An Interview with

John Bennett

at Ozark Regional Library in

Fredericktown, Missouri

20 May 2016

interviewed by Jeff D. Corrigan

Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

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PREFACE

John Bennett was born in Ironton, Missouri, on August 12, 1946. Since his father did general contracting work for several mines along the state's Lead Belt, Bennett grew up in Fredericktown, Missouri. After graduating from Fredericktown High School in 1964, he briefly enrolled at the University of Missouri-Columbia before returning home to work at his father's business. In 1966, Bennett enlisted in the Navy Seabees and served two tours with Mobile Construction Battalion 128 during the Vietnam War. Upon returning home in 1969, he enrolled at Mineral Area College where he completed his degree in 1971. In 1977, Bennett accepted a position as the Fredericktown City Administrator where he undertook a number of infrastructure and environmental projects. After serving as City Administrator, he worked in the engineering and construction industry, including time at LM Engineering and Hudwalker & Associates. From 1995-2008, Bennett worked for the Saint Louis Environmental Division of Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc. as a resident engineer and construction manager on projects in Texas, Minnesota, Florida, and Missouri. In this interview, Bennett discusses his life and career in Fredericktown as well as the mining history of Madison County.

The interview was taped on a CompactFlash card, using a Marantz PMD-660 digital recorder and an audio-technica AT825 microphone placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [ ] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets *[ ]*. Any use of parentheses ( ) indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [__]indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [_____(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Sean Rost**.**

Narrator: John Bennett
Interviewer: Jeff Corrigan
Date: May 20, 2016
Transcribed by: Sean Rost

[Begin Interview.]

[Begin Track 1.]

Corrigan: This is Jeff Corrigan, Oral Historian for the State Historical Society of Missouri. Today's date is Friday, May 20, 2016. We're at the Ozark Regional Library in Fredericktown, Missouri. I'm here today with John Bennett who's a local expert in the mining industry around here. We're here today with—let's see one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight other people that have been attending a workshop on oral history. An advanced oral history workshop, yesterday. And today, they're observing an oral history, and John has graciously accepted to be the guinea pig so they can see an oral history in progress. John, if you are ready to begin, could you start by telling me when and where you were born?

Bennett: I was born August 12, 1946 in Ironton, Missouri, actually. During that time, Fredericktown did not have a hospital so a majority of my classmates were also born in Ironton, Missouri, at Saint Mary's of the Ozarks Hospital which was the closest hospital at that time. I grew up here in Fredericktown. Went all through the Fredericktown school system.

Corrigan: Could you tell me a little bit about your family?

Bennett: Okay. My father was a general contractor starting about a year after I was born. He worked for many years doing contract work for the various mining companies in the area. So, I grew up not only with general construction, but also around the mines.

Corrigan: And what was his name?

Bennett: Willard Bennett.

Corrigan: And what was your mother's name?

Bennett: My mother's maiden name was Reba—R-E-B-A—S. Barber.

Corrigan: And could you tell us where you lived? Did you live in town or in the country?

Bennett: I lived in town. Early years, we lived over on Lindell Street in the southeast sector of Fredericktown. When I was seven years old, we moved to South Wood Avenue. And then, moved to South Main Street.

Corrigan: And you still live in Fredericktown today, correct?

Bennett: That's correct.

Corrigan: Where do you live today?

Bennett: 505 Marshall.

Corrigan: So, could you tell me what you did for fun as a child?

Bennett: The early childhood, I grew up in a neighborhood that had a lot of kids around my age. And at that time, we didn't have a leash law in Fredericktown so all the kids had dogs and we ended up playing Cowboys and Indians, and running with our pet dogs. Occasionally having to separate a dog fight. But, it was a fun time doing adventurous things such as exploring the nearby farmlands and roaming the neighborhood.

Corrigan: Now, did you have regular chores as a child?

Bennett: Yes, I did.

Corrigan: What were some of the things you had to do?

Bennett: Oh, the normal thing was keeping my room clean and making my bed every morning. As I got older, mowing the grass. Also did some tending in the garden, the family garden.

Corrigan: Did you have any siblings?

Bennett: I had two older brothers. They were considerably older. One was ten years older. The other was twelve years older.

Corrigan: What were their names?

Bennett: The oldest was Jim. The other one, who is still living, is Jerry.

Corrigan: Now, you said you attended schools here in Fredericktown.

Bennett: Yes.

Corrigan: So you attended elementary school here.

Bennett: Yes, I did.

Corrigan: Did it have a name?

Bennett: It was Fredericktown Elementary, but it was the old elementary school at the corner of Albert and High Street.

[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]

Corrigan: Did you have a favorite subject or teacher that you enjoyed?

Bennett: I liked all my teachers when I was in grade school, actually. But probably one of my more favorite subjects was history.

Corrigan: Was there a particular type of history you liked? Or time period?

Bennett: I actually enjoyed World History and American History, both. But I found the Civil War period to be an interesting period. I had trouble understanding at a young age what the Civil War was all about. Confusion between states' rights and slavery. And of course today, it's primarily accepted as being over slavery.

Corrigan: And you were already contemplating that in grade school? Or did that kind of evolve through grade school and high school?

Bennett: Well, it evolved. But early on, one of my teachers, I don't remember exactly who, did point out that there was a consensus of opinion that it was more over states' rights at that time.

Corrigan: Now, you attended high school then in Fredericktown?

Bennett: Yes, I did.

Corrigan: What year did you graduate?

