

An Interview with

Earl Jenkins

at the offices of the Index in
Hermitage, Missouri

07 March 1997

interviewed by Ray Brassieur
transcript edited by N. Renae Farris



Oral History Program

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[Tape Counter 000; Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 1.]

RB: This is Ray Brassieur. Today is March 7th, 1997. I'm interviewing Earl Jenkins at his office. Mr. Jenkins is the publisher of the Index, in Hermitage, Missouri.

[Recording stops, then resumes]

EJ: (in mid-sentence) ...five years old. (laughs) And that was all right.

RB: That's great! So, Mr. Jenkins, you're eighty-seven, you say?

EJ: That's right.

RB: Now, what's your birthday?

EJ: July the 15th. Born in 1909.

RB: My daughter was July 16th, by the way. She's only four-and-a-half. She's got quite a few years to go!

EJ: Got a long ways to go! (laughter) Been a lot of water under the bridge since I was born.

RB: Absolutely. Now, where were you born?

EJ: Cross Timbers, Missouri.

RB: Cross Timbers. Where exactly is that?

EJ: That's in Hickory County, back... Well, I guess it'd be north. It's on 65 Highway. [U.S. Route 65]

RB: Okay. Is it still a little community there?

EJ: Oh, yeah! Yeah! It used to be a thriving little town when I grew up there. I lived there until I was eight years old. It was a thriving little town, but it's kind of died out now.

They lost their school, and there's just not much there anymore, but there's several buildings there _____.

RB: That's happened to a lot of small communities. They've gotten smaller.

EJ: That's right, yeah.

RB: What were your folks involved in there?

EJ: Well, my dad was a schoolteacher. He got twenty-five dollars a month. Then he helped his... His dad passed away and he run their farm for a while. Then when I was eight years old, he bought a farm three miles north of Hermitage, on [State] Highway U out here, and we lived there. I grew up there.

RB: You spent your youth right here in Hermitage?

EJ: Well, right here in... That's right. I graduated from grade school here, and from high school here, that's right.

RB: And when you graduated from high school, where'd you go? Did you _____?

EJ: Well, I got a job over in the courthouse as deputy county clerk. I worked there for nine years. Then I went to Jefferson City, and I worked for the State Insurance Department [for] I don't know, several years, and then Uncle Sam... I got a greetings from Uncle Sam, and I had to go to the Army.

RB: That was for World War Two?

EJ: World War Two, yes. And I spent thirty-three months in the Army, and nine-and-a-half months on the battlefield in France and Germany.

RB: Really?! Which branch? You were in the Army then?

EJ: I was in the Ordinance, 714th Ordinance. We were attached to the 83rd Division, infantry division.

RB: And you actually went overseas then?

EJ: Oh, sure.

RB: When did you land over there? What year, do you recall?

EJ: Well, I got out in '46, and I was in thirty-three [months]. I couldn't give you the exact date.

RB: Right.

EJ: Remember the Battle of the Bulge?¹

RB: Yes, sir.

EJ: Right after that. After that was over we went in there and went all the way up to Berlin. Then we formed a line up there. Nobody goes in this way or that way, and Russia takes Berlin. Now, that was Mr. Stalin's, and our President's, and let's see, the man from Europe, what was his name? [Winston Churchill] Anyway, those three men, they made this decision.

RB: Right. So you were in that group that was sort of mopping up and setting up?

EJ: Well, I was in charge of the ordinance. We furnished automotive supplies and supplies for guns and... All the supplies, see? And I was in charge of this ordinance group. And we followed along with the infantry, see?

RB: Uh-huh. So you were older than a lot of the soldiers at that time.

¹ The Battle of the Bulge, also known as the Ardennes Offensive, took place from December 16 1944 to January 28, 1945.

EJ: Oh, yeah, I was. I was about thirty-five when I went in the Army, yeah.

RB: And you had already had the first start of a career, already stateside, before you went to the Army at that time.

EJ: Oh, yes. That's right. Yeah, I had to leave Jefferson City. I was working for the Insurance Department, and I was supposed to get my job back when I got back, but the politics had changed, and I didn't get any job. (laughs)

RB: How did you get associated with the Insurance Department, to begin with, there?

EJ: Well, I had some kinfolks that were on the Republican Committee, and I got acquainted with this fellow that was in charge of it. And that's the way I... They helped me get the job.

RB: Uh-huh. And your responsibilities there? What were you...?

EJ: Well, most of the things we did was: insurance companies that went out of business, and we checked their records and things, see?

RB: But there was a lot of turnover like that, at that moment, wasn't there?

EJ: Oh, there was, yeah, quite a bit.

RB: It was right during the Depression.

EJ: That's right.

RB: And they were pretty large companies that had to fold.

EJ: Oh, sure. Sure, that's right. It was interesting work.

RB: And then there were other companies that kind of bought up their assets and all that, was going on. That was a pretty active time, during that.

EJ: It was, yeah.

RB: Then the Army called, and you went over, and then *after* that you came back. Were you married by that time?

EJ: Yeah, I got married in 1938. (laughs)

RB: Before you went?

EJ: Yeah, before I went to the Army.

RB: Did you marry a girl from here, or someone you met?

EJ: Well, I worked in the county clerk's office and a young lady worked in here for her dad, and we got acquainted. Her dad passed away in '32.² We got acquainted in... Well, no, her dad died before I worked there, that's right. And then we got married in '38.

RB: What was her name then?

EJ: Willa Mae Wilson was her name.

RB: Wilson? She was a Wilson?

EJ: Yeah.

RB: From right here in Hickory County?

EJ: Oh, yes, she was born right out town, this side of town here. She lived right down here. We had a good life. She passed away in, [*chokes with emotion*] let's see, when was it? April 19th, 1996.

RB: '96? So it's been very recent.

EJ: That's right, yeah.

² U. Elmer Wilson, then the publisher of the Index.

RB: Oh, that's tough. That's tough. And you had a companion for a long time.

EJ: Almost fifty-eight years.

RB: That's exceptional.

