

An Interview with
Max O. Shemwell

in
Doniphan, Missouri

22 August 1997

interviewed by C. Ray Brassieur
transcribed by Teresa Jones
edited by Renae Farris



Oral History Program
The State Historical Society of Missouri
© 1997

Collection C3966

Missouri Environment a.c. 43

NOTICE

1) This material is protected by copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code). It may not be cited without acknowledgment to The Oral History Program of the State Historical Society of Missouri and the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, a Joint Collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri.

Citations should include: [name of interviewee], [name of the interviewer], [date and place of interview], [audio recording or transcript], and [where it can be found, for example, The Oral History Program of the State Historical Society of Missouri, Missouri Environment Oral History Project].

2) Reproductions of this transcript are available for reference use only and cannot be reproduced or published in any form (including digital formats) without written permission from the Western Historical Manuscript Collection.

3) Use of information or quotations from any Missouri Environment Oral History Project transcript indicates agreement to indemnify and hold harmless the University of Missouri, the State Historical Society of Missouri, their officers, employees, and agents, and the interviewee from and against all claims and actions arising out of the use of this material.

For further information, contact:

Western Historical Manuscript Collection
23 Ellis Library
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65201-5149

PREFACE

Max O. Shemwell was born on April 11, 1919, in Doniphan, Missouri, where he has spent the majority of his life and currently resides. Doniphan is located on the Current River which has affected the way of life there extensively. Shemwell speaks about growing up near the river and the economic opportunities it has provided such as fishing, boating and tourism.

River life has given him knowledge on johnboats, inboard motors, current operated ferries, and the differences between wood and aluminum boats as well as a library of stories about ferry systems he has heard since his youth. Shemwell credits the Civilian Conservation Corps' (CCC) camp located in Doniphan for the large areas of federally protected land along with the road systems in the area. He also discusses the generational dichotomy of his home town.

The interview was recorded on a 3M type I (normal bias) audio cassette, using a Sony TC-D5 Pro II stereo cassette recorder (set on automatic recording level) and an Audio-Technica AT825 stereo microphone attached to a tripod floor stand. No interference compromises the recording, and the audio quality is good throughout.

The following transcript represents a faithful rendering of the entire oral history interview. Minor stylistic alterations -- none of factual consequence -- have been made as part of a general transcription policy. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Parentheses () are used to indicate laughter or a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation. Quotation marks [" "] indicate speech depicting dialogue, or words highlighted for the usual special purposes (such as indicating irony). Double dashes [--] and ellipses [. . .] are also used as a stylistic method in an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, N. Renae Farris.

[Tape meter, 003. Begin side one, tape one of one. Begin interview.]

RB: Mr. Max, what I'd like to do is start off with just a little bit about your life and your basic biography. Your name is Max D.?

MS: Max O.

RB: Max O. Shemwell?

MS: Mm-hmm.

RB: And that "O" stands for?

MS: Oliver.

RB: Oliver. Was that like a last name of some branch of your family?

MS: It comes from my mother's family. I don't know the origins, but she had a brother named Oliver.

RB: A lot of times, middle names are passed down that end up being real significant in the family.

MS: Right. Her parents were from the east, and they migrated to Southwest Missouri. Her father's middle name was Oliver, and I don't know where they got that.

RB: When is your birthday?

MS: April 11, 1919.

RB: And were you born here?

MS: Right here. Two blocks from here.

RB: In Doniphan?

MS: Right.

RB: Was your dad born here too?

MS: No. Pitman, Arkansas.

RB: When did they move up into Missouri?

MS: Well, he grew up in Pitman.¹ His dad had the post office and the country store. My dad went to school at Maynard. And then he got on the Frisco [railroad] and went to Springfield to go to the college over there. I believe it was a business college; I've forgotten. While he was there, he met my mother. She lived in Polk County. He came back and he worked in a bank in Maynard. Then he came to Doniphan and he worked in a bank with the Wrights.

RB: Let's see now, what was your dad's name?

MS: Kit K. Shemwell was his name.

RB: And your mom's name?

MS: Hopkins.

RB: Hopkins? That was her maiden name?

MS: That was her maiden name.

RB: And what was her first name?

MS: Lula, L-U-L-A.

RB: So they met over in Springfield; is that where they married?

MS: Well, they met over there. No, they were married on Current River. They were married in 1905 and they were to be married on the Ruffs Ferry in the middle of the river. That was April 7th, 1905. But it rained all day and they couldn't get out on the ferry, so they were married in the homestead of Cousin John and Cousin Kate Ruff. They were the

¹ Pitman is in Randolph County, Arkansas, very near the state line with Missouri.

ferry tenders. That ferry was called the Upper Ruff Ferry and it went down through the Braschler neighborhood, the road did, on to Pitman and Maynard.