Bennett: Nineteen sixty-four.

Corrigan: About how big was your class, then?

Bennett: One of the largest classes to ever graduate from Fredericktown High School at that time. We had 128 students graduate. We were the first year of the baby boomers. Right after the war ended.

Corrigan: Now, did you have a favorite subject in high school?

Bennett: Most of my studies in high school were geared towards pre-engineering, math, and the sciences. Chemistry and physics.

Corrigan: Why was that?

Bennett: Growing up with the construction industry, and my oldest brother who was twelve years older had gotten his degree in civil engineering from University of Missouri, and I wanted to, at that time, follow suit.

Corrigan: So were you already thinking about college early in high school?

Bennett: Right. During this period of baby boomers, ever parent seemed to have the dream that they wanted their kids to go to college. A majority of my classmates were preparing for this.

Corrigan: Where would a majority of the people go to school from here if they were going to college?

Bennett: Quite a few went to what was then the old Flat River Junior College. It's now Mineral Area College. And also Southeast Missouri State University. With the remainder scattered out to various universities and colleges throughout the region here.

Corrigan: Now, you just mentioned Mineral Area College.

Bennett: Yes.

Corrigan: But you said it was formerly something else.

Bennett: Formerly Flat River Junior College.

Corrigan: So is the name change—when did that occur? Do you remember?

Bennett: Actually, it was shortly after we graduated from high school. I don't remember the exact date, but I think somewhere around 1968.

Corrigan: And was that to better represent the area?

Bennett: Right. It became a community college within a community college taxing district. Whereas before it was different funding. I don't remember how it was funded.

Corrigan: So back in high school, what kind of activities or organizations were you involved in?

Bennett: I played football all four years of high school. Was a member of the Beta Club which is similar to Honor Society. Do they still have a Beta Club here? Yeah.

Corrigan: Did you work during high school?

Bennett: I worked in my father's business. Actually starting from—

[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]

Bennett: —about age nine, I used to ride my bicycle after school up to his place of business west of town and sweep the floors in the evening. And then he'd throw my bike in his pickup and we would go home for the evening meal then.

Corrigan: Did he pay you?

Bennett: He paid me fifty cents a day to—which was quite a bit for just coming out and spending about an hour sweeping floors.

Corrigan: Do you remember what you spent your money on back then?

Bennett: At that time, we had a local theater. Mercier Theater. In grade school, it was a big thing to go to the Saturday afternoon matinee and meet our friends there and yell and scream and carry on whenever the exciting parts of the westerns would come up, or whatever. We were kind of a rowdy bunch in the theater at that time.

Corrigan: Do you remember at all, back then, what the cost of a movie was?

Bennett: Not for sure, but I know it was less than fifty cents for a Saturday afternoon matinee.

Corrigan: And you mentioned westerns, is that the kind of movies you liked to go to?

Bennett: There were westerns, Tarzan movies. There was always a Saturday matinee serial, too. So, it became pretty much an every Saturday afternoon event.

Corrigan: Okay. Now, what did you do after high school?

Bennett: After high school, I attended [the] University of Missouri-Columbia. College of Engineering. At that time, we were the first baby boomer class. The campus was overcrowded. I walked in to my chemistry class and the first thing—well, they had to bring extra chairs into the lecture room because there wasn't enough room. The prof[essor] put the curve on the board and he said—he got down to the very last, he says, "Okay. Thirty percent of you will fail." And so, my first hard lesson in life that it wasn't going to be an easy go at that time. I ended up completing two semesters, but got put on the scholastic probation and decided to come home. Worked for my father with the intentions to go to the new Mineral Area College to bring my grade point up. But, unfortunately, that was kind of the escalation of the Vietnam War. The draft caught up with me during the semester I laid out, and received my draft notice and talked to recruiters to see what options I had. The Navy recruiter says, "Oh, you've been working in construction. I have just the thing for you. It's called the Navy Seabees." So I joined the Navy Seabees, and went to Vietnam for two tours with Mobile Construction Battalion 128. The first tour in Da Nang, and the second tour in Quang Tri.

Corrigan: Now, what is a—for somebody who may not know, what is a Navy Seabee and what do they do?

Bennett: A Navy Seabee is a cross between a Marine and an Army engineer unit. We construct facilities for various military organizations in war zones.

Corrigan: And you said it was the local construction battalion 128. Is that right?

Bennett: Mobile.

Corrigan: Oh, mobile.

Bennett: Mobile Construction Battalion 128. And we're having a forty-ninth anniversary celebration in Saint Louis in September as a matter of fact.

Corrigan: What primarily did you do in Vietnam?

Bennett: One of the first—

[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]

Bennett: —tasks my unit had was to build a complete cantonment, or base camp, for the 5th Special Forces Group in Da Nang at the foot of Marble Mountain. This was a training facility where the 5th Special Forces trained Chinese mercenary and Vietnamese Montagnard soldiers. We had to complete within two months consisting of six barracks for the mercenaries and montagnards and facilities for the 5th Special Forces training unit, including a complete water system, and all support facilities, a communications bunker, and also an ammunition supply point.

Corrigan: Now, having worked for your father and his company with large machinery, did that help you in giving you knowledge and background to do some of those things?

Bennett: Yes. Actually, I received training also as a carpenter. So a good portion of my work involved frame construction and reinforced concrete work.

Corrigan: And you said you did two tours there. So when did you finish your duties for Vietnam?