EJ: Just lacked a few days.

RB: That's a gift there, to have a companion for that long.

EJ: Oh, sure, yes. It is. I grew up on the farm out there and went to high school down here, and to grade school, and worked in the county clerk's. Of course, I told you that.

RB: Now, when you came back from the Army, you say your job was no longer available at the Insurance Department?

EJ: (laughs) Well, I'll tell you what I did. I kind of goofed around and worked around and drew unemployment, you know, because I was retired from the Army, they could draw that. And I got tired of it, didn't like it. (laughs) So about a month. I drew one check, and then I told my wife, "I'm going down to Springfield and get me a job." And I went down to Springfield and got a job as a parts man in charge of the parts department for a Lincoln-Mercury agency, and I worked there quite some time -- I don't know, a couple of years, probably. Anyway, along the last of September, my wife called me up and she said, "Mom wants to sell us the Index." (laughs)

RB: Who wanted to sell it to you?

EJ: Her mother.³ See, her husband had died, and my wife was running it for her. And I says, "Gosh, Mom, I don't know anything about running a newspaper. I never wrote one!" "I

³ Mae Wilson.

don't want you to do that," she said, "I want you to come up here and run this business for me, and I'll do the writing." So we bought the newspaper. We gave \$10,000 for it. We had \$1,000 we paid down on it. And I started managing the business, and I would get out and get the news stories and sell some ads and stuff, bring them in to her, and "you put them together, that's your job." (laughs) And we worked as a team, and worked out pretty successful. We had a good business. And our business grew. When we bought the paper, it was a four-page paper, and we got \$1.75 a year with a subscription. Classifieds sold for 25¢ _____, and a penny a word over that, you know. But I think in '51 we raised it up to \$2.00, and now we get \$4.50 for a classified and our subscription rate is \$18.50. Plus tax! We didn't have tax back then.

RB: Now, you've expanded, probably, from a four-page, though, haven't you?

EJ: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah, we're up to sixteen, twenty pages now. From the four pages, we wasn't that way very long after I came and started collecting the news and the ads and working in the shop and running the business for her. I let her do the writing.

RB: Right. But now, the Wilson family is the one that started the paper, didn't they?

EJ: Yeah, the picture of the man that started the paper is in there on the wall, F. Marion Wilson. He and his wife established the Index in 1885, and they run it for quite some time. Then they sold it to a man by the name of Paul Murphy. He had it for a few years, and he sold it back to their son, to the Wilson's son, U. Elmer Wilson [Ulysses Elmer

Wilson] -- that was my wife's father -- in the '20s.⁴ And he run it 'til '32, and he passed away. And my wife had been working in here, and she took over the management of it.

RB: Uh-huh. Well, now, when she was a young girl, then, she grew up, really, in the newspaper business.

EJ: Oh, sure, that's right. (laughs)

RB: What kind of job? Did she work for her dad, sometimes, there?

EJ: Oh, she worked for her dad when he was here, yeah.

RB: What sort of jobs did she have, I wonder?

EJ: I don't know. I guess she must have done some of the writing, because she was pretty well qualified to write the paper.

RB: Did she have any education, like, for instance, beyond high school?

EJ: She went to college for a little while, yes. I don't know how many semesters she went, but not too long.

RB: So you sort of married into this newspaper family.

EJ: Oh, that's right, yeah. (chuckles)

RB: Even though you hadn't had any prior experience.

EJ: No, no, I had no newspaper experience.

⁴ This may be slightly inaccurate. Back issues of the Index and the Official Manual of the State of Missouri indicate that there were several changes in the ownership and editorial staff of the newspaper in its early years. Although F. Marion Wilson was indeed listed as one of the publishers and editors of the Index in 1885, his name no longer appeared in either role by 1886. Wilson was the Hickory County Prosecuting Attorney in 1885, and also had a private law practice. It is possible that he found the legal trade more lucrative and too time-consuming to continue his work at the Index. Paul Murphy had acquired the newspaper by 1907, and U. Elmer Wilson was publishing it by at least 1921. Family accounts note 1919 as the date of Elmer Wilson's purchase. It also appears that the Wilson family was periodically involved in other regional newspapers, namely the Hickory County Republican (circa 1903) and the Hickory County Herald (circa 1909).

RB: Did you ever work, for instance, for the Index, before that, like, say, when you were a kid?

EJ: No.

RB: How about even a paper route, or anything like that?

EJ: No.

RB: Nothing like that at all.

EJ: No. Oh, after we were married and I was working, I'd come and be with her when she was in the office. I never had any job or anything.

RB: Were they printing their paper here at that time, like when you [were] first married?

EJ: That's right.

RB: Do you remember what kind of equipment they had?

EJ: Oh, they had Linotypes. A couple of Linotypes, and they had the press. Now, what was the name of that press? Hmm. Let me go ask Donnie.⁵

RB: Okay.

[Recording stopped, then resumes]

EJ: We run that for a while, and then we bought a -- it wore out -- we bought a Miehle.

RB: Uh-huh, but the first one was a Babcock?

EJ: Yeah.

RB: Was it one of those big, large presses?

EJ: It was a hand-feed press, you know.

⁵ Don Ginnings, Mr. Jenkin's son-in-law.

RB: Oh, it was a hand-feed. You didn't have a roller? I mean, it didn't have rolls of paper?

EJ: No, no, no, we had the sheets. And we fed the sheets in there, and it printed. Then we had to take it, put them up, right on the back, we had to feed them through again. And then we bought a Miehle Press, which was a little later model. But we fed it the same way, see. And then later we decided that we got tired of the Linotypes and everything. Let's see, we had some kind of equipment between... Let me find out. And then we went from that to...

RB: After the Linotype?

EJ: After the Linotype.

RB: It was a Copygraphic, you say?

EJ: Copygraphic, yes, machine.

RB: Was it based on film? Photographic type work?

EJ: Yeah, I think it was. I'm not sure about that (chuckles), it's been a long time ago. And then we went to the computers. Then we went offset. We printed over at Bolivar for a year or so and we got tired of that. Then I bought a King News Press that we still have.