RB: So that ferry was important enough that they had hoped to get married upon the ferry?

MS: Right, right.

RB: But not only the ferry of course, but the *river* was very important to them.

MS: Right. But that was the gateway from the county seat here down into, well, Randolph County.

RB: Randolph County, Arkansas?

MS: Yes.

RB: So just to get an idea here... I don't know, this map doesn't go into Arkansas, but we can take a glance and see about where it was. (sound of map rustling)

MS: Down at the bottom of [Highway] "U." Do you see "U"?

RB: Here is Pratt [Missouri], here's Purman [Missouri], and then of course Doniphan is over here and here's so the Current coming down, and there's the state line.

[Tape meter, 050]

MS: It's down [Highway]"U" and the ferry was along in here.²

EB: Right in there, and the Indian Ford is right below it. So this is the route that General Price took going in to Missouri. So that's very, very good.³

RB: Right, so that was called the Pitman Ferry? No...

² Approximately five to six miles south of Doniphan, Missouri on the Current River.

³ Mr. Braschler may also be heard on audio cassettes 41, 42, 52, 53 and interviewed on a.c. 37, 38 in collection C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project. However, toward the end of the recording there are references made to a possible unnamed fourth man in the room. It also sounds as if there may be a fourth person from background laughter. This man may also have spoken in the recording and therefore confused with Mr. Braschler on occasion.

MS: Ruff's Ferry.

RB: ...*Ruff's* Ferry. Why would they have to have a ferry right across there? It's because there was an important road there, right? Or an old road?

MS: No, there never was. There was a road on each side of the river, but that was an important link to Doniphan. It even predated the ferries when it was a Civil War crossing. Who was the Civil War general that came up through there?

EB: General [Sterling] Price.

MS: *Price*. It was called Indian Ford. That would have been...

RB: Was that close to where that Big Island is?

EB: Below it, just below it.

RB: Below Big Island. So were they living close to that area?

MS: Well, the Ruffs lived *at* the ferry. They *operated* it. That was some of my dad's cousins. His mother was a Ruff. They, of course, had love of the river and that's what happened.

RB: Were they living at that time below the state line?

MS: No.

RB: No, they had moved up right before they got married; they were living in that neighborhood.

MS: They were living here in Doniphan.

RB: Oh, in *Doniphan*?

MS: My mother came here after they had met in Springfield. And she went to work in a general merchandise store. My dad was working at the bank. However, he terminated his employment pretty quick after that and went into business by himself.

- RB: I see. And he was working with the *Wright* family?
- MS: It was the Wright family, yeah. It wasn't a very pleasant situation for him.
- RB: But he had gotten an education in Springfield, and it was a business-type of an education? And what kind of business did he go into right after he left the bank?
- MS: Insurance and loan broker, and...
- RB: Was that a pretty new sort of a business for Doniphan?
- MS: I'm not sure, but I know he filled a niche.
- RB: There may not have been that many insurance agents in this neighborhood at that time.
- MS: Right.
- RB: Did he specialize in any kind of insurance?
- MS: Property insurance.
- RB: Property? So there's not such a thing, I guess, as life insurance?
- MS: Yes, there was life then, yes.
- RB: Life as well? Alright. And you were born then while he was working at the bank, or while he was working at...?
- MS: No, he was self-employed when I was born. His bank experience (where he was employed with the bank) was short. After he started the insurance business, then he got interested in banks. Then you could buy stock on the margin; you can't do that now. He had some bank stock, and then you would pledge that against some more bank stock in a different bank, and it pyramided. That's one of the reasons we had the fall of the stock market in '29, was this pyramiding of pledging stock, one against the other. And, of

course, in the late 1920s and early '30s, all that collapsed. And he never did recover from that.

RB: So he *was* doing pretty well before that?

MS: Yes, *real* good for that time.

RB: [From] where came his love (or his connection) to the river? How did that come about?

[Tape meter, 100]

MS: Well, he was born a couple of miles from the river, and spent his boyhood fishing and swimming. He knew all about the river.

RB: Right down below the state line?

MS: Right.

RB: And was he born a farm?

MS: Yes.

RB: And so they spent a lot of time fishing and that kind of thing. And then he moved to Doniphan which was still on the river. Why the connection with Ruff? The family connection, mainly?

MS: His mother's maiden name was Ruff, and they came from Tennessee. His parents came from Tennessee and Kentucky. All of those families came down through the Cumberland Gap all about the same time. They were, I guess, getting away from the Federalists; I don't know. But they were all Southern sympathizers.

RB: And even the name Shemwell is one of the families that came through the Cumberland Gap?

MS: Yes.

RB: What's the ethnicity of that name, do you know?

MS: It's English.

RB: Uh-huh! I was trying to twist it into a German name, but it's not.