Bennett: I was there from November of 1967 to June of 1968. Then we were transported back to the United States to—we had several people who had completed their duty requirements. Normally, Seabees are required to make two deployments during a war period. But, we had to come back to the United States for retraining and for new personnel to come on board, a period during that time. So, we spent six months in Gulfport, Mississippi, before deploying back to Quang Tri in, let's see, December of '68 until August of '69.

Corrigan: Okay. So you returned in August of '69.

Bennett: Right.

Corrigan: Okay. Did you return back to Fredericktown, then?

Bennett: Actually, I was supposed to get processed out of the service in August of '69 at Gulfport, Mississippi. That was during the time that Hurricane Camille was hitting the Mississippi Gulf Coast. As a matter of fact, we had a twelve hour lay-over in Anchorage, Alaska, waiting for the hurricane to blow-out. When I arrived in Gulfport, Mississippi, I was extended for two weeks to help clean up after the hurricane which consisted primarily of clearing the

streets for fire lanes in order to get emergency equipment through. During that period, we were staying with civilians in what few undamaged buildings we had left on base consisting mainly of reinforced concrete warehouses.

Corrigan: Was that your first experience with a hurricane?

Bennett: Yes, it was.

Corrigan: And then after that, you were discharged. Did you then make your way back to Fredericktown?

Bennett: Made my way back to Fredericktown. Upon arrival, it was too late to enroll in college. That was my motive to try to get in fall semester, but with the extension I couldn't get in the fall semester. So, I went to work for my father, at that time, who was completing a contract for the city of Fredericktown for water and sewer system improvements. Fairly large project. At the time, about a $240,000 project to upgrade the water and sewer system.

Corrigan: And that was in 19—

Bennett: Sixty-nine.

Corrigan: Sixty-nine.

[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]

Corrigan: What was the name of your father's company?

Bennett: Bennett & Smith, Incorporated.

Corrigan: And then, did you continue to work for your father's company?

Bennett: Yes, I did. I enrolled at Mineral Area College [in] the spring semester of 1970, and continued to work for him while I was going to school. With the assistance of the GI Bill.

Corrigan: So you did use your GI benefits then.

Bennett: Yes, I did.

Corrigan: Okay.

Bennett: And graduated from Mineral Area College in May of 1971.

Corrigan: Go ahead.

Bennett: Changing my major at that time to General Business Management. Had three semesters of 4.0 grade average. A little change in attitude. (laughter)

Corrigan: Why did you switch to business? Did you have something in mind?

Bennett: I figured a degree in business would give me more flexibility in a career, and at that time I was really interested in trying to become a part of my father's business. And I realized that a business degree would probably help me more in that regard.

Corrigan: Did either of your two brothers work with the business?

Bennett: Yes, they did. They both worked with the business up until that time. Shortly after I got home, the oldest brother, who was civil engineer, went to work as project engineer for Terre du Lac and left the company. There was some internal family disputes there involved too, but I won't go in to that.

Corrigan: But you and your other brother worked there still.

Bennett: Yes.

Corrigan: Or worked there at the time.

Bennett: My other brother also managed a Ford Tractor and Implement business for my father.

Corrigan: Okay. And then, did you continue to work there?

Bennett: Continued to work there up until my father's passing in—actually, he passed away a few days before my scheduled graduation from Mineral Area College with a massive heart attack.

Corrigan: So, it was in 1970?

Bennett: It was May of 1971.

Corrigan: And then, you had brought something as a visual today, and didn't you tell me that took place in the '70s? Early '70s?

Bennett: That's correct. Actually, as a result of family dispute, I went to work for Revelle Lumber Company after my father's passing and made sure that my mother, who was a housewife that didn't drive and never worked, was provided for. Went to work for Revelle Lumber Company drawing house plans and also developing a subdivision for Revelle Lumber Company who was a homebuilder at that time.

Corrigan: So still in the construction—

Bennett: Still in the construction—

Corrigan: Business.

Bennett: Business.

Corrigan: Okay. And how long did you stay there?

Bennett: I stayed there until 1976 when I had an offer to become city zoning administrator and technical advisor on a part-time basis. And at that time, my oldest brother needed help with his engineering practice so I worked two part-time positions until 1977 when I became Fredericktown City Administrator.

Corrigan: And did you tell me that you were the first—

Bennett: City Administrator.

Corrigan: City Administrator for Fredericktown.

Bennett: That's correct.

Corrigan: And that's what you brought here—

[End Track 5. Begin Track 6.]

Corrigan: —was a newspaper clipping.

Bennett: Clipping from that time.

Corrigan: So was Fredericktown, at the time, big enough, or in need of a full-time administrator?

Bennett: Fredericktown was facing a lot of issues at that time. With the passage of the Water Quality Act in the early '70s, the wastewater treatment plant was no longer in compliance with the Water Quality Act. Public Law 92-500. At the time, EPA was offering grant assistance for communities who were having trouble meeting what they call a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Requirements. Basically, stream pollutants because we were discharging into Saline Creek, local tributary here. So, the needs at the time, we had also a failing water treatment plant. It had structural defects with the back wall of the filter so we had two urgent projects at that time that needed to be completed, and ended up filing the step one and step two grant applications for the wastewater treatment plant and also worked with acquiring an engineering firm to study the water plant needs at that time. We also had a problem with our swimming pool, at that time, which was approaching forty years old. The state Department of Health of threatening to close it so that was another project that I saw as an urgent need. Having grown up learning how to swim in that swimming pool, I realized what a valuable asset it was to the kids of the community along with other summer recreational activities such as little league and whatnot.