RB: So when you printed over at Bolivar, they had a large print...

EJ: They had an offset press, yes. That's when we went offset, see. We sent it there for about a year or so, or maybe a little longer, and then we decided to buy our own press.

RB: Uh-huh, and it was an offset?

EJ: Oh, yeah. I bought a King Press.

RB: Do you recall the year you bought that offset? That must have been in the '60s, or late '60s maybe?

EJ: *[Thoughtful pause]* Donnie...

RB: That's alright, that's okay, we'll find out, and I'll have a chance maybe to talk with him too, later on. Anyway, there's been a lot of changes in technology and that in the business.

EJ: Oh, Lord, yes!

RB: And you started off with kind of a basic press, I guess, in the printing operation.

EJ: That's right. But the worst job -- (laughing) I thought, anyway -- was re-melting the metal for your Linotypes. About every ten days, you had to do this, you know. I guess you don't know anything about a Linotype.

RB: Just a *little* bit, but not that much.

EJ: We called them "pigs," and you hung them on this thing over the electric pot, and they melted. They molded the thing on a slug, you know. That's one thing I didn't like to do, but we had to do it.

RB: You had to do that, and pretty frequently, too.

EJ: About every ten days, yeah.

RB: And then you'd have to re-mold?

EJ: Well, we'd take these slugs, you know, after we printed the paper and put them in a bucket and then put them in the pot and re-mold them, and re-melt them down and pour them out in molds.

RB: Right. Now, whose job was that, to do that re-melting there?

EJ: Well...

RB: What sort of staff...? Like for instance now, when you first got in the business, and you came over and decided to buy the paper, your first role in the newspaper business was owner, wasn't it?

EJ: That's right. I was the publisher. That's right, yes. And I've been the publisher since '47.

RB: What sort of staff did you all have when you first [came in]?

EJ: Oh, we had about four, I guess. We had three men and a woman working for us.

RB: Was one of them your wife?

EJ: Besides my wife. The gal run one Linotype, and we had a man running a Linotype. And we had a man [who] worked in the back with the job work and printed the paper and set up the ads. We set up the ads with hand type. You've seen hand type, I'm sure.

RB: I've *seen* it.

EJ: Of course, after we went offset, that was history. (laughs)

RB: But, boy, that was a lot of work, though, to set up that type, wasn't it?

EJ: Oh, sure, it was. You'd take it a piece at a time, and you had what they called a "stick," and you put it in. I remember one time I hired a kid [who] graduated from Skyline High School over here. (chuckles) I told him to go back in the shop and set me a month, day, and year -- a certain [date], I forget what it was now, whether it was November 15th or not -- and he said, "Well, you'll have to tell me how to spell the month, I don't know how." (laughs)

RB: And he was graduated already?!

EJ: (Chuckling) Graduated from high school. So I told the kid. He worked here quite a little while, but...

RB: But you had to be a good speller to set that type, because there's no copy correction, there's no spell check on that! (Laughs)

EJ: There you go! Well, the advantage they had in setting the type was the editor wrote out the copy, see, and took it back. And they (laughs) had something to go by.

RB: It should be spelled right by that time.

EJ: It should be spelled right, that's right. I'm a poor speller, myself.

RB: Were there some people that were faster than others, at setting this type?

EJ: Oh, certainly, yes. Some people have a knack to do it, that's right.

RB: Because I can see that that'd be kind of a tedious job.

EJ: It would be. Yeah, set it, and then you put it together, you know, make an ad out of it.

RB: Right. And there's some art involved in that, too, wasn't it?

EJ: Oh, sure.

RB: For ad work and that kind of thing.

EJ: That's right.

RB: Did you all have anyone that you'd call...? Let's see, okay, you had a Linotype operator, and you had an editor, I guess. Who was the editor at that time?

EJ: My wife was the editor. I was the business manager.

RB: And then you had some people working on the press, I guess.

EJ: Oh, we had a young fellow that run the press for us, yeah.

RB: Did you have anyone that you'd call a "print devil"?

EJ: (laughs) I don't think we had... We'd have had a lot of fun out of that! (laughs)

RB: How would you describe a print devil?

EJ: I think that was more or less a joke.

RB: I don't know if you know Mr. Wallace Vernon, over in Eldon.

EJ: I've heard of him.

RB: He was telling me he did some work as a print devil himself, when he was a young boy, just doing jobs.

EJ: Doing odd jobs, that's true. More or less a joke, but anyway, they had a lot of fun with it -- or we did, anyway. (laughs) But we enjoyed it. And we made pretty good money. It was a good business, we worked it up to a good business. It was a real good business.

RB: So that was a weekly paper, and so you had a lot of work to do at the first part of the week. That's what I'm starting to learn.

EJ: Oh, sure, that's true.

RB: A lot of pressure there.

EJ: A lot of pressure there the first part of the week. We printed on Thursday.

RB: What kind of circulation do you get beyond...? Let's see, it's for Hermitage...

EJ: We pretty well covered the county. And a lot of people that lived here that moved away, they want to keep up with the people here, so they subscribe. You know, I'm trying to

think what our circulation was _____. I'd have to guess at it, I think around a 1,000, maybe, when we started -- 800 or 1,000 when we started. Now we print 4,700 papers.

RB: 4,700, huh?

EJ: We print that many. I think our list is about 3,200 or 3,500, and we sell a lot on counter sales, that we didn't back then. Now we put them out on counter sales and we sell a lot papers that way.

RB: People just stop and buy, then, or pick it up.

EJ: That's right. Back then, that was history. (laughs) We didn't do that.

RB: I noticed in Mr. Taft's book, he mentioned that you added a storefront, a new front to the building in '56.⁶

EJ: That's right.

RB: That was only about ten years, I guess, after you...

EJ: After we bought it, that's right.

RB: Is that this portion that we're in now?

EJ: No, it's in there. This building was a grocery store when we bought it. But we bought the building in there, and then I put a new front in it in '56. That's right. And the front's still there just like we put it in.