MS: Well, it could have been. You know, there's no telling. I never did do any work on it.

My brother, who's now deceased, did a lot of work on that. He had printouts; you know what I'm talking about, big volumes of stuff. He came through to visit me one time and I asked him how his project was going and he said, "Well, I've quit." I said "What happened?" He said, "Well, I went over in Kentucky and Tennessee, and I found a murderer and a bastard, and I just *quit!*" (chuckles) So, that's all I know!

RB: (laughing) Right! It didn't get anymore precise than that!

MS: (chuckling) No!

RB: So they had moved over mainly from Tennessee, you say?

MS: Yes.

RB: And they moved over here before the [Civil] War?

MS: Yes. My grandmother was born in 1860. Their homestead was on the military road that came from Maynard up through and across the river there.

RB: On the way to Doniphan?

MS: Well, on the way to Missouri. East of here, the military road actually went up... The one I'm thinking of went up through Oxly. My grandmother (who was born in 1860) told me about seeing the Civil War soldiers coming *and* going for several *years*. Hell, they didn't go home just all at once! (chuckling) I mean, there was no way to get *home* [and] they

didn't have any *money*! They were sick and poor and injured. But she remembered a steady stream, both ways.

RB: And your grandmother, what was her name?

MS: Ruff, her name was Ruff.

RB: And what was her first name?

MS: Leota Gardola Ruff. And she married my grandfather. His name was James Pascal Shemwell.

RB: But she herself was born in 1860, so then she would have been four years old when the war was ending.

MS: Right.

RB: So she still had a memory of that period, huh?

MS: She was born in Hollow Rock, Tennessee; and they moved to Arkansas (Pitman), I guess, while she was an infant.

[Tape meter, 150]

RB: Did their family have slaves at all?

MS: No! I haven't heard of any.

RB: So they would have been farmers, they were pretty well independent...

MS: They were; they were.

RB: Independent, small scale type of operation.

MS: Most of them were professional men. In my dad's family, there were four or five doctors and in fact there's *still* a couple of doctors. One in Louisiana, and one was... Well, Gene Ruff was a doctor in Butler County.

RB: So your dad's father, he was a farmer but was he also a...?

MS: He was a merchant, yes.

RB: A merchant?

MS: Yes, and lived on a farm.

RB: So he probably had a store there in Pitman?

MS: Yes. My dad would come to Doniphan once a week to get the freight for the store. The railroad came into Doniphan in 18...80? My dad was born in 1880. And he would come to Doniphan across the Ruff's Ferry to get merchandise to take back down for the store at Pitman. And that was a once-a-week chore.

RB: That's when he was younger there, before he ever went to school.

MS: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

RB: He wasn't inclined, after he got through with his school, to go back to the store in Pitman?

MS: No!

RB: I wonder; was it still going on at that time?

MS: Yes.

RB: But he'd rather strike out on his own.

MS: Well, I think he had more ambition than *that*, you know.

RB: Now, after you were born here, and your dad was working in his insurance company, did he continue to keep a relationship with the river?

MS: Oh, yes. Yes.

RB: What were your first recollections of that? Would you go on fishing trips?

MS: Yes. My first recollection... Well, there are many, and I can't just say "number one, number two." I remember one very interesting trip. He used Alex Hubbard as his guide, and Mr. Hubbard had an outboard engine (they were primitive then). I would have been six or seven. It was a one cylinder engine and it was fixed on the end of the boat. To make it turn, there was a tiller out [on the] back, and a rope attached to it. Rather than turn the whole motor as we now do, Mr. Hubbard would pull this rope and turn the tiller and make the boat turn as he needed [it] to go.

[Tape meter, 200]

Anyway, this one trip, I went with him and we motored up to the Hawes clubhouse, and that's up the river about eight or nine miles.

RB: Up the river from Doniphan?

MS: Mm-hmm. We went above the Hawes clubhouse, and as we floated down, I remember as my dad was fishing, and he was catching goggle-eye⁴ along that bank. On the front porch or patio in front of the Hawes clubhouse, was [U.S.] Senator Harry [Bartow] Hawes. So my dad stopped, and we visited and my dad was interviewed by Senator Hawes. It was quite an experience. I never will forget that. Hawes had a deep love for the river, and in fact an area at the county line is called the Harry Hawes... What?

EB: I know...

(People speaking simultaneously)

MS: You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

EB: ...Park or something.

⁴ Although several small fish with large eyes are known by this name, goggle-eye is usually a reference to rock bass.

RB: Yes, a management area of some kind?

MS: Yeah.

EB: It's on there.

(Sounds of map unfolding)

MS: And Hawes then was finally... He was cremated and his ashes were sprinkled in the Current River.

RB: Oh, really!

MS: Yeah, really!

RB: Was Hawes from this area too?

MS: No.