Corrigan: So was it rebuilt then?

Bennett: I filed a grant application with the Land and Water Conservation Fund and we received grant assistance along with passing a local bond issue for the local match portion of the swimming pool. And we received notice of award, right before I resigned in 1979, on the swimming pool grant.

Corrigan: So you were the administrator from—

Bennett: Seventy-seven to '79.

Corrigan: And did you get those other water projects, the sewage and the water treatment?

Bennett: Both of those projects were eventually funded. Completely funded, and constructed. I had an opportunity—worked on both of those projects for another engineering firm. LM Engineering.

Corrigan: Can you say it again?

Bennett: LM Engineering. During construction.

Corrigan: Is that who you went to work for after the city?

Bennett: Along with having purchased a small business on East Main Street. One of my motives at the time, I thought that after Anschutz Mining Company had purchased the old National Lead property, or what was originally known as the Buckeye Mine, that there would be a resurgence in mining so I purchased a multi-faceted store on East Main called Economy Sales that handled everything from package liquor and sporting goods to office supplies and kind of a general merchandise facility.

Corrigan: How long did you own that business?

Bennett: For seven years.

[End Track 6. Begin Track 7.]

Corrigan: So, through the '80s?

Bennett: Through the '80s. Up until 1987.

Corrigan: And then where did you go to next?

Bennett: I went to work for an engineering firm in Farmington called Hudwalker and Associates. And worked there until 1995 which reintroduced me to my mining interests. One of the contracts we had at Hudwalker and Associates was with Fluor Corporation who was then owner of all the old Saint Joe Mineral's properties. Actually as a sub-consultant to Fluor, we

oversaw some of the old mine facilities ranging from the ones in the old Lead Belt area, just north of us here, all the way over to the Indian Creek Mine in Washington County.

Corrigan: Okay. So you're bringing up the mines here, and you told me earlier that your interest in mines started when you were six.

Bennett: Right.

Corrigan: Okay. I'm going to pause for a second because we are going to talk about mines next, but I'll take a little break here. Hold on one second.

Bennett: Okay. [pause]

Corrigan: Okay. We took a brief little pause there for a second. Okay. So you were telling me that your interest in mines started at age six. Can you tell me about that?

Bennett: Okay. At age six, which was 1952, my father had a contract with Mine La Motte Corporation to do some strip mining at Mine La Motte. He purchased three additional bulldozers at that time, and two scrappers which you pull behind a bulldozer to do this work. As a matter of fact, there's a picture on the wall in the mining exhibit showing that work taking place. And most of the mining during that time was deep shaft mining. Room and pillar type. Working open stopes. But some of the mineralization occurred at shallower levels where they need to strip off the soil overburden and mine it from the surface at that time. So, at age six, I made several trips with him out to observe what was going on. Also, I'll never forget him driving us in the family car down in to the offset mine, which is commonly referred to as the offsets today. And I was just in awe at the massive cavern that was there at that time. I had a big fascination for all the work that was going on around me then. That really sparked my interest at an early age. Later summer work for National Lead Company at what was originally called the Buckeye Mine, mostly process work there, rehabilitated the old roaster plant where the big smoke stack, almost 400 foot tall smoke stack was constructed in 1956. At that time, I was ten years old, ten [or] eleven years old, and that was a very fascinating thing to watch that smoke stack rise to the height. It was quite a landmark for many years around here.

Corrigan: Where was it located?

Bennett: Located southeast of town at what was originally called the Buckeye Mine, but now referred to as the Madison Mine.

Corrigan: And you said it was a 400 foot tower?

Bennett: Four hundred foot smoke stack.

Corrigan: Could you see it from town?

Bennett: You could see it from town. During the late '50s, up until the closing of the plant in early 1961, it was a key portion of the process where you could see smoke billowing from the

stack. If weather conditions were right, you would get a sulfur smell over town because, basically, they were burning the sulfides, what they call calcining—

[End Track 7. Begin Track 8.]

Bennett: —the ore, at that facility.

Corrigan: Could you step back a little bit, and could you tell us a little bit about the mining industry in and around Fredericktown and Madison County. And kind of give us a little background about what was being mined, where was it being mined, who were the mines. Just kind of a general background of what was going on here.

Bennett: The primary foundation of mining in Madison County was lead mining. But there was also other minerals of significant economic importance, in particular at the Madison Mine, which was originally called the Buckeye Mine, which had good cobalt, nickel, and copper values also. During the early period, the French mining era, they were primarily mining from shallow excavations, what they call hand diggings. There's a number of old diggings with unusual names like the wildcat diggings, the seed-tick diggings, the bluff diggings, the rattlesnake diggings, the old jack diggings out in the Mine La Motte area that all produced lead during the 1700s and early 1800s. The Buckeye Mine was discovered, the deposit was discovered, in 1843. And in 1844, a man from Ohio named Pomeroy sunk the first shaft at the Buckeye Mine. Since he was from Ohio, and later two men by the last names of Avery and Dill had purchased the property and they were also from Ohio, so the property became known as the Buckeye Mine since they were from the Buckeye State. Then, there is two disputing opinions as to what took place. But after 1847, there's not much history on it other than it was reported that they encountered too much water in the shaft at that time that they were sinking. Also, another report that with the 1849 gold rush they gave up and left for California to pursue that. It was also mined for a short period during the Civil War by the Copper Creek Mining Company. Not much is known about the Copper Creek Mining Company, but that's a little brief history of the Buckeye Mine. Throughout the 1800s, the Mine La Motte property, which was originally discovered in 1715 by then French governor [Antoine] de la Mothe Cadillac, but throughout the 1800s it was operated by various interests. Which, by the way, the Mine La Motte property consisted of almost 24,000 acres. One of the largest land grants ever given by the U.S. government. That was actually a grant that had to be passed by an act of Congress. I believe it was 1837. Ruth?

