

Ruby Lee Norris: My name is Ruby Lee Norris, and I live at Topping, Virginia in Middlesex County. [laughter]

Michael Kline: We never ask people their age.

RLN: Oh, wow.

MK: But would you mind giving us your date of birth, please?

RLN: Oh, I don't mind at all. I'm happy for every day that I've survived. I don't mind telling you I'm eighty-seven years old and I was born in 1915. [laughter]

MK: What was the month and date?

RLN: December 16, 1915.

MK: Thank you.

RLN: Yes. I'm living in a house that my great uncle built. My grandfather's brother built this house. Somebody in the family has owned it all these years. But I grew up about eight miles from here. So, if you're talking about steamboat wharves, my father went to the Mill Creek Wharf. He went to the Burhans Wharf. Mill Creek Wharf, which is down at Wake. Burhans, which is up at Locust Hill. North End, which is the last one in the lower part of county before you get to Deltaville. I'm old enough to remember my father going in a horse and wagon. Because that was a big adventure for me if I was allowed to go with him to ride to the steamboat wharf because the steamboat wharf at Wake – at Mill Creek was a long wharf. It was so long, it had rails on it. There was a little rail cart. So, I get to ride on the rail cart to the end when the steamboat came in. That for a kid is big deal. [laughter] That also was the North End Wharf also was long enough. See, they had to build them long enough to get out to where the depth was – were great enough that the steamboats could come in. The North End Wharf also had a rail on it.

MK: A rail for...

RLN: To carry the little rail cart. I don't know what else you'd call it. It was just like a cart that you see on any warehouse that you would load things on and ride it all around on the rail.

MK: How was it powered?

RLN: By people. You just got behind and pushed it. [laughter] That's true. Well, you push it down, push it back. Yes, you did. Because I remember, my dad would have the horse and wagon (towed?) at the end of the wharf. Then we'd get on and go out and get whatever there wasn't and push it back. Dad always took somebody with him. So, I suppose that's why to help push it. Yes, we didn't have any – he had main power. Yes. [laughter]

MK: Whatever it was, what kinds of things came in beforehand?

RLN: Oh, he had a general store. So, he had dry goods. He had groceries. He had things for the farms. He had farming equipment. He had horse (collars?) and he had plows, but then he had – by dry goods, I mean he had buttons and bows and ribbons and lace and fabrics, and things for people to sow because that was in the days before we had mass-produced clothing. That's what was going on the day on here in the early part of the 1900. Oh, and all sorts of things would come in. Also, he'd get in barrels of molasses and barrels of sugar and barrels of flour. They had to be rolled off the gangplank, off the boat and then load them up on the little carton back up.

MK: [coughs] Excuse me.

RLN: Yes, that's all right.

MK: I'm so sorry.

RLN: That's all right. So, that brings up something that I hadn't found the answer to, which is, what did they call the man who handled all this heavy stuff? I cannot find anybody who knows the name of these people because I asked, "Do they call them stevedores like they did on the [inaudible]?" "No." I'm like, "On the harbors?" "No." So, finally, this old Black lady said, "Well, all I ever heard was [inaudible]. If you could get hired on as [inaudible] on the boat, that was good." Because that means you could go up as far as Baltimore. That was a real adventure. It was a real adventure for everybody, Black or white. Then you see it along with the things that came for the general store, came the things that had to do with agriculture area here. I mean, you ship your chickens. You ship your goats. You ship your calves. You ship your pigs. Then in return – well, do you ship those to Baltimore and then whatever – or manufactured nature would come from Baltimore back down here. I'd suppose you've heard about the steamboat (wharf?) is way across the river. It went from the north side to the south side to the north side to the south side. It didn't go straight on up. My mind is skipping. But as a result of that, you could take a trip. You could get off down here and get off in Tappahannock if you'd get somebody to meet you in Tappahannock and bring you back home, or you could just wait and come on back down on the next steamboat coming back down. I don't know anybody who just went to Baltimore and spent the night and came back. I'm sure they did. But I remember hoping to be old enough that I'd be able to go to Tappahannock and come back down, be allowed to do that. I think I was fourteen years old before they let me go with (some older?). That was a thing that teenagers did, get on a boat and ride. [laughter] It was exciting because it was like an all-night trip that just went – because I remember the stars and the darkness on the river.

MK: Wow. Fun.