(Sounds of map rustling)

MS: "Hawes Memorial Camp Ground" and it's at the bottom of the Ozark Scenic Riverways area.

RB: But he just loved the area so much.

MS: Oh, yeah! Yeah. And he built this cabin. I was up by there yesterday; I went fishing. Now, where were we?

RB: Well, you were on one of your first trips that...

MS: Well, that's the one that I remember.

RB: And I wanted to ask you about that boat you were in. Because you remembered...

MS: Well, I've got a picture of it, but I loaned it to Dorothy⁵ to write a book.

⁵ Possibly referring to Dorothy Wright Burford, whose interview may be found on a.c. 39, 40 in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project.

RB: Oh, really!? Was it an inboard motor?

MS: Oh, no, outboard.

RB: Oh, it was an outboard, but it was just fixed... The one you were telling me about, that just had the tiller?

MS: It was fixed to the end of the boat, but to turn it... Behind it was a flexible tiller, a rudder, so to speak.

RB: Do you remember any inboard motors?

[Tape meter, 250]

MS: Yes! There were several inboard motors. They were usually one or two cylinder gray marines. They were put in boats about thirty-two or thirty-four feet long, and about eight feet wide. They were gasoline; they were put in the back. And there was a paddlewheel attached to them. And they used that for transportation up and down the river. I remember riding on one at one time, and there was a mail route that went from Doniphan all the way to... Oh, way up in Carter County. It ran once a week and people would bring their milk and cream and produce, and they'd get the mail [and] take it back up.

RB: But at least this particular boat was used as a kind of a guide boat. As you said, your dad had used it to...

MS: Yes, that was Mr. Hubbard's boat, but that was just a johnboat.

RB: It didn't have the paddlewheel on it?

MS: Oh, no. No, it had an outboard.

RB: It just had an outboard.

MS: I'm talking about the inboard that...

RB: ...that had the paddlewheel to run it. That's right. They were for bigger hauling...

MS: Right.

RB: ...or big transportation and hauling merchandise or whatever, mail.

MS: One of the best known paddlewheel owners and operators was Harry Grubb. In fact, some of his children still live up the river. They would be great to talk to.

RB: Where did he live?

MS: He lived up the river at Kelley Hollow and that vicinity, and below Big Springs. And there's still Grubbs there. He ran a mail route and came down the river once a week. It took two men to run these boats. You had to have one in the back to operate the machine, and then you had to have assistance from somebody in the front with a pole to assist going around corners and tight places, which you can see that you couldn't... Now we can run an outboard now and we can go anywhere we want to, but of course that was big and cumbersome.

RB: Right.

MS: I remember hearing Mr. Grubbs tell a story about... He had been to Doniphan, and going back with the mail, he didn't have any passengers. And he got up the... [*Slight pause*] Boy, I've got a name slipping here. That makes me so mad. Well, anyway, [there] came a storm and blew the boat into the... Tore it up, tore the top off of it.

[Tape meter, 300]

Oh! His helper was named Taylor Matheney. And they were coming up the river, and here came a storm, and he could see it. He knew it was going to blow the boat. He yelled ahead to Taylor, "Taylor, grab a-holt of a 'willer' [willow], we're going to get

blown away!” That’s the end of the story.⁶ Now, why I would remember (chuckling) some senseless thing like that, I don’t know!

RB: “Grab a-hold of a ‘willer,’” huh? (laughing)

MS: “Grab a-*holt* of a ‘willer!’”

RB: (laughing) Right! Now they might have had to do that... It must have been hard to come up the Current River to begin with?

MS: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I remember riding on one. My parents went with a group. There must have been, I don’t know, fifteen or twenty; and it was some kind of a picnic. We all got on this boat -- and I think it was Jeet Smith’s -- and we got on the boat down at the bridge, and we went to a place called Hargus on the river to picnic. The boat had benches around the side and everybody sat on the benches and so forth.

RB: That thing would have to really chug up the river, wouldn’t it?

MS: Well, you know, a speed [of] two or three miles and hour, *maybe*. Slow.

RB: I know those gasoline engines like that that they had down in Louisiana would just barely make it up.

MS: Right. Right.

RB: And the bayous weren’t swift flowing like these streams, so I could imagine. I guess that paddlewheel might have helped them.

MS: It was geared, of course, by a sprocket. I don’t remember whether it was a chain or a belt, but anyway, you had a small wheel on the driveshaft and a larger wheel on your

⁶ This same story may be found in the interview of Andrew McSpadden, C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 32.

paddle.

RB: Right. So it would add to the mechanical advantage...

MS: Right.

RB: ...but still it was an effort to get on up there.

MS: Yeah.

RB: What about your dad's boat that he had that was hauled up there? What particular kind of boat did he have?

MS: He never did own a boat. He always had somebody take him and my...

