of Route 210.

JT: Right.

JW: Now were those houses built at the beginning of World War Two?

JT: Yes.

JW: Or before that?

JT: They was built during the war.

JW: So they were pretty new when you were there?

JT: Right.

JW: What was the—

JT: All of them wasn't even finished when I was there.

JW: What was the quality of construction now that you know something about it?

JT: They were just frame buildings. There was, you know, quick like prefab put up.

JW: What kind of foundation? Peers, solid concrete?

JT: Yes.

JW: Wood?

JT: No there was—was just I believe that was just a concrete slab put down under the house.

JW: Okay. Did they have running water in them?

JT: Yes.

JW: And toilet facilities?

JT: Right.

JW: And what was the kitchen like? What went with the house in the kitchen?

JT: You've got a refrigerator, a stove, table, and four chairs. That's all that went with that.

JW: What kind of stove was this now? What did you cook with?

JT: Gas.

JW: Gas. The furnace for the house was what sort of heat?

JT: You had—what was it—it was oil heat.

JW: Okay. So it was not a bad—

JT: No it wasn't.

JW: Small but reasonably comfortable.

JT: Small. Only two bedrooms.

JW: You remember what they charged you for it? Was there a rent? Monthly rent?

JT: Yes it was a monthly rent but it's been too long I don't think [inaudible].

JW: Yeah. Maybe not more than 30 dollars a month?

JT: I think it was something like 45.

JW: Oh yeah okay.

JT: With utilities included.

JW: Who were some of your neighbors there? Have you kept in touch with any of the people that you first met in Charles County?

JT: No because most of the people that was my neighbors were people that had came there from out of state and soon as the war was over they all left.

JW: How did you happen to stay here in Charles County? Did you like it that well?

JT: Well I'll tell you I.... After being leaving my job in North Carolina I didn't want to go back there. I said I think somehow or another I'm gonna better myself and I'm gonna stay. Tough it out.

JW: Did that turn out to be the way of it?

JT: Yeah it turned out because—

JW: Looking at it from this perspective right now where we are it wasn't a bad decision?

JT: No it wasn't a bad decision.

JW: Did any of your brothers and sisters ever come up here to live?

JT: No. My one sister went to New York. Only two that left the state.

JW: Isn't that something. That's remarkable this part of the century. Okay what was your next job after Indian Head? And what happened to cause you to leave the Indian Head job?

JT: Well—

JW: End of the war cut backs?

JT: There was a reduction in force so my supervisor advised me to go to Patuxent. I transferred and went to Patuxent but I didn't like it down there so I left.

JW: And then what was the next major step for you?

JT: Well—

JW: Career wise?

JT: I left there and I stayed in Washington for a couple of weeks. Then it was a lady I was—I don't know how I got in touch with this lady—and she said, "I know a man that want a couple." She said, "I think they're living and got a place out in Virginia or somewhere." So she gave me the address. I mean telephone number. I called them so I went over for an interview and he said yes he needed somebody right away. So we talked and talked and then after he was telling me [where his place was] straight down there in Charles County.

JW: Not Virginia at all.

JT: No it was not Virginia this is Charles County.

JW: And you knew that from having lived down here.

JT: Right so I came down to the house and I said, "Oh my lord. I've been to this house before." Because he had a man that stayed there part time. That man used to pull some big parties over there that I [someday] was going.

JW: Oh really? What was his name?

JT: Can't think of the man's name. Course see I only went there through somebody else. He was—I don't know whatever happened to the man because we came there I never seen the man no more.

JW: Black or white?

JT: Black.

JW: I'll be darned. Well okay so when did you first meet Peter Vischer? The colonel.

JT: It must've been in May of...must've been 47.

JW: Okay May 47.

JT: Because I know he came with me down to this house showed me what the house was just in a mess. So he said, "I'll give you all a month or so to get in." Straighten out and we'll be down.

JW: We're talking about Habre de Venture?

JT: Yes.

JW: What kind of a mess was it in?

JT: Well it looked like they just moved in and everything was just bundled up then.

JW: Where were the Vischer's living?

JT: They were living 2134 [Inaudible] Street and all.

JW: And who was his wife at this time?

JT: Ruth.

JW: Ruth. She had been a [Fleishman]?

JT: Yes.

JW: So they came down in about a month?

JT: They came down in about a month.

JW: And you and Loraine managed to put that place in some kind of order?

JT: Right.

JW: Who helped you? I mean you must've had—

JT: Oh we had—let's see they had a couple over there on the farm. [What was that man's name]. 'Cause see his wife she knew a lot about the house and everything because they'd been there for a while. So she'd come over and give us assistance and getting things straightened up.

JW: Had she worked for Stevenson Smith before?

JT: This lady that—

JW: Yeah.

JT: No.

JW: Who did the Vischer's buy that place from do you recall?

JT: ...Probably I know they got it through Mr. [Snide].

JW: Okay the local real estate man at that time. Does the name Stevenson Smith ring a bell with you at all?

JT: Well I know he was the man that had it prior to them yeah 'cause I heard them talk about it.

JW: What was the condition of the grounds when you and Loraine finally moved in? Had they been kept up fairly well?

JT: The grass hadn't been—the lawns hadn't been taken to much care of.

JW: Where your living quarters there?

JT: We lived right in the house with them.

JW: In the unit on this end?

JT: Yes.

JW: Okay up above the—

JT: Up above.

JW: Above what they were using for the kitchen. You had a couple of good size rooms?

JT: Right.

JW: Upstairs?

JT: Right.

JW: Now when we moved here in 1958 where were you living then?

JT: He had [inaudible phrase].

JW: Okay that was a brand new building.

JT: Right.

JW: Didn't John [Sasser] build that?

JT: He built it but he didn't trim it up. I don't know what happened with him and Mr. Vischer because I know that—John told me one day, "Well this is it with me." And I said, "Well what happened?" I said, "I thought that he had so much he was gonna do." [Everything] he said, "I don't know. He just suddenly everything's over."

JW: Ran out of money.

JT: So then I talked with Mr. Vischer. I said, "Who's gonna do the trimming out of that building?" I said, "The walls and everything's up but it's gotta be trimmed out." He said, "Well if you wanna stay there you trim it out yourself."

JW: No partitions upstairs? Where were they in?

JT: The partition—

[Simultaneous speaking]

JW: The window and door trim was not in?

JT: No.

JW: Was it wired?

JT: Yes.

JW: Was the plumbing in?

JT: Plumbing was in too.

JW: Were you able to finish it?

JT: Oh yeah.

JW: When did you and Loraine move into that apartment?

JT: We moved in there....

JW: I think we were living here when you moved into that.

JT: I believe you was too.

JW: 59 possibly?

JT: Probably 59.

JW; Yeah because I remember John [Sasser] working on that and also working on that brick tool house I guess that's what he called them.

JT: Right.

JW: When you first talked to Peter Vischer, what was the understanding you had about what he expected you to do at Habre de Venture?

JT: Well when we first met the decision that we came on that all I had to do was butler and chauffeur his wife because at that time he was working so.

JW: He was still in Washington was he?

JT: Yeah. He was going to Washington every day.

JW: How many years later did he start staying here full time and gave up his job in Washington?

JT: 1950.

JW: Okay so you had been here about four years, three and a half years at that time.

JT: Right.

JW: When did Peter seriously get into horses? Horse raising?

JT: ...Must have been—it was around about 1950 when he really.

JW: Okay so when just a few years after you started living here he was already into horses.

JT: Right.