RB: Was it added onto the old building that the Wilsons had had?

EJ: Oh, we just took the front out of the old building and put a new one in! (chuckles)

RB: And so this part of the building over here on this side here is an older building, and that's

⁶ William Howard Taft, Missouri Newspapers. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1964), 308.

where the Wilsons were?

EJ: That's where they started. Well, they started the paper up on the other side of the Square, and moved it down here later, but...

RB: They moved the same building over here?

EJ: They didn't move the building.

RB: They just moved the business?

EJ: The business, uh-huh. But when I bought it, it was that building in there. This building was a grocery store and then an attorney's office. And then we needed the space, so I bought this right here and cut that door through so we could use it, which has come in handy. Of course, we have grown and had a good business, and we appreciate it very much. People have been awfully nice to us.

RB: Sure. And since 1885, when the paper started, there must have been a lot of old... Was there such a thing as a morgue or old files of papers and that kind of thing?

EJ: Not that I know of.

RB: There wasn't any around when you purchased [the business]?

EJ: Not that I know of.

RB: Have you saved those sorts of things over the years?

EJ: Well, when I bought the paper, they had a file of all those old papers they had published, and I sent them all to the State Library [State Historical Society of Missouri] up in Columbia. And they microfilmed them, and they're on microfilm up there. And I started

binding them in 1951, and I have all of them bound here in books. Like, see, those books laying over there?

RB: Right. So that's part of your regular operation. You bind what you [print].

EJ: That's right, we bind each year. We sent it out to have it bound. And we refer back to them quite often, and they come in handy, yes. But the older papers, they got so -- well, they'd laid around so long, they were brittle. So we had them microfilmed up there, and they kept them [the microfilm copies.] They sent them back to us, but if you pick them up, they fall apart. (laughs)

RB: That's right. But we're glad to have them over there at the State Historical Society
_____.

EJ: Oh, they have them, there. Yeah, they've got them on microfilm. If you want to know anything about the Index, it's there.

RB: Yeah, that's quite a history on that. One of the things that I've found, going around talking to people, is that family is very important, and that newspaper businesses seem to pass down.

EJ: Through the family, yes, that's right. Yeah, it does.

RB: And a lot of the work force, sometimes, incorporates some of the family.

EJ: That's right, that's true.

RB: So some of this has happened here, then?

EJ: Oh, sure, yeah.

RB: To the extent you were a son-in-law in that line there.

EJ: That's right.

RB: Have you had other family members that have worked for the paper?

EJ: Well, let's start back when her father bought the place. He run it there and then later he hired his brother to help him. And then come on down through the years, why, my wife had a sister that had a couple of young people that wanted a job, and we hired them, and they worked for us a while and...

RB: So they'd be like your nephews or...?

EJ: That's right, yeah. One little girl -- well, she's dead now, but she was an awful good head -- she run the Linotype, helped keep the books and stuff.

RB: What was her name?

EJ: Carlstrom, Virginia Carlstrom. And Charlie Carlstrom, he run the big press.⁷ He run the press, hand-fed press, and set up some. Let's see, my father-in-law's brother, he was a printer for a while for him. That's been years ago. Then we had another man was a Linotype [operator], he did back then run Lin[otype], by the name of Isaac Clark. He was very efficient.

RB: He was a good operator?

EJ: He was a good operator.

RB: You had to have a skilled operator for that Linotype.

EJ: Well, you need... That machine (chuckles), I don't know whether you know anything about one or not.

⁷ Virginia Ruth Carlstrom and Charles Carlstrom were sister and brother.

RB: I'm not the expert on them, but I've heard they had some complexity to them.

EJ: Well, they do. You've got to learn the machine to operate it, and operate it right. It has a lot of mechanical problems. Of course, you have a mat up here, and you push a _____ out here, it releases it, comes in here. And then you cast it, make a slug out of it, and then it takes it back and ?registers? it and all that stuff. There's quite a machine.

RB: A lot of mechanical processes there.

EJ: Oh, a lot of mechanical processes, that's right.

RB: Did you yourself have to run it from time to time?

EJ: Oh, I've run the Linotype a lot of times, yeah, sure.

RB: And the press, too, I'm sure.

EJ: No.

RB: Didn't have to do it?

EJ: I stayed away from the press. (laughs) You mean the hand-fed part? No, I didn't run it.

RB: Did you ever end up writing very much for the paper?

EJ: Not too much, no. Oh, I'd help the wife out a little bit on it. But she loved that. She liked to write, she loved it. And that wasn't my line of thinking. (laughs) But I enjoyed the business, running the business, the job shop, keeping the equipment up to date, buying new equipment. And the newspaper business, you've got to be up to date with your machinery if you're going to keep in business and keep growing. And that was one of my jobs.

RB: Right. And that's a big investment, too.

EJ: Oh, it is, yeah!

RB: You have to re-tool every so often.

EJ: Oh, we changed (chuckles) equipment three or four or five times. I don't know, at least three times.

RB: What happens to the old equipment, Mr. Jenkins? For instance, you know, the Linotype machines?

EJ: They were junked.

RB: Just junked. Because after the next technology comes in...

EJ: You have no use for it. You've got to have this metal, you know, and all that to run it.

RB: Then later on, then, it went to, I guess, this other typesetting machine that you had there -- copy typesetter?

EJ: Yeah.

RB: And that thing left too. Was that junked, too, I guess?

EJ: Oh yes, it was thrown away. Then we come to the computers. And they keep adding to them, and they're growing and do this and that with them, you know.

RB: There's a lot of change, maybe more change than that.

EJ: Even in there today, why, we have a man up here that's teaching Donnie and the bunch in there how to make photos with the computer.

RB: Like scanning the photos?

EJ: That's right. (laughs) And that'll *continue* to grow.

RB: Right. And you don't even have a photographic process -- it's all electronic.

EJ: Well, that's what we're getting in now. We had a photographic process before that, but we're trying to get away from it.

