

Michael Kline: Start again and tell us about the floating theater.

Gazelle Moore: Well, it was real nice to always to see it come into Cricket Hill. It had the tugboats with it. They were damaged, washed away from the theater during the [19]33 storm. But they finally got away from here and got everything fixed up again. But it was just like going in any theater, only you are on water. They had nice people there, nice shows, wonderful music. It was really something. I loved it. Mr. Cook, John Warren Cook, who was a very outstanding man here in the county, he was there several times. I've heard him talk about it. I know that when it was in Bath, North Carolina, that's an inland waterway town. My sister lived there. The oldest church in the state is there, and also that's the oldest town in the state. My brother-in-law went over to the church and looked through all the records. He found where everybody had signed their names that were on the theater, the crew. They're still there today. He said they were dated in 1925 when he went through them. If you ever want to go anywhere unique, that's the place to go. It's wonderful.

MK: This was who talked about it?

GM: This was Bath, North Carolina. It's an inland waterway. It's on the inland waterway. It's their oldest town in the state. They have a stone fence around their church that was brought over and ballast, thrown over in the creek from mainland. It's unique if you want to go to a unique place. My sisters lived there since 1936. Beautiful, beautiful little town. At one time, it was the poorest in the state in Eastern North Carolina. But so many wealthy people have moved in, it's a show place today. Really lovely, nice people all over, just like it is here.

MK: At the theater, do you recall any of the shows that you saw? Do you recall what –

GM: I don't recall, not one. No, I don't. I wish I could, but I'm going to try, see if I can look up some of those things. I can't get up in my attic anymore. But I can get somebody to go up there for me I'm sure.

MK: Do you have programs from the plays and so on, do you think, up in the attic?

GM: I could have. But I'm sure that there's some in there. I'm pretty sure what it is. I don't know why, but people just didn't pay too much attention to it maybe. I think we would if it came today, but that must be gone. Never heard of it for a long time since maybe 1940. Can't even remember anymore. That's what happens to us.

Female Speaker: Can you remember being at the theater, the Adams Floating Theater, the night of the [19]33 storm?

GM: Yes.

MK: Tell us about that night.

GM: My goodness. When we came off the theater, we had far up on the dock to walk and then go down on the ferry dock. The tide had started to come in. When we got off of the ferry, we

had to take our shoes off. It was a low place there at the wharf, and then you went up. We were out of the water all the way until I got to the lane to go to my house. It was water up to here then.

FS: To where?

GM: But we didn't give a thought to a snake or to anything being in the water that would hurt you. Just went on like it was everyday day. We didn't realize the danger or anything of it. The next morning, when we woke up, the tide was way up. If you couldn't swim or didn't have a boat, you had to stay where you were, I'll tell you. Because we had to swim to everything we went to do. Take care of our cattle and we had goats. You had to see about everything, that they weren't going to get dry. Some girl told me at the courthouse that her husband had seven hunting dogs and she sat by and let them all dry out, seven great big dogs. You would think she wasn't even civilized, I would think. That was a loss, I would say. But that was some night and some storm, it really was. But all of us, we made it out pretty good. We didn't have any water in our house, but a lot of people on the creek did. Some of the people did. I don't remember about Diane Steward's house. But our house was up quite a bit from the road, the water, and so was my Uncle Elmo's. He had inherited this land that came through Francis Gwynn. She's the only Gwynn that I know of that is buried on Gwynn's Island. But more than likely, there could be others. But we've failed to say much about Gwynn's Island because I'm fascinated about the Gwynns. Because they're direct descendants of Stewards and Henrys and my daughter and my husband, but I was an outsider. [laughter]

GM: I was nothing to the Gwynns, but they let me stay. [laughter]

MK: Who were the Gwynns?

GM: The Gwynns?

MK: Why are you so fascinated with them?

GM: They went to a valley in North Carolina. I have a copy of the book, and it's one copy. One that is for sale, and it's \$500. When I heard from the fellow that wrote it, it costs \$6. One of my cousins gave that to my daughter. It's so really nice to have it in your family.

MK: So, that gives some of the Gwynn history?

GM: Yes. We have Gwynn history here, too, also. You got to come more than one time, Mr. Kline. [laughter]

GM: So, you all be liking Gwynn's Island real good by the time you learn everybody. Come two or three times.

MK: I am already in that boat, I think. I am already in that boat. I like it a lot.

GM: I'm glad you do. Maybe someday we can even row to the wharf. [laughter]

GM: Not such a bad row, is it, Stu?

Male Speaker: No.

GM: Not far at all.

MS: No.

MK: Diane, do you have any other –

FS: I have thousands of questions. But I think we have kept you quite a while, and we do not want to wear you out. We want to make sure you will let us come back again. So, we do not want to wear out our welcome. Thank you so much.

GM: I'd love to tell you all something about our school, the Gwynn's Island School, and our wonderful teachers.

FS: There is so much to tell.

GM: We have one of them that's up in the nursing home. Was she eighty-eight or ninety-eight?

FS: Ninety-nine.

GM: Ninety-nine.

FS: That last Friday.

GM: Last Friday.

FS: Stealing my stuff. [laughter]

GM: I was telling her about Ann Forrest, who paints. She went to school to Miss Clarey's, and she said, "I would love to have a picture that Ann painted." Just because it came from somebody from our school. So, I got one from Mrs. Tanner today for her. The fellow there has already told me he'll put it up. She wants to watch it from her bed. She's a wonderful lady to talk to somebody like that. Another thing that's fascinated me up there has been the colored people. They are wonderful to you. They don't want to see you hurt. They would just rather if they could take that hurt right away from you. They love you and hold you close to them and help you to get better. They've done that for me. I thank the good Lord for doing that way. It's been wonderful.