JW: Because I remember when the second stable was built by somebody named Johnson.

JT: Right.

JW: Built that so that's 1959 or possibly 60 when that was built. What was the condition of the house inside when you and Loraine moved in as far as the appearance was concerned? Did it look like it needed some restoration work?

JT: Well it did need restoration and I can't think of this man's name from Washington that did a lot of work in that house. Did the paneling and everything and the library.

JW: Now was about this time in 56 that he bought our house across the road and started rebuilding it.

JT: Right.

JW: Because I first saw in January of 1958 and it was finished and ready to move into at that time. So John [Sasser] worked on our house. Stone's [throw] and also on—

JT: The garage.

JW: The garage and the tool shed. And what were some other of John Sasser's big building projects at Habre de Venture?

JT: Well the old tenant house over there he had to do a lot of restoring of that.

JW: Okay across the creek there?

JT: Right.

JW: Across the valley okay. Who was living in that when you arrived in 46 or 7?

JT: It was Leo Edelen was living in that.

JW: Edelen?

JT: Yes.

JW: Okay. By himself or was there—

JT: No he had a family.

JW: Oh.

JT: He had let's see one girl, two girls—well one girl didn't stay there too often. And he had three boys.

JW: Did he farm?

JT: He farmed.

JW: He was a farmer okay. Did you ever get back into farming here at Habre de Venture? The way you had experienced it as a boy?

JT: No not really I used to do—

JW: Not into planting, plowing, harrowing, [disking]—

JT: Well sometimes I would do it.

JW: Okay you knew how to do it didn't you?

JT: Yes if they were going away I would do it.

JW: While you were doing that John did you ever run into any section of the fields where you were turning things up where there might've been an earlier house or building of any kind? Chunks of china, belt buckles, bits of—

JT: Well I don't recall any belt buckles but—

JW: Old dishes, pans—

JT: But you'd always run into some bricks. Old bricks [at different times].

JW: Where were some of these places? You were out there working in the fields even before [Lenco] got here.

JT: Right.

JW: So this is important because some archaeology has been done at Habre de Venture in the past four or five years that has been surprisingly unfruitful in places where I felt sure they would find traces of earlier buildings there were none, none.

JT: Well—

JW: The big field out there by the little tenant house all by itself. We had thought there would be some remains of slave cabins but we found no trace of them. Nothing. Did you ever work that field?

JT: I worked that field. I didn't ever see anything over in [those fields] either.

JW: It was clean. But if there had been some frame structures there built on wooden posts they could have disappeared completely but still you think you might find a door hinge or—

JT: Or an old doorknob.

JW: Yeah something like that. The archaeologists that tested in that field found no proof of anything. But now going down beyond that little tenant house walking toward [hog hole run] all along that bank on your left are stones. A lot of stones.

JT: Right.

JW: How the heck could they have gotten there?

JT: I don't know. And you know coming from the house you where the old swimming pool used to be?

JW: Yeah, yeah.

JT: All down in that bottom if you go down there I don't know what all them bricks unless they built up a foundation to hold water or something.

JW: May have been a reservoir of some sort. When you and Loraine moved there what was on that site where the swimming pool was built? Or was the swimming pool already there?

JT: No. It was nothing but—it looked like it had been used like if you was tearing down old buildings like they were throwing all the materials down there to build that up.

JW: It was the dump, the dump.

JT: Like it was a dump.

JW: Who was responsible for building that swimming pool? Was that primarily Mrs. Vischer's idea?

JT: I think that was his idea. Because he hid—if you go down there you know where the pump house it at?

JW: Yes. Or was.

JT: Was. Well you know he hid—he had [Joe Lee] to put in like a little earth house. I don't know whether you've ever seen the door down there that went into that.

JW: Yes, yeah. What was that for?

JT: Put vegetables and things in it.

JW: Okay root cellar.

JT: Yeah root cellars.

JW: Now what year did the first—well it was really the second Mrs. Vischer who had been a [Fleishman]. What year did she pass away?

JT: In 1949.

JW: Okay after a while as I understand.

JT: Right.

JW: When did you first meet Mrs. Vischer number three?

JT: Well—

JW: Helen [Carusey] Lombard Vischer? [Let me turn this case]. So where did you first meet the Helen Vischer that my wife and I knew first? Now as I understand she was a [Carusey]. Her father was president of the national law school in Washington. And then she married a Lombard and then she married Constantine Brown and then she married the man that we both knew Peter Vischer.

JT: Right.

JW: When did you first meet her?

JT: I must've met her in...first in the fall of 47.

JW: Okay when she was still married to Mr. Brown?

JT: To Mr. Brown.

JW: And you said they came out here and visited once in a while?

JT: Right.

JW: When Peter Vischer was still married to wife number two?

JT: Sure.

JW: Okay so you knew Helen Vischer almost as long as you knew Peter.

JT: Right because—

JW: Give or take a year or so.

JT: And then she had a maid who worked for her which was a friend of ours so I was constantly over at the [they] house.

JW: Okay and you said too that for a while Habre de Venture was just considered the summer home—

JT: Summer home.

JW: Of the Vischer family and also of you and your wife.

JT: Right.

JW: Now where did you stay in Washington? At their house?

JT: Yes they had a three floor house. We stayed on the third floor.

JW: Was this close to Georgetown?

JT: When you cross over Florida Avenue you are right in Georgetown. So they just in the edge of Georgetown.

JW: Do you recall when Helen Vischer and Peter came down here as man and wife to live full time?

JT: ...It was sometime during the year 1950.

JW: And you and your wife then lived in what we call the kitchen wing of Habre de Venture?

JT: Right.

JW: And [stayed] lived there in my guess I guess near to about nine or ten years.

JT: About nine or ten.

JW: Now when were your two children born? Who is your oldest child?

JT: Linda.

JW: Linda and what year was she born?

JT: 1953.

JW: And she was born right here?

JT: Right here.

JW: And Percy when was he born?

JT: He was born in 54.

JW: Okay. And the young lady. The third one of your children. Who we sort of grew up with.

JT: Right.

JW: The one we call DeeDee?

JT: Yes.

JW: And my daughter went to school with her and they're still friends.

JT: They—

JW: In fact my daughter in law also went to school with DeeDee.

JT: Yeah.

JW: She's doing very well. That young lady.

JT: DeeDee came up—we adopted her in 1967.

JW: And where was she born?

JT: Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

JW: Okay so she's a native of North Carolina.

JT: Correct.

JW: Well you should be proud of her. I know you and Loraine always looked on her as a daughter.

JT: Yeah.

JW: And she's been a good friend of my family as long as she's been here. Okay now back to the farming because it's very important to the research being done on Habre de Venture. Anything you can remember John about other buildings? Any traces, any clues as to where there might have been other building. It's very important in the research. It's proved to be a very difficult thing. See we know from our research that before 1700 there had to be buildings including a house at Habre de Venture. We don't know where. We have no idea where.

JT: Well from the time that I went there you know where the little brick [round] place was? It was a two car garage.

JW: Alright now the Stone family has told me that.

JT: And then—

JW: Frame? A wooden structure?

JT: Frame yeah wooden structure.

JW: And was it two car garage size?

JT: Right.

JW: Okay.

JT: And down from—well just like you're going down to the little earth house—

JW: Right towards the swimming pool.

JT: There was a little old wooden shed. Something like I guess about a 8 by 12, or 8 by 10 or something like that. Now why it was sitting out there right in front of I don't know but it looked like it had been there for years.