RB: Do you all have a collection of photos? What did you ever do over the years? When you collect photos, did you ever have a morgue where you'd collect and save them?

EJ: Well, a lot of people bring in photos, and then they come and get them, see. We have a whole bunch of them in there that we collected. We don't use them. I don't know, they're just laying there. (laughs)

RB: Right. There are *some*, but it's not a major interest to the business.

EJ: No, it's not a major interest.

RB: But you could have... Since you've been here so long...

EJ: Been here fifty years.

RB: You *could* have some older stuff like that, that could be of interest, historically.

EJ: Well, we regretted that we didn't put one of the Linotypes over in the Historical Society, but we didn't. I've thought about it several times, that we should have done that, but we just were busy and didn't do it.

RB: That's right.

EJ: Now, here's the presses I learned how to print on right here.

RB: Oh, this one right here?

EJ: This one right here is a pedal. See, you pedal it with your foot. That's where I learned how to print.

RB: Wow, look at that thing! That's an old timer there, then, huh?

EJ: Oh, yeah! And that's the one Donnie learned how to print on, too.

RB: Now, when did Donnie start in? Your daughter [Kathy Jenkins Ginnings], for instance, must have gotten involved with the paper.

EJ: Well, they got married and they went to college. We sent them to college. He got a job teaching school down at Camdenton. And [my] wife and I begin to get old, and it was quite a chore to us, see. So they...

[Tape Counter 491; End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 1.]

[Tape Counter 000; Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 1.]

RB: Your daughter, already, before you went to...?

EJ: Yeah, that's right.

RB: So he was interested in journalism?

EJ: I guess. (laughs)

RB: How about your daughter, now? Was she involved with the paper when she was very young?

EJ: Oh, she was, a little bit, yes.

RB: Did she do some writing?

EJ: No, her mother did the writing. She's kind of like me on the writing. (laughs)

RB: But she would help out around...?

EJ: Oh, sure, on the paper, sure.

RB: [Help] put the paper out on a weekly basis. Did she go to college? Did she study journalism too?

EJ: No, she didn't. She more or less... Oh, she liked typing and stuff like that. What do you call it?

RB: Stenographer and office work?

EJ: Yeah, things of that sort.

RB: And is she still involved with the [newspaper]?

EJ: Yes. She's not here today, but she's our receptionist up front.

RB: So she's still involved with the paper.

EJ: And she keeps the books and all that stuff. Then I've got a granddaughter [Donna K. Ginnings Christian] who's a CPA [certified public accountant] and she works for the State Auditing Department. And I let her make my reports and things. Comes in handy. Sometimes she gets a little slow and I have to get after her. (laughs)

RB: You have to watch that pretty carefully.

EJ: Oh, yeah.

RB: You have to keep your records in there, accounting and that.

EJ: That's right. I used to do all that myself, and I got tired or old, I don't know which. (chuckles)

RB: Well, time for somebody else to start doing it.

EJ: Why, I think so.

RB: So, he [Don Ginnings] was teaching over in Camdenton, and you told him he was going to have to come over?

EJ: Well, they come up one Sunday and we were visiting. And [my] wife and I, we were getting tired and old and we needed help. (chuckles) So I told the kids, *[speaking with emotion]* I said, "If you want this newspaper, you'd better come up and help us run it, or we're going to sell it." So when his school was out, here they came! (laughs) It's been a good relation, too. It's let them make more money than they were making, and we've had a good income from it too.

RB: Sure. That's great. And he was well prepared for it, and already had the education for it.

EJ: Yeah, that's right.

RB: He's a pretty young fellow, too. I mean, in other words, he's got a potentially long career.

EJ: That's right. And he does a good job.

RB: Does he have children?

EJ: Oh, they've got, let's see, two daughters and a boy.

RB: Do you see any interest in those kids there?

EJ: Well, I haven't yet. (laughs) One of them works for the State Auditor, and the other one is a dental assistant [Amy Ginnings Herring.] And the son [Matt Ginnings] will graduate from college in May. He likes electronics, so I don't know what he'll...

RB: Well, I guess all of this will be electronic anyway.

EJ: That's right, it would be.

RB: So he might fit in somewhere.

EJ: I was talking to my oldest granddaughter the other day, I said, "You know, one of you kids are going to have to take this Index office over some of these days." (laughs) And she acted like she was interested. And I hope she is.⁸

RB: So it could happen there.

EJ: It *could* happen, sure.

RB: Now, how about your philosophy, there, Mr. Jenkins? Say, when you were preparing the papers and all, your wife was the editor, she would chose to write the articles and that kind of thing. Did you all have a certain...? Were you interested in politics, for instance, in this area?

EJ: Oh, yeah, we were. Hickory County's been Republican for years. It's not as strong now as it used to be, because we've had a lot of people move in here. But we were interested in that, yeah. And you know, back when we bought the paper, we had a little over 3,000 people in the county. Today we have around 8,000 people. You know, they built the Pomme de Terre Dam out here, and those people... Well, the trend, you know, back -- you remember that, maybe -- the trend was leaving the... Used to be that they had a little farm, each people, and they made their living on the farm. And then the man decided to go get him a job. And now he's retired, or drawing Social [Security], now he's moving back here.

RB: They want to go back to the country.

⁸ Back issues of the Index also note additional members of the extended Jenkins family participating in various aspects of the newspaper's operation.

EJ: And we've got about 4,000 or 5,000 people out there on that Lake. [Pomme de Terre Lake]

RB: And it is sort of a retirement community...?

EJ: It's a retirement community, that's right. The government built it -- let's see, oh, they started in '58, I think they got through in '61, maybe.

RB: Uh-huh. So you all would report on politics, of course, you know, local.

EJ: Oh, sure.

RB: Do you report on anything but local politics?

EJ: Well, back years ago we used to because a lot of people, that was the only way they had of finding it out. But now it's different. We don't report too much on the national politics, but we do report all of the local deal, and both parties.

RB: And state too?

EJ: Well, yeah, we try to report part of the state too, yes.

RB: Because, of course, the governors' elections and all that kind of thing would be important. The legislature, state...