Ruth: Nine. Maybe.

Bennett: Eighteen thirty-nine. Okay. And we have a copy of the old land grant act signed by President Van Buren at the county jail museum.

Corrigan: So you've mentioned a couple different types of mines. You've mentioned strip mining, shaft mining. Did it just depend on the mine, the company, the person?

Bennett: It depended on the ore occurrence.

[End Track 8. Begin Track 9.]

Bennett: Whether it was—at what depth it was. Most of the operating mines during the twentieth century were better than 200 foot depth. So they were operated through vertical shafts with room and pillar type mining activities going on.

Corrigan: And when you say room and pillar, you mean so there's men going down and kind of mining rooms, physical kind of rooms, and the pillars are to keep it from collapsing. Correct?

Bennett: That's correct.

Corrigan: So how far were they going down?

Bennett: In most cases, an average of two hundred to three hundred feet. There is one part of the Madison Mine that was developed in the 1940s that is a little over 400 feet. Most cases, as I mentioned, they were 200 to 300 foot depth.

Corrigan: Okay. So it was depending on how close it was to the surface.

Bennett: That's correct.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. Now, so say the twentieth century, who were some of the big companies that were here and what were they mining at that time?

Bennett: Okay. During the late 1800s, the Buckeye Mine property, there was very little activity from the Civil War period up until the late 1800s. 1898. The Buckeye property was purchased again by Ohio interests, and they formed North American Lead Company. North American Lead operated from, after they completed their treatment facilities, their mill and whatnot, construction on it, from about 1902 to 1910 they operated the Madison Mine. Mine La Motte had gone through several different ownerships at that time. Of course, Mine La Motte was still primarily noted for lead, but also produced some cobalt and nickel. Much of the work during the late 1800s, which was a fairly high production period, Mine La Motte was owned by a Rhode Island industrialist. Help me, Ruth.

Ruth: Roland Hazzard.

Bennett: Yeah. Roland Hazzard. This was probably when the Mine La Motte area became more industrialized. Prior to that, it was more primitive mining activities. They also smelted the lead at Mine La Motte during the late 1800s. And a number of old smelter facilities, actually dating back to the 1700s, were in the area there. But, again, back to the Buckeye Mine, due to the fact that they had a very complex ore, a nickel, cobalt, copper, lead complex, it was difficult to separate. They put in a fairly costly refining plant under North American Lead, but they were undercapitalized and failed in 1910. Went in to receivership. And then a Canadian by the name of M.J. O'Brien, who was referred to as a Canadian cobalt king during that period, purchased it from receivership and formed Missouri Cobalt Company which operated the mine during World War I until 1920. Mine La Motte also was under several different ownerships during the earliest

part of the twentieth century. During the early 1900s, two men by the name of Doherty and Albers had—

[End Track 9. Begin Track 10.]

Bennett: —promoted the Mine La Motte property, and tried to sell stock in a company that, again, they were undercapitalized. It went into receivership. And the bondholders formed a company called Sweetwater Mining Company in the early 1920s. It set idle through most of the 1920s until 1928 when Saint Joseph Lead Company became interested in the property, and, along with National Lead, formed a joint venture called Mine La Motte Corporation. Eventually, the mines went through a stagnant period through the depression years due to depressed lead prices and mining activity at Mine La Motte didn't resume until 1938. But Mine La Motte Corporation operated at Mine La Motte from 1938 until they closed in 1959.

Corrigan: Okay.

Bennett: National Lead Company operated the old Madison Mine after extensive exploration redefining the ore deposits in the area. A lot of drilling took place during the late 1930s and early 1940s. And with a subsidy from the federal government, they reopened the Madison Mine in 1944 during the war years. Of course, the federal government was most interested in the mine and seeing it move forward because of the strategic metals that were needed for the war effort. This carried on through the Korean War period, and the Cold War period, too, with the biggest subsidy being a seven and a half million dollar cobalt and nickel refinery that was constructed in 1952. That refinery employed over 140 men at that time. Worked around the clock. Three shifts. It was in production from 1953 until they closed in the spring of 1961.

Corrigan: Okay. So, now this is during your lifetime that you are seeing these around here. What was the mining going on—like you said you got interested in 1952 as a kid, so that one you just mentioned was open and running and that, what other mines around here were still operating at that time?

Bennett: Actually, the World War II period was probably more significant because of the demand for lead and other heavy metals. In 1941, Park City Consolidated Mines, out of Park City, Utah, opened the Ruth Mine which is just almost due south of Fredericktown. And just east of the new Masonic cemetery. They operated all through the wars years up until at least 1949 from what I can see evidence of. Also, another significant mine located northwest of town was called the Catherine Mine. It actually opened in 1898, and was operated for a period of about six years and then went through, I think, three different ownerships up through the First World War period. But during the Second World War, it was operated by a company called Fredericktown Lead Company. And Fredericktown Lead Company operated up until at least 1949, also.