JW: On the hill side?

JT: Yes.

JW: Going down towards the swimming pool site?

JT: No it's farther [inaudible]. Do you know where the old pump house was?

JW: Yeeha back toward the road.

JT: Right.

JW: Toward the stable?

JT: Right.

JW: From the swimming pool

JT: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Down in that area?

JT: Down in that area.

JW: Okay now the Stone family has said that they used to get there water down there using a ram.

JT: Right.

JW: There was no electricity and the only running water up in the house came from that spring down there not far from the swimming pool.

JT: Right.

JW: Was that ram still visible when you?

JT: No.

JW: Okay that was all gone.

JT: That was all gone.

JW: So this story I'm going back to maybe 1915 or 20 and I've been able to talk to people John that lived in Habre de Venture or used to visit there as early as 1906. What do you think of that? At one time the Wright family from Nanjemoy was farming Habre de Venture for Mrs. Margaret Stone. I recently interviewed an 80 year old man—85 I think—who moved into Habre de Venture with his family in 1906. Started going to school at Port Tobacco about 1908 or 9 when he turned five years old and walked all the way as a little tiny kid. And they lived where you lived in that house. The extension. The house on the end where the kitchen was.

JT: Right.

JW: That's where the Wright family lived. They moved in 1911 and went back to Nanjemoy but he farmed for Mrs. Margaret. Then there was black lady named Lorena Butler.

JT: Who lived?

JW: Right here. Within a few 100 feet of where we are was Jacob Butler's house.

JT: Right.

JW: Now you have any idea where that was? Jacob Butler's house?

JT: You mean back in here?

JW: Yeah.

JT: Yeah I know where [it is].

JW: Okay good. Now if she's still living she's close to 100. But she used to go over to Habre de Venture walking across this back road here.

JT: Right.

JW: And visit the young very short black woman who worked for Mrs. Margaret, Mariah. Did you ever hear of Mariah? Maybe not but the Stone family know of her. She described for me the conditions of the kitchen. Mrs. Margaret cooked and ate in the dining room. That was her kitchen because the other part of the house where you and Loraine lived in was being used by the farm manager.

JT: Right.

JW: So she didn't have that. But I thought you'd like to know that, that we had gone back and talked to people—

JT: Sure.

JW: Who are still living the last I knew. So you're sort of helping me bring it up to date. So can you think of anything else that was standing there or signs of something like the smoke house which was near that garage you just mentioned? There were two buildings the wash house and a smoke house.

JT: No but when we were planting shrubbery out there and stuff you'd always be running into concrete or something other down there [inaudible].

JW: Bits of mortar and bricks?

JT: Right.

JW: Okay.

JT: It looked like they mixed the stuff with lime or something other back in those years or something.

JW: So between that brick garden house that Peter built and the end of the apartment, the garage, or between the stairway that goes up on the outside, were two buildings standing at least when the Stone's were there in the 1920's. Now had they disappeared?

JT: They disappeared when I was there.

JW: Okay. So we know about that. But there's no proof yet about where the slave cabins stood. Now I have an idea. Let me throw this at you. That back in the field by the tenant house there is so little really good agricultural land at Habre de Venture.

JT: Right.

JW: But that field was one of the best wasn't it?

JT: Yes it was.

JW: The soil and the size of it. It doesn't make sense to me that an intelligent plantation owner would have put slave cabins out in the middle of his best land.

JT: It don't. [Inaudible phrase]—

JW: Now along the ridge where the land drops sharply from the tenant house which still exists as we've mentioned a lot of stone along there. A lot of stone from big pebble size to size that you could hardly lift.

JT: Right.

JW: Now my feeling is that possibility that the slave cabins were along that slope.

JT: Well that's what I'm thinking.

JW: Along that slope with these stones being the foundation.

JT: Right.

JW: Because that land was not good for anything else because it couldn't easily be plowed.

JT: No.

JW: And when you have horses, and oxen, and mules drawing your farm equipment you were concerned about what kind of land it was.

JT: Right.

JW: So does that sound reasonable?

JT: That sounds reasonable to me. But you know when I first when I lived they had two—he had two big old Belgian horses.

JW: I understood that Peter was kicking around the idea one time of maybe even raising those. Did you ever hear him mention?

JT: Well he did say one time he was gonna do that and then he changed his mind.

JW: What happened to those horses? They were big ones weren't they?

JT: He sold them to somebody.

JW: 1,600 to 2,000 pounds.

JT: Right.

JW: Per animal. And then I understand he was interested in raising hogs.

JT: Well—

JW: A particular strain.

JT: Well he—they came out with a Minnesota number one hog. So he fenced in all that land right over there. So at one time we had—

JW: How far are we from that piece of property from here? We could get to it right through the woods here couldn't we? Where the hog house was?

JT: No it's straight over by Andrew White's house.

JW: Oh okay.

JT: You see that—wait a minute. I'm trying to think of John [Sasser]. He probably built that hog house too.

JW: It looks fairly new.

JT: He probably built that.

JW: It looks fairly new yeah.

JT: Because at one time we had 200 and some head of hogs. Because I used to have to—when people buy them like over on the Eastern Shore I'd have to take the truck and [carry] the load on over there.

JW: So during your stay there he really got into pork?

JT: Right.

JW: Huh.

JT: And I started [I mean] the poultry.

JW: Oh did you? Now that's what I remember. See I don't remember the hogs.

JT: I—

JW: I remember the white turkeys.

JT: One spring we came out there from Washington. So I said to him one day, I said, "Mr. Vischer how about buying—call down there and see if southern state can't get us 50 turkeys." He said, "Who gonna raise them?" I [said], "I will." He said, "You don't know about raising no turkey's." I said, "I know more about raising things than you think I do." Just like that. So he went on—he went on and purchased them. And out of—in that little house I'm telling you there were about ten by—oh 8 by 10—

JW: Down on the slope?

JT: Down on that slope. He said "Where you gonna put them?" I said, "Put them in there." [Got them as a day old]. Put them in there. Fastened them up in there and I fed them and watered them. So when they got up when they was large enough to get on outside and run around—

JW: You got 50 of them delivered?

JT: 50. And out of 50 I raised 49.

JW: Boy that—that's a great [inaudible].

JT: He said, "Oh this is impossible. This is impossible." So we killed them all that fall around—

JW: What year do you think we're talking about now?

JT: We talking about...this must've been around about 52.

JW: Okay and you still had hogs?

JT: Yeah we had hogs.

JW: Okay. When did you begin to wind down the hog business?

JT: We winded it down after two years.

JW: What went wrong?

JT: You see when a new breed comes in and you—and you sell all these sows and males out you get flooded with them. Then you [ain't got no sale for them]. The only thing you can do is raise them and send them to the market fast.

JW: Okay so in the beginning it looked pretty good?

JT: It looked good.

JW: As a market. Do you remember the Post family? Henry? From [Holland]? That were here just before the—just before the [Lenco's] arrived?

JT: Yes I remember them but I didn't—they wasn't that long enough for me to get really acquainted with them.

JW: Maybe only a year.

JT: Right.

JW: We're in touch with them. We know where they are.

JT: Oh you do?

JW: We've written to them yeah. He was a very intelligent man and had a lot of formal schooling in agriculture.

JT: Right.

JW: And he was the one that told me about the pigs, the hogs, and the—

JT: Well did you ever? They had another man over there in that house called [Inaudible].

JW: I haven't heard anything about him John. Black or white?

JT: White.

JW: [Inaudible].