EJ: That's true. Well, our representative and senator from this district, they send us a letter about every week, telling about the things in Jefferson City, and things _____, and we publish it.

RB: Did you have a competitor paper, that, for instance, would be the Democrat or something...?

EJ: No, we didn't. We've been fortunate. (laughter)

RB: Not in Hickory County, anyway.

EJ: No, not since I've been in the newspaper business, anyway.

RB: How about yourself? Were you ever interested in political office yourself?

EJ: Well, no. Like I told you, when I got out of high school, I worked nine years as deputy county clerk. Then I went to Jefferson City, but I never did have too much desire to run for office or anything. Oh, I thought about it one time, when I got back from the service. Then I didn't do it. (laughs) [*Thoughtful pause*] I don't know, you're under a little stress if you got a political job, and people talk to you. I just stayed away from it. And I think you can make more money, maybe, otherwise than you make by having one of those jobs.

RB: Right. It's a public service job.

EJ: It's a public service job, that's true, and it should be handled that way.

RB: But now, somebody was telling me you've been *servin'*, at least, as mayor?

EJ: I'm on my fifteenth year as mayor. I've never run for the job. They always write me in. (laughter) And I got a lot of publicity this last election. I was reelected, and the reporters came up and interviewed me and they sent it all over the United States, and I got clippings from Florida to California, all the way across, about (laughs) the story.

RB: Write-in!

EJ: Write-in.

RB: Write-in mayor.

EJ: That's right! (laughs)

RB: And is that how it started off to begin with? I mean, as a write-in?

EJ: Yeah, I never run for the job.

RB: And somebody, fifteen years ago...

EJ: Well, the fellow that had the job, he got old and I think he quit. I don't know, the people just looked at me and said, "You're going to be it!" (laughter) But I've always felt this way -- maybe I'm wrong -- if you're going to live in a community, you owe it a little something. And I thought, "Well, I owe a little something. Yeah, I'd better do this." Well, I served on the school board down there, thirty years as president of the school board. And superintendent of Sunday school for years.

RB: Which church is that, sir?

EJ: I belong to the Christian Church. We had a unity up here -- Methodists and Christian, the same building. And we had a Union Sunday school. I served as their superintendent. We had a Methodist preacher one Sunday, and a Christian preacher the next Sunday. And that was Christianity to me, the people working together, striving for the right -- one thing, see, that we're *all* striving for. I can't understand all these denominations, because we're all striving to go to the same place. Maybe there's that many roads in, but I doubt it. There *could* be. I *hope* so. (laughter)

RB: I guess we'll find out, by and by.

EJ: By and by, we'll find out.

RB: That's it. And how about the town? Do you have a city council that helps you?

EJ: Oh yeah, we have a city council. We're the only town in the county in the last few years that's shown any growth at all. Most of them have gone down.

RB: So you folks have to contend with that growth. You have to plan for it, deal with it.

EJ: Oh yeah. We got a care center down here. We went to Jeff City. Worked, finally got it installed. She's 120 beds -- 60 rooms, you know, with 2 beds in a room. And we got that accomplished. Then I got "Key Industry" to come in and build a plant downriver. Little things like that. You got to keep on the ball. But like I told you, I think if anybody that lives in a community, makes their living there, owes the community a little something.

RB: That's right. Well, you're in a good position -- or you've always been in a good position as the newspaper person -- to have a lot of contacts and know people and know everyone and that kind of thing.

EJ: That's right.

RB: What do you think about the newspaper business altogether? Do you think that it's more of a *reporting* of what's going on, locally, or is it more of a...? Do you think that it itself *influences* what goes on?

EJ: I'd say it helps to influence, probably. I think the newspaper needs to promote the community, and work to that extent. And anything that comes along that's worthy should get some publicity.

RB: And that goes on into editorial philosophy.

EJ: Sure, uh-huh.

RB: How strong your editorial, for instance, would be.

EJ: (laughs)

RB: Who's the editor now? Is that Mr. Ginnings?

EJ: Yeah, he's our editor now.

RB: So he's the one...

EJ: He writes the editorials.

RB: And he decides to come out for this or that?

EJ: Well, we talk about it, but he writes it and that's all right.

RB: Back when your wife was doing it, did you all talk about it, too?

EJ: Oh, sure we did!

RB: Whose side won out?

EJ: She usually won out. (laughs heartily) We agreed pretty much on it, you know. Well, you know who wins when you're wife and husband. (laughter)

RB: The one that really runs things is the one that wins out.

EJ: There you go. Oh, we got along real well. We had no problems.

RB: While we have a little chance, Mr. Jenkins, you mentioned something about this press over here. I'd like to learn a little more about it. That's a great old machine there, isn't it? Look at that thing.

EJ: That's a great old machine, yeah.

RB: The name of this thing is called a "Golding and Company, made in Boston, USA."

EJ: *[Apparently trying to remove a part on the machine]* They got that on there pretty tight.

RB: Do you mind if I snap a picture or so of it?

EJ: No.

RB: And you say this thing was in the shop when you arrived?

EJ: When I _____.

RB: In 1947, it was already here. I just wondered...

EJ: I guess you know how this works, don't you?

RB: No, sir, not really.

RB: You put what you're going to print, right here. And you got your form that fits right in here, see. And this is inked up here. Your rollers go up and get the ink, put it on the form.

RB: And that presses it up against that...

EJ: Presses up against there, gets pressed, and then you take it out, see.

RB: What do you call this part right here?

EJ: A disk.

RB: That's the disk right there. And it would press up against that disk?

EJ: Your rollers go over that disk, see, and get the ink and bring it down on the form, which is in here.

RB: So where would the ink be placed then?

EJ: The ink is all around that.

RB: So you actually have to ink that disk?

EJ: We ink this thing here, see.

RB: Uh-huh. How did you ink it? Did you have like a brush or something that you put on it?

EJ: Well, we had a knife or something that we put it on there with -- or brush or whatever you call it.

RB: And it's got a foot pedal on it.