Corrigan: Okay. Now, one of the questions somebody had written kind of goes along—you just mentioned there was 140 men that worked there.

[End Track 10. Begin Track 11.]

Corrigan: How did the mining jobs in the area compare to other jobs?

Bennett: Well, mining compared to one of the other major employers in town, Brown Shoe Company, was considered a better than shoe factory pay situation. Especially refinery workers. Refinery workers were union and had union representation. There was a lot of labor strife, though, during the period of the 1950s. Periods of strikes. Disputes between management and the labor organization. But, I have a copy of the annual pay for 1956 for—and most of them were making in a range of $4800 to almost $7000 per year, which was good money for back in that period of time in 1956.

Corrigan: You mentioned the smeltering jobs and that. So one of the questions somebody had [written] was what happened to the minerals once they were mined out? And their question was how did they leave the area, but were they processed here or processed elsewhere?

Bennett: Most of the minerals from this area were processed primarily at the Saint Joe Lead Company smelter in Herculaneum, Missouri. The more complex minerals that were mined at the Madison Mine went to various places because of the strategic importance of cobalt and nickel. Of course, National Lead Company was the operator of the Madison Mine during the 1950s. Well, actually, from 1944 until they closed in 1961. I'm not sure of all the shipping points, but everything left here by rail on the old Belmont branch under the Missouri Pacific Railroad during that time.

Corrigan: Do you have any idea kind of the breadth or scope—somebody was curious with their question was just how much was taken from this area? How much stuff was mined out? Do you have any idea the amount that was taken from this are and went elsewhere?

Bennett: I can't give you the total production because there was—some of it doesn't have records on especially the early production in the 1700s and early 1800s. But it is estimated that we're talking in terms of millions of tons of lead being produced from this area. There's been several different estimates that I've seen that vary considerably. And actually, the cobalt and nickel production figures vary considerably, too, because there was a period where cobalt and nickel was produced at Mine La Motte that there's no record of, too.

Corrigan: Now, who were the miners? Were these generations of miners? Or were they—

Bennett: Well, it varies depending on the period. The early miners were French settlers primarily from the Saint Genevieve vicinity, and they were primarily agriculturists and part-time miners. They planted their crops and tended them through the summer months, but during the off seasons they would come from Saint Genevieve to Mine La Motte to work the mines as a supplemental income type situation. And with Saint Mary—

[End Track 11. Begin Track 12.]

Bennett: —and Saint Genevieve as the two primary shipping points on the river. During the early 1800s when we start seeing more Anglo-American immigration to this area, a lot of the early miners were of German origin and several French origin people still worked in the mines at

that time. The LaChance's. The Turbeau's. Several old family names. Thurmure's. Names that are disappearing. Schulte's. We've got a Schulte's sitting here. But there was also a strong period when we had a lot of German miners. And a very interesting period was when Mine La Motte was under primary ownership of the Flemings from Philadelphia. Two of Thomas Fleming's sons came here to run the mines during the period of late 1840s through 1860s, and there's evidence that there was quite a few immigrants working the mines at that time.

Corrigan: Okay. So another question someone had wrote was were the miners—or at least to your knowledge or even in your lifetime, was it a community within a community?

Bennett: No. As a matter of fact, when I was growing up, a lot of the miners were also farmers. They would work a shift at the mines, come home, feed their livestock, work the fields. So, they would end up working twelve [to] sixteen hour days between the mining job and their farming activities. And there were a lot of full-time miners, too. I mentioned 140 people at the refinery during the 1950s. At the same time, you had approximately eighty people working underground as miners, actually. Then you had somewhere in the vicinity of thirty to forty people working the mill facility. And then at least another twenty people in supervisory positions working at the mines. So, we're talking in terms of probably 250 people worked at the Madison Mine at that time. In addition, we had somewhere around fifty people working at Mine La Motte.

Corrigan: So was that—and you did mention the Brown Shoe Company, those were the two main employers?

Bennett: Two main employers during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Corrigan: Okay. You mentioned earlier—you briefly mentioned it, and somebody wrote this question. Were there any mine conflicts with the workers and the companies?

Bennett: There were several periods of strikes. Both Mine La Motte Corporation and National Lead were union operations during that time. Actually, there were two unions involved at National Lead Company. I don't remember the names of the organizations. I've got it written down somewhere. United Mine Workers, I think, covered the people underground.

Corrigan: Okay. Now, are you aware of—somebody was asking about working conditions, and what they were interested in is could you talk about were there any major accidents or disasters?

Bennett: Fortunately—I mean there were some incidents where there were fatalities. In particular, the Catherine Mine, I think, had at least two fatalities. Under Saint Joe's supervision at Mine La Motte Corporation, there were very few incidents out there, but there were some minor injuries from what I understand.

[End Track 12. Begin Track 13.]

Bennett: National Lead Company. I don't know of any fatalities there.

Corrigan: And they were also curious about what were the working conditions like?

Bennett: It depends on the period. Prior to electric lighting, underground mining was mostly done by either carbide lights or candles with poor ventilation back in the 1800s through the early 1900s. With new mine standards coming on, the state sponsored mine safety program[s]. They had mining inspectors involved. In the 1900s, it changed considerably and you saw safety practices evolving into more modern practices.

Corrigan: Okay. When would you say was the peak of mining in the area?

Bennett: I would say the peak would have been in the World War II period because we had Fredericktown Lead Company, Park City Consolidated Mines, National Lead Company, and Mine La Motte Corporation all in operation at that time. Four different mining companies, and they were all at peak production during World War II.