JT: He didn't stay there too long.

JW: In the house the [Lenco's] are in now?

JT: Right. I don't think he was there [inaudible]. Course see at first the [Lenco's] was in the other tenant house.

JW: Oh were they?

JT: They didn't—they wasn't in the house that you know she gave to his wife.

JW: So you really didn't know the Post family? Hank is name.

JT: No.

JW: I think they had at least two sons when they were here. Where did the Post's live? Which house?

JT: They lived in the same house as Andrew and them did.

JW: When was that house built? After you arrived?

JT: Yes. The house was going up when I first came down there. Because I know—you know when this little house that's down there at the foot of the hill? On the left hand side? Adam used to live there. Right down at the bridge.

JW: Oh you can hardly see it oh yeah.

JT: The man that used to live in there built the chimney. Course I remember going over there one afternoon with Mr. Vischer to look and see how the chimney and fireplace was gonna look. [Laughter and inaudible phrase]. I said to Mr. Vischer, "If the wind blow hard that chimney's coming down." Showed up the next morning and it was down.

JW: Oh you're kidding.

JT: When it fell down he paid some fellows to clean the brick and the whole thing he had to go back and build it over again.

JW: What was his name was he a Langley?

JT: No he was a Adams.

JW: Adams, Adams okay. That house I guess is owned by the Compton family.

JT: Yes. See—

JW: —the edge of the swamp there.

JT: Yeah. See they were gonna sell that piece of land and I was gonna get it so Mr. Compton seen me talking to the man and so he went right then on and bought that.

JW: Oh boy wouldn't you know. Okay so do you remember when the [Lenco] family arrived here at Habre de Venture?

JT: Well you see I was in Washington at the time that they arrived I was there. So he told me about—he got a couple from. He said, "That's gonna be a hardworking man." Which he was.

JW: And he was yeah. He could do a lot. He could do a lot.

JT: He could tear up a lot of machinery too.

JW: Oh I know that. I remember driving the old truck they had there for a while with no brakes on it.

JT: And you know I remember one year when we was over there baling hay for Mr. Judge Mitchell—that was the old man. So he came out—

JW: Over here on Mitchell road?

JT: Yeah he came out—

JW: Near the college.

JT: And he said... Well he brought some ice water out to me or lemonade or something of that sort.

JW: The judge did?

JT: Yeah. So he said, "How do you run that baler? It don't never bust," he said, "That other fellow he busts as many as he bales." I said, "Well it's because he's running the tractor faster than this motor can handle the heat." So Mr. Vischer he came running he talked to Judge Mitchell. He said, "Oh let me go get Andrew you'll be all day getting that." I said, "Go get him." He wasn't on there—he didn't make two rounds before he had to go back and bale what he done miss. So Judge Mitchell said, "I ain't"—

JW: The twine wouldn't work fast enough, right. Or was trying to work too fast.

JT: Trying to work too fast. See if you in heavy hay you got to let that baler have it's time to bale.

JW: Well he had a lot of fun with the tractors but they didn't have a good feel for machinery.

JT: No.

JW: He really didn't. How about the fields down towards that little telephone building off in the other direction? Did you do much plowing down in there? Any—

JT: Me and Andrew cleaned up that field. It wasn't nothing but pines.

JW: Oh really? Near that long low barn which has fallen down? Have you seen it lately?

JT: No I haven't.

JW: It's on the ground.

JT: It's on the ground?

JW: Yeah it's on the ground. That was an old one wasn't it?

JT: Yeah it was old.

JW: Because I remember helping Andrew with my son and I one year with the hay and we were storing it in that building.

JT: Yeah well one winter while they was in Jamaica me and Andrew took [inaudible phrase] [commandeering] old steel wheel tractor. We took long chains and we pulled up them pines. We first went through the center pulling them up. And then we pulled and so we had everything in the center of the field and then we plowed up around on both sides and set ourselves a fire and burned it up.

JW: Now what field was it? After you get past what we call the duck pond there? Yeah was it the very first field?

JT: No, no it wasn't that one.

JW: You went down past that old barn?

JT: Yeah the large field out there.

JW: The next field between that old barn and the telephone?

JT: Right.

JW: That field was cleaned off by you. That was a big field. How many acres would you say were in there? How many acres did you clear?

JT: I guess that's about—

JW: 12?

JT: About 10 or 12 acres.

JW: That'd be my guess. Did you uncover anything when you were pulling those trees up that there was anything in that field you would have seen it?

JT: No we didn't—we didn't discover anything out there.

JW: You pulled the trees up roots and all?

JT: Right.

JW: Well that's very important because pulling trees up by—

[Tape Interruption]

JW: So he wasn't exactly a professional farmer?

JT: No.

JW: What did he ever tell you about what he had been doing during his life? How close were you able to get?

JT: Well—

JW: Do you feel you ever really—

JT: He had a place up there called Pleasant in Pleasant Valley when he first moved to Washington. I think and he's talking about—

JW: Where's Pleasant Valley?

JT: That's up in [inaudible phrase] I think. But whoever he had did all the work and he probably just go out there for exercise you know.

JW: It was a farm and country place was it?

JT: Yes. He always said he was gonna take me up [that way]. It never did materialize.

JW: Did you go with him to the race tracks from time to time?

JT: Yes I did. I had to usually. I had to take his wife up and meet him up there at the race tracks. We'd go to Charlestown, Pimlico, [inaudible]. When he'd go up to the New England estate most of the time he [inaudible].

JW: What were some of the best of the Vischer horses during the—during the 50's the early years of his raising?

JT: Arch Rival.

JW: Okay that was the big winner?

JT: That was the big winner.

JW: What was his all-time winning figure? I heard it one time.

JT: Let me see now [inaudible phrase] Thomas Stone.

JW: Oh is that right? Now Thomas Stone was as they say old?

JT: Yeah.

JW: While we were here. So we're probably going back to what about 1961 or 2 maybe.

JT: Right because in the—I know in 66 he told me he didn't want another winner. 'Cause it was gonna make him pay too much tax.

JW: Oh. Whatever happened to Arch Rival?

JT: I think Arch Rival finally died.

JW: Here?

JT: Yeah.

JW: About how many horses were here at the most active period when he really was into it deep?

JT: I guess we had about—we had [five brood mares] so. And they all had foals every year so.... About ten at one time I guess would be about tops.

JW: It was a pretty sight wasn't it?

JT: Oh yes.

JW: To see those young ones playing around in the field. John while you were living in the house was there anything especially attractive about the decoration of the old kitchen? Were there any clues as to where the kitchen was originally? Because I know where it was when you and Lorraine were active there. Was the kitchen in any other part of that building before you arrived?

JT: No that stayed just about as it was when we first went there.

JW: Okay have you ever heard that the kitchen was located in the other room downstairs?

JT: No.

JW: Where the little bathroom was put in. That's true that was the first kitchen there.

JT: It was?

JW: I found a photograph of it recently.

JT: You did?

JW: And they've uncovered it. You ought—you can take a look at it. A great big brick fireplace there.

JT: Yeah.

JW: And I think the original iron crane—

[Speaking at the same time]

JW: Yeah that's still there. And one of the Stone girls, Mrs. Lybrook told me about it and gave me a photograph so that's been a big help to the National Parks Service.

JT: Right I know.

JW: So we gotta go over there and look around some day. Would you like to?

JT: Sure.

JW: Okay now was there a bathroom upstairs in that part of the house? When you were there did they ever build a modern bath up there?

JT: Yeah.