RB: Could you rent a boat and float down?

MS: Yes.

RB: Is that how you did it?

[Tape meter, 350]

MS: Mm-hmm. My mother told me that soon after they were married -- I believe before the arrival of my brother... *[Thinking]* Let's see, yeah. They hired Mr. Hubbard to push them to Big Springs, and they camped up there for two weeks. And that was before it became a state park. It was called Brown Spring. Apparently it was on a farm owned by a Mr. Brown. They camped there, and I remember that she said the fishing was *fantastic*. You just can't imagine! And wildlife, of course.

RB: Did you all eat a lot of fish when you were growing up?

MS: Oh, yeah! Always had fish.

RB: So he wasn't just for the sport of it? He liked to eat the fish, too.

MS: Well, yeah, but of course I think he liked to be out, too. That was the main thing, an outing.

RB: How far would you all go down? Would you go down all the way...? Can you go into the Arkansas from here?

MS: Oh, yeah.

RB: We heard about a town earlier today called Buck Skull.

MS: Yes.

RB: What about that town?

MS: Well, Buck Skull is now Current View. That's the story I always heard. I don't know where it got [the name] Buck Skull, but I've heard my dad refer to Buck Skull.

Apparently there's a ferry site or river site above the now Current View, and that was referred to as Buck Skull, I think.

RB: Do you ever remember seeing the town or the old...?

MS: No, but I remember the... Going up north of Pitman, you go to...

[Tape meter, 390. End of side one, tape one of one]

[Tape meter, 002. Begin side two, tape one of one]

MS: Anyway, my brother Ruff, when he was growing up, he used to go down to that farm across the river from Buck Skull. And they could pick up minié balls and there were still gun emplacement sites there. Apparently there had been a skirmish there, I'm not sure.

RB: So one or the other side had tried to hold that position, I guess.

MS: It was along that part of the military road.

RB: Now, you had a brother named Ruff? So he was named after your...

MS: My dad's family.

RB: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MS: Only one brother.

RB: So you were born here. You went to school here too?

MS: Mm-hmm.

RB: What was the school like here at Doniphan? Did you have a...?

MS: [We] had a good school.

RB: Was it graded? Or, did you have more than one grade in the same school?

MS: Yes, we had the grammar school with eight grades, and then we had a high school.

RB: You graduated from here?

MS: Mm-hmm.

RB: About what year would you have graduated?

MS: '37.

RB: In '37? And that was still in the Depression...

MS: Very much so.

RB: The CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] Camps...

MS: ...were here. We had one.

RB: Were there any of them located right here?

MS: It was out west of here at Bardley, and...

RB: What was their job, mostly?

MS: They built many, many roads in the national forest. The government was acquiring national forest at that time -- forest lands -- I believe at \$5.00 an acre. And lots of people

were disposing of it, and the CCC people built roads into it. You'd be surprised at the amount of land. (Sounds of map shuffling) It's represented by the green [on the map].

RB: That's federal land?

MS: Yeah. It's the National Forest.

RB: Yes, that's a *lot* of federal...

MS: Here we are in Doniphan.

RB: ...appearance there (laughing) on the landscape, isn't it?

MS: Well, the CCC guys built *all* these roads you see in there. And they did quite a job!

RB: Right. Well now, you were getting out of school in 1937...

MS: I went to the university.

RB: You had a chance to go? You went to the University of Missouri [at Columbia]?

MS: I graduated from there. The first year I went to Central College in Fayette, and then the other three years I attended the University. I took time out for World War Two.

RB: Did you join up in World War Two?

MS: Mm-hmm. I was at the University, and I joined the Navy. I went to Great Lakes and the Ninth Naval District put me to work with a swivel chair and a calculator and a typewriter. And I did that for four years. I was called a Dispersing Clerk.

RB: That was in Michigan somewhere? You said Great Lakes?

MS: Illinois. It's a training center. Then they sent me to the Western Pacific, and I island-hopped all over the Western Pacific. I had duty on the island of Guam in the Marianas Islands when Mr. [Harry S.] Truman dropped the two bombs. Incidentally, that was in

August and it was 1945. I put the flag out the other day because that saved me a trip into Japan when he dropped the two bombs.

RB: You were getting ready to go in...?

MS: Well...yes, I was supposed to keep going like everybody else.

[Tape meter, 050]

RB: Do you remember what ship you were aboard in the Pacific?

MS: I was never assigned to a ship. I was a “chair-borne calculator” counting money, and I island-hopped. I’d go from one duty station to the other.

RB: Did you go aboard a destroyer, or how did you travel?

MS: Oh, the best way you could. If you had to report someplace, you ran around with your orders until you could find somebody going your way.

RB: Oh, I see. So you got to see a lot of the world, but you were somewhat concerned...