EJ: Oh, yes, that's what runs it. (laughs) That's what Donnie and I both learned to print on.

RB: What about this right here? Is that for a belt?

EJ: We had at one time, we put a... Had a motor there, put a motor and run it with a motor. But when we learned how to run it, we run it with our *foot*.

RB: And so it was sort of adapted. It began as a foot-powered machine, but it had to _____.

EJ: We put this on later.

RB: And it had an electric motor, I guess.

EJ: Electric motor that run it. You could stand here and... Don't get your finger in there, though.

RB: Did you ever have any problems like that?

EJ: No, not serious. Once in a while you get your finger bashed.

RB: It'd get caught in there.

EJ: Yeah. But you got to be careful of about those things.

RB: That's one of the dangers, isn't it, the machinery?

EJ: Well, any machine that you use, you've got to be cautious about it, my friend.

RB: Uh-huh, because you were talking about, this printing process here, and I guess those *big* machines, as you get more powerful machines, you get a dangerous...

EJ: That's right.

RB: And then the other thing was the lead operation. That's *got* to be dangerous.

EJ: Yeah. I know my big press, back in the back there... My printer was running it, and he come over and put his hand down here, and got it caught and mashed it a little bit. But it come out, it didn't hurt it too bad.

RB: Did it break it or anything?

EJ: No, he just bruised it.

RB: But I guess there's been some horrible stories, probably, from some of this equipment like this.

EJ: Oh, sure. I'm sure that people got hurt with it _____.

RB: Different places.

EJ: If you want to learn how to print, we'll fix that up for you, and come down and let you fix it.

RB: Yeah!

EJ: (laughs)

RB: Yeah! That thing definitely goes in a museum, doesn't it?

EJ: Well, it should, yeah. We should take it over to the museum, that's true.

RB: I don't see any date on it, but I just wonder...

EJ: Well, isn't there a date on it over there on the side? There should be.

RB: Some of them have dates on them. I don't see it on *this* side.

EJ: Well, look around. *[pause]* I guess there isn't any. I don't know. Well, you've got good eyes. There's a number right there. I can't see it. Maybe you can see it.

RB: Okay, let's see. Yes, that's the date.

EJ: What is it?

RB: 1895.

EJ: Okay, that tells you when it was manufactured.

RB: [It reads] "1895, Golding and Company." That's probably an old name. Of course, they had those presses during the nineteenth century, too.

EJ: Oh, yeah.

RB: But this original Wilson, who operated this place here, who began the Index, he probably himself had this thing hauled in.

EJ: Probably did, yeah.

RB: Or else he bought it used.

EJ: He might. I don't know. It was here when I got here. (laughs)

RB: When you look back at a machine like that, do you have a -- is it a nostalgia that you have, or are you glad to be away from it?

EJ: (laughs) Well, if you run it eight hours a day, you'd be glad to get away from it.

RB: I suspect. Was that pretty typical? I mean, when it was time to...

EJ: We printed a lot of envelopes, letterheads, and stuff like that on it, yeah. But then we got the other presses.

RB: So you had other jobs besides just the Index, right? You would take jobs?

EJ: Oh, we did a lot of job printing, if that's what you mean. We bought a Heidelberg. I don't know whether you're familiar with them or not. They were an automatic press. They were German-made presses. And we used that a lot. And we had three or four other

hand-feed presses like this one right here. But they didn't have pedals on them, you had to run them with a motor. That's the way we did our job printing.

RB: Do you still have a lot of jobs that come in, like other than the [Index]?

EJ: We do quite a bit of job work, yeah.

RB: I noticed you had some duplicators in here and copiers.

EJ: Here's the last thing in a job press right here. You don't have to make a plate or anything for it. Just like you take that, put it in there, and it'll start printing them out.

RB: Once you come up with your original...

EJ: You've got it typed out, see. So, there again, you see how we're...

RB: Yeah, it's gotten to be a lot easier, I guess.

EJ: I just bought that press there. I think it cost me \$15,000. But they come in here... You bring in an envelope, you want 500 envelopes, they can put it in there and wham, wham, wham, in twenty minutes or thirty you've got your envelopes.

RB: And this thing is called a Risograph. I can see the name.

EJ: Can you read it there?

RB: Yes, sir, I can. [It is] a [model] GR-3750, and that's the modern...

EJ: That's the modern equipment. That's the latest in the press business.

RB: But you all still have a big press for your newspaper.

EJ: Oh yeah, back in the back there.

RB: And it's got the roll type?

EJ: It's got a King... It's got big old rolls of paper, you know. I'll take you back and show it to you, if you want to see it.

RB: Sure, I'd love to.

[Recording stopped, then resumes]

EJ: This was before we got that one I just showed you.

RB: These are offset presses. These are the ones that are no longer in use now?

EJ: Well, we use them quite often. Yeah, we still use them. But not as much as we did.

RB: Okay, so we're walking now into the... Do you call it the print shop?

EJ: This is our King press, our news press, see.

RB: And this thing is -- now, it's getting to be fairly older, now, isn't it?

EJ: Oh, yeah, it's quite old.

RB: Do you recall when you bought that one?

EJ: I'll ask Donnie, he remembers. I don't remember.

RB: "The News King, King Press."

EJ: News King, yeah. Here's the rolls of paper that we put on it.

RB: Right. Now, that thing is running pretty wildly on Wednesdays then, you say?

EJ: That's right. Well, Tuesday night and Wednesday, yeah. 1,500 papers a minute, or something like that. And here's our storage room, I'll show that to you. (door squeaks open) And we go out it. There's our...

RB: Okay. You have a tractor right here.

EJ: Well, we have that to unload these big rolls with and bring them in here, see? See the front of it there. They're a little too much to handle.

RB: Sure, that's a heavy roll of paper right there!

EJ: (chuckling) That's right.

RB: But you can take the forklift adapter off there and put on a plow on there and go in the garden with that thing, can't you? (laughs)

EJ: Oh, yeah, plow right back here. That's right. (laughter) (sound of door squeaking again)

RB: It does take some equipment to handle those big pieces of... I see here you have a lift.