JW: Okay and there was the one downstairs too?

JT: The one downstairs. This was like—see there's two bedrooms right on the end. And then there's another small linen closet in the kinda hallway—

JW: Oh yeah.

JT: Going up to [this room and the bathroom].

JW: Yeah I've been in that linen closet yeah. Now did you know that originally going up the main stairway of Habre de Venture to the center hall down at the end of that there had been a small room too.

JT: Yes it had.

JW: It was still there when you arrived?

JT: Yes.

JW: Was it still there when the house burned? I just draw a blank. I just can't see it. I was upstairs only a couple of times.

JT: I don't—I believe they just made that into a large linen closet.

JW: Could very well be. That was used in early years in this century as a bedroom for Mariah. The little black woman who stayed there—

JT: Well that was the bed—that was the bedroom for my two kids.

JW: Is that right?

JT: Yeah.

JW: Well now that's interesting. Your kids are going to enjoy listening to this tape. How—what were the dimensions of that little room?

JT: Let's see I guess that must've been...it was longer than it was wide. It probably been about—

JW: The width of the hallway. How wide was that hall upstairs? do you have any idea?

JT: It was a narrow—it was a narrow hall. [But there] was two windows so there was light you know.

JW: Was that little bedroom as wide as this porch here?

JT: No it wasn't as wide as this porch. It must've been like from about from here over to there.

JW: So maybe six feet?

JT: Right.

JW: What's the width of this porch?

JT: It's about...

JW: Eight or seven?

JT: It's about seven.

JW: Okay so then what would be the depth of that little room? It was deeper than it was wide would you say?

JT: No it was wider than it was deep.

JW: Oh was it?

JT: Yeah.

JW: Okay so now the doors to the two bedrooms upstairs were pretty close to that partition weren't they?

JT: Right.

JW: So you couldn't bring that wall out much or you would hit those doors?

JT: No, no you couldn't bring it out too much.

JW: Okay. What was the condition of those fireplaces when you were there? Did you ever help build fires and feed fires in those old fireplaces?

JT: We only did it one time when something was wrong with the furnace. Now the library and the backroom which she called the great room. Now those—fires were regular in those. And very, very seldom there'd be a fire in the dining room.

JW: The little room downstairs there?

JT: Yeah. Occasionally they would put one in there but not often—

JW: How did that flue draw downstairs in the dining room?

JT: It drew good.

JW: It had a good flow to it?

JT: Yeah.

JW: And how about in the library?

JT: It had a good pull to it in the library also.

JW: Did you ever see those flues cleaned out?

JT: No. Never.

JW: I think that proved to be pretty costly. They never had the fire department come out? Drop chains down or? You never dropped turkey's down or anything like that?

JT: Well I'll tell you, in that little office part...that caught on fire in 1969 and the fire department came out there and put it out. Other I'd got a ladder and had to hold running water but you see on little shingles and things when it was burning I didn't have pressure enough to get to it.

JW: Oh yeah and no way of getting to. I think I remember that. I heard about it later. [I don't know what it was] [inaudible].

JT: 'Cause I know that fire department come out there and so she went out there talking to them. A man said, "Nah. You gotta lock that dog up in the house or ain't nobody gonna get out."

JW: Which dog was that?

JT: Heather.

JW: That crazy dog.

JT: See that dog wouldn't listen to nobody.

JW: No yeah she was mean too. I remember Shipmate was the first one we ever saw.

JT: Yeah. Admiral [Fletcher] gave me that dog.

JW: Oh really? What was the basement like John when you arrived? What kind a floor was down there? Concrete?

JT: Concrete.

JW: Dirt? Okay. Were there electric lights in the basement? Did they run electricity down there?

JT: Yes.

JW: And what kind of a heating system was there in 1947?

JT: That was an oil.

JW: Okay. I remember seeing that furnace sit in that big open pit.

JT: Yeah sitting down there in the—

JW: Do you know they just recently smashed that apart with sledgehammers?

JT: Did they?

JW: Three or four weeks ago I went over there and I heard all this noise in the basement. So I wanted to know who's playing around.

JT: Right.

JW: And the National Parks Service had hired two men from Virginia and they were using big eight to twelve pound sledgehammers knocking that iron apart so they could move it out of there.

JT: Right.

JW: So by now it's probably all out—

JT: I don't know how they got it in there.

JW: That's interesting. How did they get it in there?

JT: 'Cause you see going in there it's too low.

JW: That's right yeah but there it was. And that used to flood once in a while didn't it? You'd see water in that?

JT: Yeah because I pumped it out many times.

JW: Now let's see there was steam heat throughout the house when you arrived?

JT: Right.

JW: The radiators were still in place?

JT: Yes.

JW: So and you have seen the fireplaces work upstairs once in a while?

JT: Right.

JW: When you were without electric power.

JT: Only once in a while.

JW: How did they draw?

JT: Well they drewed pretty good but I was scared to light them because you know when you haven't had fire in a place for a long time—

JW: I would be too. Those were not lined were they? Those chimneys.

JT: No.

JW: Just the brick.

JT: Just the brick.

JW: But you never during your period there had a chimney fire?

JT: Only just one time.

JW: And that was in the law office? Not in the big house?

JT: Not in the big house.

JW: Okay did Peter [Vischer] make any changes at all on the house? That is structural changes? Any carpenter work? Who cut that whole up in the gable end? On the kitchen side of the house there's some sort of a square opening up there. It was not original.

JT: Well that was—that was running that water from the swimming pool up there through the air conditioning.

JW: Oh when the heck was that done? Boy that would really do it that water was frigid.

JT: Yeah that but it worked for about two years and after that I don't know what happened. And he never did have anybody to do anything to it.

JW: So I think the Park Service has closed that hole up. I don't know why he needed such a big one. Jesus about what two and half feet by two and a half feet? Way up high in the gable end.

JT: Right.

JW: Okay were you ever up in that attic space?

JT: No.

JW: I was just wondering what that was like up there. Did you see the house burn John? Were you there that night when it was on fire?

JT: No.

JW: You didn't—

JT: Course when I heard all this I ran and I tried to get in there they wouldn't let nobody. They wouldn't let nobody through.

JW: Well my wife and I got there but we cut across fields running and we climbed three fences.

JT: I know.

JW: Just to get there and when you got there there was nothing you could do. I remember trying to tell the Fire Department people that there was water in the swimming pool. They didn't know about that. And then there was water in the duck pond and they didn't know about that. They were going down to Route 6 to get water from the Port Tobacco River. That house I think could've been saved. Finally a pumper came from Waldorf and they allowed Peter and me to take them down to the swimming pool. We broke a hole in the ice there so they could get water and then the guy found out that the pump was frozen on the truck. Somebody had not drained it and they came over in freezing weather. It was 19 degrees out that night and when we finally got them to the water they should have been using they couldn't get it because the pump was frozen on the truck. What were some of the biggest crops that were produced at Habre de Venture while you were there? From 1947 on?

JT: Well the—

JW: What did best on that land?

JT: Tobacco. Tobacco was the best growing thing on that land.

JW: How many years did Peter Vischer grow tobacco?

JT: He didn't grow it too many years—

JW: I never saw it.

JT: Because he didn't have nobody that knew anything about tobacco.

JW: I see and you could've done something. If he'd given you 20 acres you could've made money for both of you.

JT: Right.

JW: Where did he grow the tobacco? What field.

JT: Also over there where the old tenant house was.

JW: Yeah, yeah.