Corrigan: How much of the local economy was all tied to the mines, or supporting the mines, or the people that worked there?

Bennett: Supporting the people that worked at the mines.

Corrigan: The town—I mean, they needed places to live, eat, groceries, gas.

Bennett: Right. Actually, the downtown area was thriving during the '50s. We had a variety of businesses from clothiers to general merchandise to hardware stores. A variety of retail businesses here along with—north town was primarily in support of agricultural activities along with being a rail center from which a lot of the mine production was shipped. Most of the production from Fredericktown Lead Company and Park City Consolidated Mines, the lead concentrate, was loaded out in north town during the war years. Whereas National Lead Company had their own spur over to the mine, and so did—there was a rail spur to the Mine La Motte facility at shaft number eighteen.

Corrigan: And another question that was asked was—and you've answered a few of these, when did the mines close, but the question was really when was the end of it? Or, their other question was are there any still in operation?

Bennett: No mines in operation. Anschutz, when they purchased the property in 1979, started doing some additional exploration. And then in 1981 they de-watered the mine, pumped it out, did an engineering evaluation as to how much mine rehabilitation work would have to be done to put it back into production at the Madison Mine, and they decided that it wasn't feasible at that time.

Corrigan: So the last mine closed in the '80s?

Bennett: Well, I mean, last activity would have been about 1981, '82. Anschutz kept a geologist on staff, I think, until 1983 over there. But there's no currently—for at least the last thirty years hadn't been anybody deriving employment locally from the Anschutz property.

Corrigan: Okay. So when that closed, or the last mines closed—

[End Track 13. Begin Track 14.]

Corrigan: —did the population decrease? Did people leave?

Bennett: I noticed it as a student in school because 1961 was my first year in high school. Many of the kids that I had grown up with left the community. Most of the ones that left the community were children of supervisory personnel at the mines. Also, we had a number of miners that left this area and went to the viburnum trend to go to work for Saint Joe Minerals over there. I would say probably at least fifteen of my classmates, that I can remember, left when the mines closed.

Corrigan: Okay. Shifting a little bit, somebody asked the question, what effects did the mines have on say the local environment or the local ecology? Was there any major pollution? Or are there still lingering problems today?

Bennett: There's still lingering problems today. I have a newspaper article from 1945 that reported a fish kill on Saline Creek and the Little Saint Francis River that reportedly had killed fish all the way down to Thompson Ford which is west of town on the Little Saint Francis. There was also an incident in 1956 where we had a release of the mill waters. They used some strong reagents in the separation process. Among them cyanide, and that's the most likely cause of the fish kill when they released that. The second fish kill occurred in 1956. It didn't raise as much concern as you would have today. It was just thought of as an "Oops." That was [seen] as a necessary hazard to keep an industry that's employing a lot of people around here.

Corrigan: Okay. Another question somebody asked was—and I don't think they were from around here which is why they are asking this, and I would too, is they were asked if they were to drive around today, walk around today, however they got around Madison County, would they know that they were even on a mine, or see a mine, or either visually, physically—

Bennett: Most of the structures are gone. You'd have to know where to look. Some of the old mill facility at number eighteen at Mine La Motte, you can still see some of the tank foundations. At the Madison Mine, there's a number of old foundations and the base section of the old smokestack is still visible on the property over there. And a lot of the wreckage from the refinery is still visible there.

Corrigan: And to go a little step further, who has all that property now? What happened to all the mining property?

Bennett: Currently, the original National Lead holdings at the Madison Mine is under the ownership of Anschutz Mining Corporation out of Denver, Colorado. They've held it ever since 1979. With the fact that we've got known cobalt reserves, there is a primary interest for them. But, it's been a liability for them over the years in terms of environmental responses.

Corrigan: Is it a large area?

Bennett: It's a fairly large area. Over 1000 acres.

Corrigan: What about some of the other properties? Are they privately owned now?

Bennett: The old Mine La Motte properties were all sold off by Mine La Motte Corporation throughout the 1960s and '70s. They were sold off in parcels—

[End Track 14. Begin Track 15.]

Bennett: —ranging from the largest parcel being at the old Tailings facility called the "Slime Pond," which is owned by Mine La Motte Recreation Association. It's an organization people use for boating and fishing and other activities. They don't seem to have as much concern as others for the fact that there is contamination on that property.

Corrigan: So, another question somebody had here was, what effects do the mines still have on the area today? And a step further was, do the locals today know much about the mining industry or history around here?

Bennett: I don't think, especially the younger generations have much knowledge of the mining history. Or, much of an idea of what actually took place here. And how vital it was during the peak periods of mining activity.

Corrigan: So, one question somebody had, I was kind of saving it towards the end, they wanted to know what you thought was the most interesting aspect of the local mining history.

Bennett: It's such a colorful history, actually, it's hard to pinpoint. The rugged individualism of the early pioneers. The early French settlers. One of the Valle's was killed during an Indian raid while working at the mines. That's a fascinating period. Going to the Civil War period, when the Union Army marched to Mine La Motte and destroyed the old smelters after the Battle of Fredericktown. To the late 1800s, when we saw the mechanization and industrialization of mining activities out there. Steam power came into play. Large mill facilities. We saw higher production. Also, another period would have been with the construction of rail to the area in 1869. That post-railroad era opened the door for the industrialization period of the late 1800s. And then you have the war periods when everything was at peak production during World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. And the Cold War period, too. National continued to add to the strategic stockpile, strategic metal stockpile, during the Cold War up until the cancellation of the contract in 1960. The government contract.