MK: Were there Black families living on the island when you were a girl?

GM: No. They just would come and go sometimes. But it was one Aunt Harriet that was here. I heard my sister talk about it all the time. She and my brother, Bud, went to see her as long as

she lived. She moved to Hampton. They would go to see her every chance they got and take her something, just to let her know that they still loved her. It's been a wonderful book written about the colored folks when they left here. I bought it from Mrs. Tanner, but I've never read it yet. My eyes got so I couldn't read a little print, but I'm going to be able to read it yet. I'm going back to Dr. Stone in February. He's going to help me, I believe. He's just putting time on whatever it is that he wants to see about. But I can see everything else. I can see a little baby, their pretty features. I can see everything, the beautiful trees, just everybody. But I can't read and can't look up a phone number. That's got next to me really. But I'm doing better. I could read a little bit last night. I told Judy. So, I think it's going to come back to me. But I thank you all for being here with you all today.

MK: We thank all of you, too.

FS: It has been a wonderful experience. I have enjoyed it.

FS: Well, we do want to do it again.

FS: Thank you for inviting me.

Jean Tanner: The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities has given the museum that I work for up in Irvington some money to do this project. We are doing this just to give them a little taste of what we know. The wonderful information that is all around us. So, when we turn this in, when we turn this interview in and some others that we have done, then we are counting on them giving us lots and lots of money.

FS: Wonderful.

JT: So, we can come back and do this several times because an hour or two is just giving them a little sample. It just makes us want to do it even more.

MK: Indeed.

GM: I wanted to tell you all a little bit about Elwood Callis, Jr. He grew up along with me, just a little bit older than I am, and what a fine boy he was. He was an only child, but it wasn't one selfish bone in his body. He would give you the last thing of anything he had, and it would always be room for one more in his automobile.

JT: Was that John Lee's father?

GM: John Lee's daddy.

JT: They are going to interview John Lee this afternoon and that will be really nice.

GM: He is a fine boy, too. We want to tell about him.

JT: We have his father's baby quilt over there on the couch there. But there's so many neat

things. I hope they can come back and talk more. Henry's got so many neat stories about millstones on his property and growing up.

MS: Don't forget I do know how to fib, too. [laughter]

JT: Henry, I believed you. [laughter]

JT: I believed you. [laughter]

GM: Do you really believe him? [laughter]

GM: I think I do, too.

FS: One of the people that we enjoy and appreciate as much as anybody is Jean Tanner. She is the one who is really – I've got to say Bob.

FS: There is a whole list of people that we need to talk to. Absolutely.

FS: Jean has done so much for us. We wouldn't have this museum if it weren't for Jean.

MK: How did she get it started? What has she done?

FS: Jean tells us, "I can't do it."

JT: That is another day.

FS: Do not be too modest now.

FS: I have been out of the way from home for a long time.

FS: Jean doesn't know it, but she's been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Communication.

JT: [laughter] How is that? [laughter]

GM: I bet Mr. Kahn never heard of a man named Coffee Pot Bob.

JT: All your story is one of all these nicknames. It is really hard to keep them straight. Because everybody here on the island has a nickname. Everybody is Callis or Hudgens or Edwards and I come here to come in and have to remember them. It has been difficult, but it is a wonderful experience. They are great people. I am glad we moved here.

GM: I'm glad you came.

[inaudible commentary]

FS: We all came here. [laughter]

JT: There you go.

FS: We all came here.

MS: This has been great. Thank you all very much.

FS: Well, we appreciate you guys for the effort you put forward.

GM: Have you got three minutes to tell them about that fellow that you lived next to in Baltimore, and then came down here and met his mother? She mailed him a package.

JT: That Paul Ashburn, Myrtle Ashburn. Yes, I did not know. A neighbor of mine, when we lived up in Maryland, Paul, and Alberta Ashburn – we lived in Cockeysville, Maryland. You may know of it or heard of it. We were neighbors for ten years. They used to tell us about going to trips to Gwynn's Island to see his mother. But Alberta, his wife never liked the island. She said it was too – she was a city girl. So, she never really enjoyed coming here. She would talk to us about Gwynn's Island. Never knowing that several years later, we would find ourselves living on Gwynn's Island. It was not until I was working part-time for Doris in the post office that Mrs. Myrtle Ashburn came in for a package to be mailed to her son, Paul. That name just rang a bell. I said, "Would you happen to know a young man named Paul Ashburn?" It was her son who was living out in Texas. So, she went right home, called him out in Texas, and said that your former neighbor is living here, and I just met. But we had been on the island for several years before that connection was made. It was a nice one. We are glad we did. I got to know her as well.

FS: Well, it was so nice of you to put this together for us and for the museum to host this taping. We really do appreciate it.

JT: It was our pleasure to have these great people here to interview. I knew it would be very well.

MK: You knew it was going to be good, did you not?

JT: I knew it was going to be good.

FS: You picked wonderful people.

JT: Thank you.

MK: But did you know it was going to be this good? [laughter]

JT: Yes.

FS: I do not know what happens to people, but I never know it is going to be this good. [laughter]

FS: Well, the problem now is everybody wants to know, when is this going to be for sale? When is it going to be in shops or the lot, whatever, down the road?

FS: Thank you, folks, very, very much, too. We're honored.

MS: Put them off in the water then you have what you call a cradle. You have on wheels that runs on this track. You run that down in the water, have weights on it so it doesn't float. You run that in the water and float the boat over it. Then you have an engine that pulls it up. Pulls the cradle, boat, and all up. You go down there and look at it. There's a couple on the railway down there now. You go down and take a look if you want to.

FS: Sure. I was going to say that. There's a couple of big ones there.

FS: Mr. Stewart, I relieve you of this. If you would sign your name here on that top line that's printed over there, please.

[end of transcript]