JT: [That] and on that hillside down there. You know when it's—

JW: Oh yeah sloping down towards [hog hall run].

JT: Yeah.

JW: That would've been good tobacco grounds.

JT: That was good tobacco grounds.

JW: I remember when it was full of potatoes. I remember one year I can remember harvesting potatoes there.

JT: And corn, corn grew very well out there by the old, you know, past the cemetery going up.

JW: Oh up past—in that field?

JT: Right.

JW: Okay yeah I remember the swim—the pond he tried to put in down there that would never hold water.

JT: Right.

JW: And he lined it with black plastic?

JT: Yeah and then he got a lot of [this old clear] out of Georgia but it still didn't hold.

JW: It didn't and the ducks kept chewing holes in his plastic? And that's after the local conservation people. Mr. [Stillwell] told him it wasn't gonna work.

JT: That's right.

JW: He didn't listen to them so that was a disaster. But I've seen three or four good size bass caught out of that when it still had water in it.

JT: Yeah I got them out of there [inaudible].

JW: Well it did if he could've found some way to seal it. Where did he get the water for that? That little pond. Did he have to pump it up there?

JT: Pumped it from the spring.

JW: Oh I see. I guess that's all gone now. Do you recall when Helen [Vischer] started putting in her big flower garden out there where they had this little statue with the bow and arrow? Was that her idea? Was that her plan? To put in a formal garden?

JT: No. That was—that was put in—that wall brick wall was built by a man over there at La Plata called [Beluca].

JW: [Beluca].

JT: Yeah and it was—the lady she did now [Madge] Freeman. While she was married a [Lawson's] before she died. She made the mortar and waited on him as a brick mason.

JW: Well I'll be darned is this Salome's family?

JT: It's Salome's sister.

JW: Is that right?

JT: Yes.

JW: For heaven's sakes.

JT: She didn't want to work in the house a lot. She wanted to work outside.

JW: Well good for her. Now who was living at Habre de Venture when that wall was built? That brick wall which has been taken down incidentally. Were the Vischer's there then?

JT: Yeah.

JW: They must've been. Was Helen living there then?

JT: No.

JW: Mrs. [Fleishman] was there when that wall was put up?

JT: Yeah. She was there when the wall was put up.

JW: So the garden was not entirely Helen Vischer's garden.

JT: No, no.

JW: See people don't understand that.

JT: No. It's Ruth [Vischer]. All of them plants was hers.

JW: I see.

JT: Of course see she'd have an architect come out and she'd want flowers planted just according to where he put a dot.

JW: So it was all thought out ahead of time.

JT: Right.

JW: Did Mrs. Vischer continue her plan do you know?

JT: Yes.

JW: Keep things—she kept things pretty much in the same pattern?

JT: Right.

JW: Same location? Did Ruth Vischer work much herself in the gardens?

JT: No.

JW: But I've seen Helen Vischer out there working.

JT: Yeah she, she would work.

JW: With her own hands yeah.

JT: Well this other lady she had—see she knew she had [inaudible].

JW: She was not well enough to do it.

JT: No and she—she was a heavy drinker. She'd drink all the time.

JW: Yeah I guess there've been more than one at Habre de Venture with that way.

JT: Right.

JW: Enjoyed the drinking. There've been some good parties there though haven't there been? Out on the lawn pacing the terraces.

JT: Were you over there when he had those parties for the disabled veterans?

JW: No, no I missed those.

JT: See he used to—

JW: When was that?

JT: That was like back in.... Oh that must've been back in the 50's, 51 or 52.

JW: Probably before we arrived. We started living here in July 1958.

JT: Well that was before that time. 'Cause he used to have them on the Fourth of July. And they used to bring three of four busloads out there.

JW: From, from Washington? From the soldiers home you think?

JT: Walter Reed.

JW: From Walter Reed okay.

JT: Yeah.

JW: So what John can we put down on this tape that might be important to people wanting to restore Habre de Venture? Any changes made to any of the rooms at Habre de Venture while you were there at all?

JT: No they—they tried to—you see they had a photograph of the pictures that they had up in the museum and they tried to keep everything just as they had it in the museum.

JW: Okay yeah I took pictures myself of the room—

JT: But you know the outside appearance of the yard and things when I first went there you know just like—did they take up that old brick wall going up to the front door?

JW: I think it's—it's just all covered up now. And then there's a flagstone walk coming from the front of the house sort of at an angle across the field. Here and there you can still see one of the stones. Maybe when we get down here take a ride over there and I'll show you what's going on.

JT: 'Cause see when I first went out there you remember when the old baler used to sit out there?

JW: Oh boy yeah. The old baler? Yeah the baler.

JT: No the old [denabale]

JW: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes, very well.

JT: Well you see that—

JW: Whatever happened to that?

JT: I don't know.

JW: Charlie got it?

JT: And you see there was a wide brick wall.

JW: I remember that.

JT: About four feet and then they had like a wooden trellis made that you'd walk under with this wisteria coming up on both sides.

JW: Ah you could walk through it.

JT: Right you could walk through it.

JW: Whatever happened to that?

JT: Well when they got out there in the house they wanted all that stuff took down.

JW: The Vischer's did?

JT: Yeah.

JW: See I never saw it. I never saw it. Did—what did the Vischer's use for a garage when they—they had that what 57 Oldsmobile which you used to drive once in a while.

JT: They used that old garage.

JW: Okay now what year was that old garage taken down?

JT: That wasn't taken down till John [Sasser] came.

JW: Okay so then I must have seen it. Now the old building that was there at the right as you came in the driveway and just before that left turn to bring you up to the back of the house, that very old building that looked like the carriage house?

JT: Yeah.

JW: In that building was where the Stone family kept their car at one time. And then they almost had a fire there one day. The car caught on fire and they managed to push it out before the building caught on fire. As you know that building's gone now.

JT: Oh it is?

JW: They tore it down. The government did. Because it had a lot of termites in it. Anyway did John Sasser make any changes to that big barn down by the [Lenco] house? The cattle barn The big one, long one.

JT: No he just tried to straighten up what was there.

JW: Okay and the corn house, the corn crib?

JT: No he didn't do anything.

JW: He didn't do anything to that. And then the smaller barn right next to the corn crib? Did he do anything to that?

JT: No.

JW: Okay that's all rebuilt now have you seen it?

JT: No.

JW: We gotta get back. It's all brand new. What was there when you remember is gone.

JT: It's gone—

JW: [Inaudible] took it lock stock and barrel away but they kept all of the original timbers that were still pretty decent and they rebuilt it to look the way it looked about 1850. So we'll have to take a look. I keep taking pictures of these things. Okay so we—we just can't recall you ever having seen traces of other buildings at Habre de Venture during your work on the fields?

JT: No.

JW: I should talk to Audrey but I don't think he will. I don't think he'll do this.

JT: He might if you catch him in a good mood.

JW: Yeah. He's afraid I'll ask him some personal things and all I want is to know about is Habre de Venture. Okay were these good days for you and Loraine living there?

JT: Oh they was good days.

JW: For the most part?

JT: Good days.

JW: Did you find the colonel a little difficult to get along with?

JT: No in fact you just had to know how to approach him.

JW: I never did figure that out.

[Laughter]

[Tape Interruption]

JW: ...He was pretty serious about it.

JT: Yeah.

JW: I mean he hit that ball like he was gonna bash somebody in the head. Boy I'll tell you. Was he a good horseman? Did you ever see Peter Vischer on a horse himself?

JT: Yeah he used to ride once in a while—

JW: I never saw him on a horse.

