

NEWTON OWNBY, Wears Valley, Sevier County, Tennessee / Disc 071a, 071b, 072a

Newton Ownby.

I: And where were you born, Mister Ownby?

I was borned on the head of Fighting Creek.

I: And when did you first move to Elkmont?

I moved there about, well, I mean, I told you ...

I: You were eight years old?

Yeah, I moved there when I was eight years old.

I: You moved there about eighteen and seventy-four?

Yeah, I moved, moved there about that time.

I: Did your family move there with you?

Yeah, my daddy and mammy.

I: How much land did they own at ...

Well, they had about, about eight hundred acres.

I: Where was that land located?

It ran right up and down Little River.

I: Not on Jakes Creek itself, huh?

No, it wasn't a bit of that land laid on Jakes Creek, laid in below the mouth of Jakes Creek.

I: And who were the first settlers up there at Elkmont country?

A fellow by the name of Catron, and the next one was, the next one was a fellow by the name of Jake Houser, and another one was named Jerry Water, the next one, the next one was a fellow by the name of Toots, that's all that ever lived there, till we moved there.

I: Was uh Gatlinburg pretty well, pretty well settled when you were a boy?

No, not much.

I: About how many families do you suppose would have been around there then?

Well, when we moved there, they was about fifteen or twenty families.

I: Fifteen or twenty.

Yes, I guess fifteen or twenty families.

I: Why did the people uh go up to Elkmont? Was there any special reason? Was most of the land around Gatlinburg pretty well taken up?

No, just uh, just kind of a hunting ground out there and when we went out there we just moved out there to hunt basically.

I: And there was plenty of game up there to hunt?

Just plenty of it, just plenty of fish, bear and deer and coon, just plenty of it, catch a coon anytime or kill a deer anytime that we wanted to.

I: Uh your, your, your family were good hunters?

Yes, we was good hunters, me and brother Baus could just get out there and get a deer anytime we took a notion to and we kept deer meat and bear meat and coon meat and turkey all the time, we had a little black fine smokehouse we'd kept it hung in, we just kept it hung full of bear meat and deer meat and turkeys all the time, when I wanted a mess of these little slick trouts, all we had to do just step out to this river there and get them, and in twenty-five minutes I could catch twenty-five or thirty, yeah, that's what we done.

I: Have you done much hunting yourself on top of Smoky?

Yeah, hunted lots up there.

I: Uh about how many bear have you got?

[LAUGHING] I just, I just took a lick, I guess.

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Why ...

I: How about fifty or sixty?

Fifty or sixty, yeah, we'd, we'd say, nigh of two hundred would come a heap closer. [LAUGHING]

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Well, that was my brother Baus, me and my brother Baus and brother George, we all hunted together, and we, whenever we took a notion to kill a bear or kill a deer anytime, we'd kill it.

I: Where was the best hunting grounds around, right on top of Smoky or ...

No, back under this side, under the north side just get them along there.

I: Did you have to clean off that ground when you first moved up there?

Down on here at Elkmont? Yep, we cleared off all of that.

I: How many, how many acres did you clear off about, all of the acres?

Oh, we didn't have to do that, we cleared off up about a hundred acres there right close about, I guess it would be a hundred or almost a hundred.

I: Tell me, was gaming very easy to make a living up there on the bald?

It wasn't a bit of trouble, all you had to do was just make your bread there and cook it and eat it.

I: Where did you buy your provisions when you were a boy, Mister Ownby?

Never bought it, we made it right there, we didn't have to buy nothing, only just our coffee, we'd go out to, to Gatlinburg and buy that, that's, that's all we bought, we had plenty of meat and then we raised our taters there, raised our beans, we just lived right there at home, we didn't have to buy a thing, only just our clothes.

I: Uh, who had a, did you buy your coffee or did you make your clothes?

We made our clothes, my mother wove the cloth on a loom like one of these right here, and she'd weave them, weave the cloth, we had a gang of sheep, they'd shear the sheep and she'd spin the wool, uh the thread and make our britches and our shirts all GRAM, we didn't buy a bit of clothes that out of the store.

I: What did you call the cloth that was used to uh make your clothing then?

Jeans, jeans cloth, yeah.

I: Uh, and what did you call the cloth that was used in women's clothing?

They pretty nearly used the jeans cloth, they called it plain, plain jeans.

I: Did they also use a cloth called linsey?

Yeah, yeah.

I: Yeah, now who owned that store in Gatlinburg back then?

Gatlin.

I: Gatlin?