EJ: This is what you lift them with, right here.

RB: Uh-huh, one-ton lift to handle the big rolls of paper.

EJ: Just push a button right there, and it hooks on each side of this, see. It rolls it right over there, and put it where you want it.

RB: Now, once it's loaded up then, the person that's actually feeding the copy, where does he stand?

EJ: The man that runs the press, you mean?

RB: Yes, sir.

EJ: Well, he starts the press right here, then he works all the way along this side of it, see. He has his different things to turn and keep it right. And the paper comes out right here, forward.

RB: This thing will fold it too?

EJ: It folds it where it comes down there, comes through there and folds it. Well, let's see, here's one right here.

RB: I see a name called "Fairchild." Is that the folding apparatus?

EJ: Yeah, that's the folding apparatus.

RB: Called the Fairchild.

EJ: Uh-huh. There's the way you fold it. We print several different things for _____.

RB: So this is a copy of the Midwest Cattleman. Is that something that you periodically...?

EJ: We print it, oh, I think every two or three weeks. We print several jobs. We print a shopper for a fellow in Buffalo, and I don't know, several different places a week. We print several.

RB: And you say you still use that offset press somewhat.

EJ: What's that?

RB: The machine that we just passed that's in this other room.

EJ: Oh, yeah! We use that for job work. Yeah, that's job work. (sound of Mr. Jenkin's tapping the machine.) This is newsprinting. Print big sheets like that, see.

RB: What is this thing, Mr. Jenkins? Is that an older piece right there?

EJ: Oh, that's an old plate we used to make. You put that in your press. Couldn't put it in this press, but the old hand-feed press.

RB: That was the hand-feed press. And you'd have to make this thing? Or did you buy it like that?

EJ: You have this base, see, and you glued that on the base, the rubber there. You made that.

RB: I see. But the rubber itself, you had to mold that, I guess.

EJ: Oh, yeah. This rubber was bought. But mostly ours was made with a metal. We cast them.

RB: The lead.

EJ: Lead, yeah, we cast them. That was sent to us, there.

RB: Okay.

EJ: Now, see, this comes off printed and it goes down in that and it's folded, ends up over there.

RB: That's a miracle of machinery, isn't it?

EJ: That's quite a machine, if you ask me.

RB: Now, that folding operation there, if it gets messed up just a little bit...

EJ: (chuckles) Well, you've got to know what you're doing. (laughs) That's true.

RB: Because that thing's probably running pretty fast.

EJ: Oh, yeah. 1,500.

RB: It goes what? It makes... 1,500 what?

EJ: Minutes, I think it is. It goes fast.

RB: Yeah, I could see a big jam-up, if that thing were to... (laughs)

EJ: You're not a-kidding! (laughter) And this is where they make their plates. This is the Job Department here.

RB: Uh-huh. So it's still a photographic operation with this film.

EJ: Oh, sure, yeah. This girl out here, she develops the pictures -- don't you, kid?

uw: Uh-huh.

RB: Photographer.

uw: Yeah. (laughter)

EJ: Now, these two girls, they set the type for the newspaper.

RB: Are you all using MacIntosh machines?

uw: Uh-huh.

RB: Power Mac, that's the state of the art, isn't it?

uw: (chuckles) Yeah, they're good!

RB: Uh-huh, it's a great machine.

EJ: How many papers per minute does our news press...?

DG: Oh, it runs, I'd say...

EJ: 1,500, doesn't it?

DG: No, it runs almost 20,000. It runs between 18,000 to 20,000 an *hour*, so that's 300 per minute.

EJ: I thought it was 1,500 a minute.

DG: No.

EJ: It's 300 a minute? Now, see, I was wrong.

RB: That's a lot of papers to get folded up in there, isn't it?

DG: We used to, it'd take us... We had a fourteen-page paper. We'd start running on Monday and we'd finish up running on Friday. We run off and on all week.

EJ: That's when we had the...

DG: Old flatbed.

EJ: Flatbed.

DG: Now we can run that many papers in, oh, fifteen, twenty minutes.

RB: Uh-huh. Do you recall when this King [press] first came in?

EJ: When did we buy that King?

DG: We bought that in January of 1985.

RB: And prior to that you had a...?

DG: Well, for a few years, after we converted to the offset process, we went to Bolivar and had them print it while we were buying this. But before that, when we were printing the old letterpress version, we had a press right here, the Miehle flatbed letterpress.

RB: Uh-huh. Now, to actually set type, there's been a lot of changes there too, hasn't it?

DG: Right. We've had hand type and Linotype, and various forms of Compugraphic.

RB: I mean, just in your memory.

DG: I did all those. I started out with the Linotype and hand type, and then went with the first Compugraphics.

EJ: He even run that little press in there.

RB: That little press in there?!

EJ: Yeah.

DG: Then we went to the Compugraphic, various generations of that, from the simple versions on up to the computerized and the disk drive and the stand-alone units, and then to the MacIntoshes.

RB: Now, Don, do you mind if I ask you, how old are you now?

DG: I'm fifty-one.

RB: So as young a man as you are, fifty-one, you've gone through a lot of technology.

DG: I've lived a hundred years in my fifty-one years! (laughter)

EJ: How about that now!

DG: I got in on the last of the old way, and then the various processes that have led us up 'til now. Where other commercial printing operations were already starting to convert into the offset method, the larger newspaper operations had to wait until they could just convert it *all*. So we had a real good letterpress system set up here, so we continued into the '70s with the letterpress versions and methods, processes. Then we started switching in the mid-'70s.

RB: That would be a switch to the...

DG: Photo offset. The other was the hard type, the metal type, the letterpress.

RB: But all the other technology... You still have some of it around.

DG: We keep a little of it around, just for whatever purposes, just for the novelty of it.

RB: The offset machines are still here.

DG: Yeah, and we have an old historic pedal press and hand-operated presses here, just...

[Tape Counter 473; End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 1. End of interview.]