MS: (chuckles) Of course, I was an enlisted person. I was very limited in what I was allowed to do.

RB: Now, that was pretty big news when you were over there and that bomb occurred.

MS: Oh, yeah, man! Because that stopped it all! Mr. Truman dropped two bombs. I believe he dropped one on the 7th and one on the 9th. And then the Japanese made an unconditional surrender on August the 15th, 1945. But they wouldn’t let me come home. I had to stay and pay all the rest of the guys so *they* could come home. I didn’t get home until January of ‘46.

RB: So January of ‘46, you were coming back, and you still have some school to make up?

MS: I got here in time to get my last semester. I graduated in June of ‘46.

RB: What degree program did you have?

MS: I had a degree in Business and Public Administration. I had acquired a wife in the meantime, and she was in *her* final semester when I got home (at the same time). So we graduated in 1946 together. Her degree was in Journalism.

RB: What is her name again?

MS: Margaret Borth McClusky Shemwell. We're divorced [and] she lives in Tucson, [Arizona.]

RB: Oh, I see. So you all married *before* the war?

MS: *During* the war.

RB: At that time (graduating in 1946) did you feel like coming home?

MS: Oh, that's where I wanted to come, home! Yeah!

RB: I mean, back to Doniphan?

MS: Right! (coughing) To the river! Excuse me! I'm choking up.

EB: ...close to where it was, you know, where he used it. Of course, where he used it was right above the ____ ?ford? as Max pointed out, but it sunk and it stayed there for years and years and years. And when we'd be fishing and gigging in the wintertime, we'd always say that's...

MS: Do you remember that!? I remember that!

EB: But this is what I was going to tell, Max: I believe I got to telling people, I said, "That thing's still in the river somewhere." So after I came back here in '87, I was coming up from Pitman's Ferry at the mouth of the Glaze Creek there before you get to Merrill Bay Area. It's through there. And I pulled over there, and I'll be dad-blamed if there

wasn't... If it *wasn't* that old ferry boat that had made it way down there that far, it sure resembled it very closely. And I don't know of a ferry boat that could have been in that area *other* than that. Because, see, that was above the Pitman's Ferry. But I sure believe it had gotten down that far.

RB: Was it a motorized ferry?

MS: No, they were hand operated. Current operated.

RB: *Current* operated? How did that work?

MS: Well, they angle into the current hooked to a cable, and to go across the river you angled them on the cable and the current pushed it across. When you got ready to come back, you turned it that way, and here it went.

RB: And the current would actually help it, sort of like a sailboat ____?

MS: Right, same principle. There was also a rope mechanism on an endless rope, tiller type of thing that helped pull it across.

[tape meter, 100]

RB: And I'm sure it was a wooden boat, so it was a wooden ferry and pretty flat. Could you get automobiles on it?

MS: Mm-hmm.

RB: How many would go on it? Just one or two?

MS: Two.

EB: A couple maybe, three or four buggies. Possibly three.

RB: And this Ruff, did he build it himself?

MS: I'm not sure. I'm sure he *did*, but I don't remember. In his family, there were two other ferry operators on *down* the river. I don't know where they got that talent.

RB: A family of ferry operators.

EB: Uh-huh. They were doctors too, as he said. In fact, I wanted Max to comment on [that.] I was thinking at one time at Current View, there were two medical doctors. "Red" Ruff, and then he had a brother who was also a doctor. I believe so.

MS: I think so. Then in my dad's family, there were a couple of doctors too. But I've forgotten.

RB: Well, did you have a job waiting for you when you got back?

MS: My dad had an insurance agency established and I went to work for *him*. Of course, that was right after the war and things began to hop and pop. So I stayed in that [field] and got *another* swivel chair and *another* calculator and *another* typewriter and I worked there for thirty-nine years. Then I sold the insurance agency and here I am.

RB: What was the name of the company?

MS: Shemwell Insurance Agency

RB: Now your dad lived how long?

MS: He lived 'til 1966.

RB: 1966. And then the same name continued with the company and you continued to work there.

MS: Mm-hmm. I sold it in 1985.

RB: How about the river? Did you continue to have an interest in it?

- MS: *Oh, yes! Oh, yeah!* We had four children and we spent a lot of time on the river. And we had several families [with the] same age children and we did a lot of “rivering” together: picnics, camping trips, hunting trips, [and] the whole bit.
- RB: Did you like to gig?
- MS: Some of them did. I never was any good; I’d always fall out! But I liked to watch them.
- RB: You liked to fish, too, though?
- MS: Mm-hmm.
- RB: Did you ever own a *boat*?
- MS: I have one now. I’ve owned one for *forever*.
- RB: Did you ever own a wooden boat?
- MS: Oh, yeah!
- RB: Is your boat now, is it aluminum?
- MS: Yes, it’s a bass boat, a seventeen foot bass boat with a 75-horse Evinrude [motor] with a jet. It’s a good rig.
- RB: Do you remember when those wooden boats started to go out [of fashion]? When the aluminum boats [took over]?
- MS: Well, they didn’t... We had wooden boats right up ‘til, oh, 19... What? I really don’t remember.
- RB: I wonder if it was a fight, or if people just gave up on the wooden boats all together as soon as they could?
- MS: Well, they’re so hard to maintain. They swell and they crack, and you have to keep them wet, or you have to take special care of them. And these the aluminum boats, you don’t

have to do a darn thing. I saw a wooden boat yesterday on the river, Max Price. He was guiding a party of two, and his boat is about thirty-two feet in length.