Yeah.

I: Did you ever know Gatlin?

No, I never seed him in my life, never did.

I: Do you know anything about Gatlin? Where he came from?

No, I couldn't tell you that.

I: When did you first move down to uh Wears Valley, Mister Ownby?

I moved down here about ten year ago.

I: And why, why did you have to move down here?

Well, I had to move down here because the park bought us out up there, run us out, took our, we sold out our land to the park up there.

I: How did the people feel uh, when the land was first being bought by the park?

Well, they felt pretty well when they first got to buying, but before they got done buying they felt pretty bad about it, they hated it because they left the mountains, all the people pretty generally hated it, and all the people that left the mountains is a-wanting back.

I: Did many uh people lose their money when they uh sold out to the park?

Yeah, more than half the people lost their, all their money.

I: How was that?

Because they'd go off about and they'd buy uh farms and make a payment on them and then couldn't reach the next payment, the land would have to go back to the owner.

I: Do you find living any easier down in Wears Valley than up in Elkmont?

No, I lived the easiest at Elkmont.

I: Uh was that uh because of the uh, the plentiful game up there?

Well, no, they was game, well but we'd kill game along all the time, I could herd cattle, uh sell cattle, and it didn't cost me anything to keep them.

I: How many cattle did you have uh when you lived up at Elkmont? Can you make a guess?

About how many do you guess?

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I had right, I had close a hundred head.

I: And where did you uh herd those?

Herded them along on Smoky Mountain in part of the time and part of the time on what we call the Long Arm.

I: On what part of Smoky did you herd the cattle?

Well, just the main mountain of the mountain.

I: Where would you stay at?

We called it the Derrick cabins.

I: The Derrick cabins?

Yeah.

I: Was that down in the vicinity of Silers Bald?

It's about five mile this side of Silers Bald, well, my cattle run clear to Silers Bald.

I: Did you uh, uh herd them as far as uh, uh Clingmans Dome?

Yeah, my cattle would get out that far.

I: How did you sell those cattle?

Well, the buyers would come there to me and I'd sell them right up there at home, just sell them off, I'd sell, sometimes I'd sell a thousand dollars worth at once once, five to six hundred dollars worth, just lots of times.

I: Did you ever go down to Knoxville in those early days?

Yeah, I'd go down there a good, good deal, I've been to Knoxville since you was here t'other day.

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One Saturday morning me and brother Baus, I was a-wanting to go out to, to meeting, church, and he wanted to go with me to help him hunt, hunt the cattle up and catch a coon, and we treed a little coon up a leaning, big leaning poplar tree and I cut it, we cut it down, and when we uh cut the tree down, the dogs run up and it jumped on the biggest bear I've ever saw in the Smoky Mountain, well, we run up there to the dogs, and the bear tore loose from the dogs, and they run around the mountainside a little piece and run that bear up a tree about twenty feet high, and Baus had the gun in his hand and I, and I told him when he shot it it'd come right down here on us and catch us, Baus says, "I'll shoot it till it catches us both," I says "cut loose" after "I'll take care of myself and you take care of youn," and when he shot that bear, hit fell right down right on us, and hit, when hit fell out, hit got one of our dogs up in

its arms in its four legs a-killing him and I run up to strike it in the head with the axe, and when he's, when I run up to strike it, they was a limb over me and caught my lick and hit, hit drawed back with that dog and hit throwed him about twenty feet right down the mountain, well, Baus loaded up the gun and shot the bear before, before it got away from us again, shot it in the right hind leg, and we run that bear about one mile right a-towards home, and we killed it there, and that was the biggest black bear I ever saw.

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[INDISTINCT TALKING]

Well, they's one time a man was passing my house and I lived up on Jakes Creek, started to North Carolina, he missed his way and went the wrong way and got lost, and we hunted for him and inquired after him and never could hear of him, and about five year after he passed my house, we found him a-laying in a sinkhole back on what they call the Middle Prong of Little River, and we, we went out there and took him up, held a jury over him with twelve men, and he'd got caught in a steel trap, and the jury give it in that they was a boy or he'd been killed by somebody and was caught in that steel trap, and they covered him up with what they call hemlock brush.

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I: Hmm.

They'd, they'd just left his bones a-laying there and we took him up, every bone was to its place but one, we took that man in, put every, had a doctor to come to him, put every bone back right to its place, and buried him out there at Gatlinburg, and they thought, they thought they knowed who it was caught him and took him up, the law took him up, and they couldn't prove it direct on him and he, they just turned him loose.