Corrigan: Okay. Now yesterday during the workshop we took a little tour of downtown and went to the courthouse, and someone noticed that on the "Welcome to Fredericktown" there's a large sign there, outside of the front of the courthouse, there was a Bennett listed on there. Is that a relative of yours?

Bennett: Maybe distant. Most of my ancestors came from Bollinger County, actually. But then, the early Bennetts actually migrated from the Carolinas to Kentucky and Tennessee, and then on

to this area. I've wondered about that myself, but I've never found anything, or never got into genealogy enough to find out for sure.

Corrigan: Okay. And then, somebody wondered what is it—

[End Track 15. Begin Track 16.]

Corrigan: —about the mines that has kept you interested in it all these years?

Bennett: A fascination with taking a raw material from the ground, and the mechanical processes that were required to get it to the surface, milled, and separated, and turning it into a finished commodity. Again, going back to the early engineering and construction aspect of my life, it's always been fascinating, I think, to see how that all gets put together.

Corrigan: Okay. And then, someone was curious if there's a particular, or a favorite, mining story that you like.

Bennett: The old miners used to talk about when a new man came to work and the first trip down the shaft in the cage the challenge was to find out if the new guy was goosey. So, they would start poking at him and get him backed in the corner of the mine cage. Of course, if he jumped and reacted that was more or less a death sentence for him. They would continue to harass him the rest of the time he was there.

Corrigan: And someone asked yesterday, too, about mining songs. If you are aware of if people were singing songs or—

Bennett: Not that I'm aware of.

Corrigan: Okay. And kind of the final question is, is there anything in particular that we didn't cover today? Or, some aspect about mining that you thought you'd talk about and we haven't yet, or we didn't know to ask the question?

Bennett: Another mine that we failed to mention, I guess, would be, and it has quite a reputation throughout the area, is Silver Mines, which is west of Fredericktown. It wasn't really a significant mine other than the fact that they did produce some silver there. Small amount which is estimated at about 3000 ounces of silver. At today's values, you're talking less than $100,000 worth of silver. But the fact that it did produce some silver, and also I think the production was estimated at about twenty tons of lead from the silver mine itself, too. But those were smaller mines that were spurred on by the hope of hitting a major lode out there. And it never happened.

Corrigan: And finally, do you think mining is going to return to the area?

Bennett: Eventually, yes. One of the things National Lead Company did during the late '50s was a massive exploration program. They had almost 100,000 acres under option during that time that they did considerable drilling on, and they discovered a significant deposit in the northwest part of the county called the Higdon Mine. It's currently under the ownership of Doe Run

Resources. Or the Doe Run Company. And during the 1966-67 period, a company called Bunker Hill Mining Company out of Kellogg, Idaho, sunk a shaft at the Higdon deposit—

[End Track 16. Begin Track 17.]

Bennett: —but the mine has never went in to production. Also, one of the last thing that Mine La Motte Corporation did in the eastern section of the Mine La Motte area was they sunk a shaft called mine number twenty-six. There was never any significant production there. It was a complex ore that their mill couldn't handle, so with the viburnum trend coming on at that time, they decided to close mine number twenty-six. It's also under the ownership of the Doe Run Company, currently. So I look for those two mines, in particular, to re-open some day. Key to the re-opening is having the technology in place to address the ecological concerns of mine waste.

Corrigan: So, is there quite a bit of land held by those companies still?

Bennett: Yes. Including not only surface rights, but also mineral rights in the areas where the deposits occur. And there's also some smaller deposits that were defined during the late 1950s, early 1960s, that eventually, I think, when it's economically feasible it will go into production some day.

Corrigan: So there companies are holding for long-term.

Bennett: Right.

Corrigan: Long-term prospects. Now, you mentioned surface rights versus mineral rights. How does that work?

Bennett: A landowner can sell the mineral rights and still retain surface rights. In other words, if he's a farmer or a timber crop manager or owner, they can keep the surface rights and sell the mineral rights. Usually, there's a royalty involved by the mining company paid to the owner of the surface rights based on production if the mine ever goes into operation. It also involves a contract, you know, setting all those terms forth when they sell the underground rights.

Corrigan: So do those companies have a lot more underground rights than they do surface rights?

Bennett: In the case of the Higdon deposit, it's about fifty-fifty, I think. You know, about fifty percent they have total rights to. And about fifty percent just the underground rights. Whereas surface rights are under other ownership in the latter case.

Corrigan: Do you think a lot of people—because a lot of those rights were figured out a long time ago.

Bennett: Right.

Corrigan: Do you think a lot of the surface owners actually know whether what's underneath them they own or not?

Bennett: Some of them may not know. You have to go to the courthouse and ask for a listing of what's being taxed for mineral rights only to determine whether your property—a lot of cases the deed will indicate it, though.

Corrigan: Okay. So some of those companies are taxed by what the mineral deposits that are there?

Bennett: Right.

Corrigan: Okay. Not just the surface.

Bennett: Right.

Corrigan: Okay.

Bennett: If it's mineral rights only, they'll be taxed for just the minerals. And the owner of the surface rights gets taxed at normal real estate rate.

Corrigan: Alright. Was there anything else you'd like to add?

Bennett: Maybe we could pause for a moment and see if anyone's got any questions.

Corrigan: Yeah. Perfect. Hold on one second.

[End Interview.]