[Tape meter, 150]

RB: And that's a wooden boat?

MS: Mm-hmm.

RB: What shape is it? Is it like a flatboat? Johnboat?

MS: Well, it's a johnboat, yes. It has a rake or a bow at each end.

RB: And this man, is he a boat builder too?

MS: No, he's a...

RB: I wonder who built his boat for him?

MS: I'd imagine Mr. Murray.

RB: But he operates it as a guide boat?

MS: Mm-hmm.

RB: Does he live here in Doniphan?

MS: Yes.

RB: He'd be an interesting person to talk to.

MS: Yeah. He knows more about the river than I ever thought about knowing.

RB: What do you do nowadays mostly with your...? Is it a bass boat that you have?

MS: Well, yeah.

RB: Do you go on the *river* or do you go to *lakes* or...?

MS: I don't go anywhere but on the Current River.

RB: Now, what do you like to fish for the most?

MS: Well, I usually fish for bass or walleye.

RB: Do you have a special spot? Are you going to tell me your spot?

MS: (chuckling) No. (laughs)

RB: I'd like to go down and catch those big fish! (laughs) Find out where the good place is!

MS: Then I throw them back.

RB: Oh, really? You don't eat very much fish anymore?

MS: Well, it's no fun to fry fish for yourself, you know.

RB: Right, you got to have a party for it.

MS: Right.

RB: Well, we've come up a little ways through your story and your life picture. Do you have anything right now that you'd like to add? This is an opportunity for us to add just about anything you'd like to that you think was important about Doniphan, or important about your family, or stories that you've heard that came down? Anything along that line that you'd like to [add]?

MS: Well, of course I've always been proud of Doniphan, where I live. I've seen it grow from just a village to really a fine place to live. And we have an unusual city administration now, and we have had for, oh, twenty years. I'm just so proud of the job they're doing despite all we old people that sit around and gripe. The administration has made our riverfront park; they've taken care of our streets; our school system is in good shape; our road system is perfect. It's just a great place! And I'm really proud of it.

RB: What sort of system do you have? Do you have like a mayor and a city council?

MS: Yes, mayor and city council.

RB: Have you ever been involved in city administration?

MS: No.

RB: How about politics?

MS: No, [I'm] not too vocal.

EB: Max was a member of the library board when I came here, and his mother, incidentally, was one of the greatest ladies. She was the librarian for many years, and she was just a great person to know and to work with. Of course, I knew his dad real well too, and he was a great guy. But I just had to interject that about his mother so you can talk about *her* a little bit.

RB: She was the librarian where, then?

MS: *Here*, at the Doniphan Public Library.

RB: Public library? Is that on the square? That's pretty close to where that park is that they've established.

EB: Yes, just off there.

[Tape meter, 200]

RB: It is a beautiful little town you have here. You can tell that there's been some interest poured into it.

MS: You bet! You bet!

RB: When you look at the little park that they've developed there and the landing and some of the other things there, that it's just...

MS: It's a community involvement! I'm just *so proud* of it!

RB: There's a lot of little town here that have had a lot of "out migration," people had *left* and not come back in some cases. Have you had that? Do you have a *growing* population? *Stable*? Or do you have a diminishing population?

MS: Well, we have a population like any rural, poor area. Ripley County is *poor*, basically. And in poorer areas, the young people *leave*. And in poor areas, you have two strata of people. You have the real young and the real old. And in between, the productive people are *gone*. They're off someplace doing something else. For example, my four children are someplace else making a living. I have one that's just retired. Guess what he's going to do? He's *coming back here*; he has a place on the river.

RB: Well, that does seem to be the pattern now.

MS: That's the *pattern*!

RB: I've talked to several people so far...

MS: I.e., "look at *this*." It doesn't make any difference. I was the only one that stayed home. Everyone else *left*! (laughs)

RB: So it's a cyclical thing that has to do with your life cycle.

MS: With the economy! If you're going to make any money or get any wealth, you've got to get away from Ripley County. Of course there are a few always that...

RB: But what is the next generation...? If you want to play that pattern out, now, and you have the people who retire come back to town...