JT: He didn't do it too much.

JW: And some of those crazy clothes that he would wear. Yellow pants at one time, plaid and then that Tyrolean hat with a feather. He was some dresser wasn't he?

JT: Indeed he was.

JW: Did I guess eventually you sort of took turns with Andrew driving them up to the track. Andrew would once in a while do it wouldn't he?

JT: Yeah. He didn't care for Andrew driving him somehow though.

JW: Oh really?

JT: He wanted me to drive.

JW: Well if Andrew drove the car like he drove the tractor you know?

JT: Yeah.

JW: Pretty wild.

JT: Because I remember one time we was coming back from the track and we was—I was running about 55 miles an hour and there was a car in front of me and so Andrew says, "Pass him! Pass him!" Just like that. So he says, "Is you driving?" He says, "If you don't like the way he's driving you can get out."

JW: Peter said that?

JT: Yeah.

JW: Oh boy I'll tell you. Did you and Loraine have your own little vegetable garden while you were there?

JT: Sure.

JW: Okay did you do any canning of your own?

JT: No we didn't do—we put some in [deep creek].

JW: Okay at least there was always something to eat around wasn't there?

JT: Right.

JW: Did you do any grocery shopping for the Vischer's?

JT: I did all of them mostly.

JW: Okay I was wondering about that. Where were—where were some of the stores that you used to go to? Here or in Washington?

JT: Well most of the time we did most of the shopping in Washington.

JW: Okay where were the favorite places?

JT: Giant Food up on Wisconsin Avenue.

JW: Near the place in Georgetown?

JT: Yeah. But see I [inaudible] right there off of....

JW: Did Charles live in the same house that Helen and Peter had lived in up there?

JT: No.

JW: Different house okay? Who were some of the society friends that used to come down and visit at Habre de Venture?

JT: Well—

JW: Who were some of the big names that you can remember seeing there?

JT: [Joan] [inaudible]... [Trying to think of this man that was here from New York]. I mean Chicago [inaudible]. Mr. [Burt] Andrews and his wife.

JW: I guess we should put on the tape too the fact that the Vischer's were very active in the Republican Party.

JT: Yeah.

JW: Weren't they?

JT: Yes.

JW: Did Richard Nixon ever come to Habre de Venture?

JT: No.

JW: To meet Mrs. Vischer. I don't know how that story got started. Somebody said that Mrs. Vischer had some part in the decision to run Richard Nixon as the presidential candidate. Did you ever hear that?

JT: No. Now she used to go over to the White House and have tea with Eisenhower's wife.

JW: Oh that's interesting. Mayme?

JT: Yes.

JW: Did either of the Eisenhower's ever come down to Habre de Venture?

JT: No.

JW: And then there was the [Pecks] they were friends.

JT: Oh yes. Gentleman [Mr. Peck]... Mrs. [Burroughs].

[Inaudible phrase]

JT: And Mrs. Catherine Posey, you know.

JW: I guess she was a good friend of Helen [Vischer's].

JT: Yes.

JW: I guess at one time Peter got involved in this Port Tobacco restoration. Do you remember anything about that?

JT: Yes see I know he—

JW: Who was the name of that artist that they got to help with that? A pretty well known Washington artist. I can't think of his name.

JT: I can't think of his name now either.

JW: But they got him down here to do some free work I guess on behalf of the Port Tobacco restoration and built some buildings for the fair grounds and props. Did you see those at Port Tobacco how it used to look? Peter and Helen were involved in that.

JT: Yes. Much work we had to do down—

JW: Boy. Well what—how did you feel about seeing the [Lenco] family arrive on the scene? Did you have much warning at all of their coming?

JT: No. He just said he had a Ukrainian couple.

JW: Okay and all the sudden there they were.

JT: Yeah.

JW: How old were their children when they arrived? Were all three of them—was Stevie born here?

JT: [I'm trying to think]. I believe she was born here.

JW: So when they arrived there was only Willy and [Maru].

JT: Willy and [Maru].

JW: Maru being I think the older—

JT: Yeah she's the older.

JW: Of the two kids. And then they moved into the old tenant house when they arrived. About how long were they there in that house?

JT: They wasn't there too long 'cause when the other couple left he told them that they could move over there in the other house.

JW: Okay and at that time the other house was still pretty new wasn't it?

JT: Yes.

JW: Pretty good condition.

JT: Pretty good condition but it had a—it had a wood furnace in it.

JW: Which I think it still has.

JT: It may still have the wood furnace 'cause I know I. One winter there they had snow on the ground and he couldn't get out in the woods much to get no good wood to burn. So I told him I

said, "Andrew," I said, "There's a white oak tree right down below my house there so. It was hit by lightning so it's down." I said, "We can get to that easy." I said, "Let's go in and cut that up."

JW: Where was your house then? Where were you living at that time?

JT: I was living over there but somebody else was living in my house at that time. We came over there and cut that tree up. Loaded it and carried it over there. He told me, "You know that's the best burning wood that I ever had."

JW: White oak?

JT: Yes because it's bone dry.

JW: Yeah it's seasoned. John when did you start constructing this house that we're in right now?

JT: In winter of 1952.

JW: Okay and I think I want to say for the purpose of this tape that we are sitting here oh less than 50 feet away from the old Glymont Road. Did you know that?

JT: Right.

JW: This is the old major road between Port Tobacco and the wharf at Glymont.

JT: Right.

JW: Now a short distance beyond us here is [hog hole run].

JT: Right.

JW: How far are we from [hog hole run]? In feet. 1000 feet?

JT: May haps at 2000 feet.

JW: Okay now when Michael Robinson Stone was working at Habre de Venture and he lived there till what 1932. He died and the family sold the house four years later. He used to teach school over here near Ripley. And he would ride through your woods here on horseback, hit this road about here, sometimes go in and have a cup of coffee with Jacob Butler's family, get back on his horse, and go along this road [poured] that stream there was no bridge there, and then go on maybe another mile or so where the little school was and it's no longer there. But a couple of his kids went to school there because their dad was teaching there. And I talked to them about walking to school. You know where the old road came behind your house from Habre de Venture?

JT: Yeah.

JW: Okay I'd like to take a look at that. And then hit this old main Glymont road and on to Ripley. And the rest of the road you can pick it up here and there for quite some distance today even.

JT: Oh you know this land that this house is sitting on it was not originally Habre de Venture.

JW: Was this part of Mattingly's [Hoke]?

JT: Mattingly [Hoke].

JW: Okay you're right. You've done your homework. It's on the deed?

JT: It's on the deed.

JW: Is that right? How far are we right now from where the property line was between Habre de Venture and Mattingly's [Hoke].

JT: You see where the trees are marked out there?

JW: Yeah, yeah. That's it?

JT: That's it.

JW: How did—this was part of the Vischer property though when you started building?

JT: Right.

JW: I wonder how it got added to Habre de Venture and when?

JT: Because see I was gonna get the land on the other side but he said, "As long as this was not original Habre de Venture he'd let me have this for much less.

JW: I see. Peter said that? So he was concerned about that sort of thing, history?

JT: Right. He said, "This wasn't really Habre de Venture." And [inaudible] he said he don't know how it got added on to that property.

JW: What's left of the old Jacob Butler house? Foundation?

JT: Foundation I guess would be the only thing.

JW: Did you any of the Butler family?

JT: One of the—

JW: One of the men he worked over here.

JT: Yeah he worked over there as long as they had horses.

JW: Yeah Lorena's brother. What was his name?

JT: [Inaudible] Butler.

JW: Yeah that's right. And one of that family—no I'm sorry one of the Woodland family is buried in the cemetery. You know Charles?

JT: Yeah.

JW: You know Charles.

JT: Oh yeah.

JW: Let me see now, I think I can get this straight an. An uncle of his I think—

JT: Probably his uncle.

JW: He died he worked for Habre de Venture and he was poor and they couldn't find a place to bury him so he's in the cemetery over there. The Habre de Venture cemetery. Now who was responsible for maintaining that cemetery while you were employed by the Vischer's?

JT: Vischer maintained it himself until he got all the horses. When he got all the horses he—I don't know why—he told Andre to take the fence up that was around there.

JW: Was there iron fence around there or?

JT: No it was just a wire fence.

JW: Oh I see to protect the iron fence. The old one.

JT: Yeah.

JW: Who mowed the grass and trimmed around the gravestones? Was that something that Peter took care of himself?

JT: Yeah.

JW: Okay.

JT: Always before garden tour. Usually I'd go over there and cut the grass you know.

JW: So it was never let go so to speak. Always maintained by the family pretty well?

JT: Because always somebody coming in there want to go over and see that cemetery.

JW: Yeah that's true. Yeah I remember when [Senator] Mathias and the Lieutenant Governor of Maryland came down to pay a visit in 1976, the 200th anniversary of the country. I was there. Helen was there kind of alone and I went out and met them and I don't where you were in 1976. Were you there working in Washington? It was after Peter died.

JT: No I went to work there—no I didn't start—yes I was in 76 too because I started working in Washington in 1970.

JW: Yeah you would've been there.

JT: On June the 1st 1970 is when I started work up there in Washington.

JW: Huh. Yeah Lieutenant Governor Blair Lee and [Mack] Mathias came down to Habre de Venture the 4th of July 1976 to put a wreath on Thomas Stone's grave and Roberta and I were there and some friends of ours and Mrs. Vischer was alone so I went out and introduced myself and brought them in and introduced them to her. They were all on the back porch and then we went out to the grave and I took pictures of the group there that day. What primarily were the responsibilities of the Thompson family? Your whole family was involved in Habre de Venture wasn't it?

JT: Right.

JW: Even Percy coming along. What were some of the chores that Percy had to do as a young man?

JT: Well he helped in our garden and he did most of the cutting of the grass and everything around.

JW: When they were entertaining I guess he had to do whatever—

JT: A lot of times like on Sunday evenings if she's going to have 10, 12 people in my son and daughter both would stay there to [inaudible phrase].

JW: Whether they liked it or not.

JT: Right.

JW: Well how do you feel that benefited them did you learn some of the social graces so to speak that kids weren't learning anywhere else in those days.

JT: Well yes I think it did and it gave my son the approach to cooking also.

JW: Yeah and he—they have a lot of poise both of them. It may be growing up at Habre de Venture was a good part of their growing up experience.

JT: Right. Because he got to drive a tractor and everything when he wasn't even old enough to be—

JW: Yeah, yeah. And they fit in, they fit in very well. And DeeDee was too young wasn't she?

JT: Right.

JW: To get involved in that sort of thing. Where did Percy and Linda go to high school?

JT: They went to La Plata.

JW: Okay both of them. And what year did Linda graduate?

JT: Must've been...I think she was I'm trying to think because—

JW: Did Linda graduate during the years of segregation or integration?

JT: It was during the year of integration.

JW: So she's a La Plata high school graduate?

JT: Yeah she graduated in an honorary society.

JW: That's great. And how'd Percy do in school?

JT: He did alright in school but he refused to go to college. Because he was a 'A' student in math.

JW: What a shame. What is your daughter Linda doing now? What is has her career turned out to be?

JT: Well she's turned out to be, she was parole and probation she's a pretrial investigator.

JW: Oh and where's she working?

JT: At Prince George's.

JW: So she's working for Prince George's County. Okay and still living here near Port Tobacco?

JT: Right.

JW: That's something. And this has been a good home for you?

JT: Yes. Quiet.

JW: Pleasant. And you're far enough back from the road so you don't get a lot of that noise?

JT: Right.

JW: We get a lot more than you do. So anyways I said you'll be having some new neighbors pretty soon. I would guess right across there. Who have been your best friends in Charles County since you've been here? You and Loraine you're Baptists?

JT: Right.

JW: You've been Baptists at least since you've been here.

JT: Yes.

JW: And did you have a background in the Baptist church at home?

JT: Yes.

JW: So you're going to Zion now?

JT: Right.

JW: And have you gone to Zion from the very beginning?

JT: No I was with, I was down to Pleasant Grove—that's down in Marbury, Maryland—for quite a few years.

JW: Who was the pastor down there?

JT: They were at that time it was Reverend [Mull]. But the congregation all hated the man somehow or other. I thought I took him to be a very nice man but. And I did so much volunteer work down at that church. I did all the custodial work and furnished the communion for the communion service and then suddenly I went down there one day to do some cleaning and locks was changed on all the doors. And I talked to the chairman of the Trustee Board and he claimed he didn't know what had happened. So I said, "Well they just locked me out."

JW: And you've been a member of the Beehive for how long?

JT: We celebrated last year 30—my 32nd year.

JW: Isn't that something. Who were the founders of the Beehive, of that lodge?

JT: That was—

JW: Any of the Keys involved?

JW: Yes, Wesley Key Sr., Mr. [Adley], Mr. Edward T. Poole, Reverend Joe R. [Moden], and I think Reverend [Al Mulberry] was one of them too. And then there was Mr. Slater.

JW: Oh yeah. Slater. Okay I've interviewed his daughters. She's, she's Mrs. Marshall I believe.

JT: Yeah.

JW: Do you know her?

JT: Yeah.

JW: Living in La Plata. Let's see the Beehive—you're in a new building now aren't you? You have left the original Beehive building?

JT: Right.

JW: What's being used—What is that building being used for now? The original Beehive at Pomonkey.

JT: That building's torn down.

JW: Oh it is?

JT: Yeah. It was another [inaudible phrase]. They used to rent from there.

JW: Oh for heaven's sakes. Are you the only one from the Marshall Corner area to be a member of the Beehive? Now that's a masonic order lodge isn't it?

JT: Right.

JW: Okay.

JT: Now we got some more people that live down like in McConchie area that belong.

JW: How many black Masonic Lodges are there in Charles County? Do you know?

JT: Only one.

JW: Only that one?

JT: Only that one.

JW: And that's one of the oldest ones probably in Southern Maryland.

JT: Right.

JW: Have you ever gone to Pomonkey to Metropolitan church?

JT: Oh yeah sure.

JW: While you were at Habre de Venture John do you remember any of the Stone family coming back to visit from time to time?

JT: From time to time Ms. Margaret Stone would. She'd come back quite—

JW: Okay and how about Bessie?

JT: Yes she—

JW: Bessie Goth Stone. Do you remember her?

JT: Yes.

JW: Did they ever tell you any of the stories of life when they were living there?

JT: Well see I'd never be around them that much for a conversation.

JW: Yeah that's true.

JT: They used to talk to my wife about a lot of things. But she's not here to tell them.

JW: That's too bad. That's too bad. But anyway you do remember Bessie coming over every once in a while?

JT: Sure.

JW: I don't know where she lived at the time maybe, maybe Waldorf. Did you feel that the Vischer's knew the value of where they were? Did they respect Habre de Venture?

[Tape Ends]