MS: And that's an industry.

RB: But the people who are most... I'll say, "productive" -- I don't mean that you all aren't productive, you all are probably more productive than most people -- but working people

out there have *left* town. Will there be *another generation* of youngsters who grow up in Doniphan?

MS: Yes!

RB: Or will it be more of the retirees who are coming in, who are not bearing children anymore.

MS: But they're bringing their *money*! And they're supporting the school system and they're dying off and here comes another bunch then. In the meantime, the young people we have will grow up and *they'll* leave. You have a continuous process, *I* think. I think that's true of any small town, probably.

[tape meter, 250]

RB: Well, it's curious to think there's some towns that probably will end up being retirement *places*. But you wonder how long retirement places... As long as people continue to want to come back to retire, then it will sustain itself.

MS: Well, you have to have somebody to take care of the retirees.

RB: That's right. Okay, so they generate the jobs...

MS: That's right. That's right.

RB: ...that the young people move here to take.

MS: That's right. But it's a constant turnover and cycle. I think maybe if we were versed in sociology, we would find that this is a typical pattern of rural areas.

RB: Right. I sure see it in Missouri going around to different places. A lot of towns are not as viable as *Doniphan*. You know, towns that have lost their downtown center. But Doniphan seems to be pretty active little town there in that regard.

MS: But it has taken effort. It has taken effort.

EB: You know, when Max and I were kids -- [you were] talking about industry -- you could get a nickel hot dog and a bowl of chili downtown and that was about it. Now, there's any number of restaurants, all of which are *busy*. That generates money, and that's a change for the *good*. I don't know exactly why. I suppose the number of retired people as well as natives. But haven't you noticed that, Max, the food...?

MS: Well, this is a *nationwide* trend too. We *all* eat out now.

EB: Right.

MS: Or else we have fast foods or frozen foods and so on. We're dependent on somebody else to prepare our meals now.

RB: That gives somebody a job in the service industries.

MS: Right.

RB: Okay, can you think of anything else that we would like to...?

EB: No, but when we finish, I've got a funny that I would have liked to tell Max and Dad. I know *he* would get a kick out of it [and] I think Max will, but I'll tell it after we...

RB: Oh, no! We want it on tape! We want it on tape!

EB: Oh! (laughs)

MS: Sure! Let's hear it!

EB: No, I've got to tell Max 'cause I would have told his dad if I got a chance. But as Max said, there were more Ruffs on down the river, and there's a ferry below me in Arkansas out of Supply there. It's called... It was at one time the Finley Ferry, but in my time one of the Ruffs run it. I can't recall his name right now. I used to really well because I'd go

down there, and cross the ferry, and get a load of watermelons in a wagon, and come back and peddle them or eat them or whatever. But anyway, I'd didn't think he'd ever remember me, but... Everybody knew my dad, and so when I got married, I went to Wyoming. So the first time we came back, I wanted to show off a ferry boat to my wife. She was from Columbia -- where Max's wife's from -- and I wanted her to see how a ferry actually looked. So, we went down there. I think we had my mother with me, but I know we had my dad, and he was a big man. Everybody recognized him. So, I don't remember, it may have been... It was a common name.

MS: Fred Ruff?

EB: *Fred* Ruff. And old Fred come out and talked a little bit more like an "Arkansawer" than the Ruffs up here.

MS: Right.

EB: He said, "I *know* that that was your boy when he drove up here. I see that damn Missouri mule on his license tag!" You know, Wyoming...

(everyone laughs)

RB: So it was Wyoming license...!

EB: Wyoming cowboy. But he said, "That *damn* Missouri mule on his license tag. I knowed it was your boy!" I think Boone told me that.

MS: Dr. Gene Ruff was a product of the Fred, the Troy and that gang, who were all cousins of my grandmother.

RB: [*long pause*] Alright, well, we sure appreciate you taking time.

MS: Yeah...

RB: We kind of took you by surprise...

[Tape meter, 311. Tape recorder shut off, then resumes.]

MS: And it's fun. I do remember. Of course, from here to Big Springs I know it better than I know from here to the state line. I have fished from here to the state line quite a bit, but never like up the river. Yesterday I went almost to the county line. I went to Mayberry Bay.

RB: So maybe it's that Arkansas heritage that you have there that makes you want to go *down* the river...

MS: (laughs)

RB: ...instead of *up*! (laughs)

MS: No, it's my dependence on the flow of the current to get me back home if I have trouble.

EB: _____+ the motor. I know the feeling well.

MS: (laughs)

EB: I can understand that. Max, I know Ray is going to drive on back to Columbia, but I want to say this: I believe in giving flowers where they're deserved. Even though you're the last man in *my* estimation, I'm happier with your interview than... I'm not... The others, none of them...

[Tape meter 331. End of tape one of one, end of interview.]