RLN: You could think of it as a romantic time. It was because that was the way we were in touch with the rest of the world here. So, when the steamboat came in, it brought things from the city, and it took our things to the city. Then people, of course, traveled. I have not found anyone who – since this project has been going on, who used the steamboat to visit. I've only found one person who said that she went to visit her aunt in Baltimore quite frequently. But she said but they didn't have enough money to buy their food. They, of course, spent the night and had paid

for that. But she said, "I don't remember anything about eating in the dining room." So, I haven't found anybody, but I hear that it was quite elegant. So, all of that was going on. There was travel for families. There was transportation for the agriculture world. That was the only way the people who ran stores, and they were all general stores, got their goods, they called it. Yes.

MK: What was the name of your family store, and where was it located?

RLN: It was called (SR?) Norris at Hartfield. There was also another Hartfield store run by (JN Hart?) at Hartfield, and Hartfield is the name for that family. There was a time, the first part of the nineteen hundreds that the government allowed the post offices' names to be changed. Whoever was the postmaster got to name his post office, so Hart – Mr. Hart become Hartfield. Mr. Wake became Wake. Wake is where Mill Creek is, and it was originally bushy. The post office used to be down at the end of the steamboat wharf. So, the change, I think, is the same, they allowed them. Mr. Topping was in the post office when that happened. This used to be called Sandy Hook. That's why I've got Sandy Hook out front at my place because I'm trying to perpetrate that name. [laughter] Let me think. I think Topping and Wake and Hartfield, we could do better than that to reflect the sort of kind of place that we lived, the original names.

MK: Sandy Hook?

RLN: Sandy Hook.

MK: What does that name say to you?

RLN: Well, Sandy Hook is the name that is, in this area of Virginia and Maryland, where there are no many deposits of sand. The soil picture of this area shows this great wave of sand that comes out from the road halfway through this house. Then all over here is this wonderful dark humus soil, and all over here are feet and feet and feet of sand. So, it goes way back to when the earth was formed. The man that my father bought this house from said that he remembered anytime seeing people in horse-and-buggies getting stuck in the sand after the (actual?) and haven't had people pull them out. So, that's what Sandy Hook is. It really means that. There is a Sandy Hook in Maryland. There's a Sandy Hook in the Eastern Shore. There's Sandy Hooks all around.

MK: So, a Sandy Hook can really hook you?

RLN: [laughter] That's right. We're sand. Yes.

MK: Before you get too far away from it, I wanted it if you would explain a little bit on that opening image of being a child and getting to ride the wagon with your father to the wharf, was it?

RLN: Yes, the wharf.

MK: Tell me everything you can remember about that from how the day started to when you

went, to what happened while you were there. Everything you can remember.

RLN: Well, like everything, it's my father. I did not dare I ask. I waited to be invited. [laughter] So, if I'm waiting for him to tell me this an odd time, I can go. That meant it'd be a big adventure because we would ride it, at least, five to seven miles in the horse, on the back of a farm wagon. Daddy had a little seat that went over the wagon, so you could sit on it. Then he took it off and just flattened it to put his goods in. So, he had two horses that pulled the wagon. We would go down and everybody knew the steamboat's schedule. So, you leave really early to get down there because you really had to be there to hear that steamboat toot, that horn. I asked Bruce, I said, "I hope some people would have those wonderful steamboat horns or whistles," or whatever they called them because they were so exciting. They would blow them before they would come into the dock, and you'd hear them. Sometimes, I think I heard them before I saw the steamboat. You just waited breathless, and you didn't know what was going to come off. That was so exciting. Because not only did you see what your daddy was getting, but you would see what other people would get. As a child, I was always interested in what kind of cookies and candies and toys and dishes he was going to get. [laughter] I'd read all the boxes to see what he was getting. Then of course, fabrics because that meant I might get a new dress of some new material. Then the steamboat would come into the dock and it would have to dock a certain way, and then a gangplank would be thrown over. Then the passengers just came off first and then the men rolled off the barrels of molasses and flour and bulks of fabric and all that. Then dad would pick it up and put it on the little carton and rolled it back and put it in his wagon and took it to the store. So, that was my dad. The other thing as interesting about that as a child, we knew the schedule of the steamboats. Off the end of a steamboat pier is the greatest place in the world to swim. It's the best swimming pool or swimming hole or anything. [laughter] Now, I think back on it that our parents let us do it. I don't ever remember any problem with there being concern about us. There would be about eight to ten of us, boys, and girls, and we divide up. Then half of us would stay up on the steamboat wharf with crab nets and grab the sea nettles and keep it clear while the rest of us swam. Then it would be your turn to grab the sea nettles while the rest of us swam and jump off. I don't remember when I learned to dive or when I learned to swim. You just jumped in and survived. [laughter]

MK: That is interesting because you hear so many people say that deckhands, the people who worked on the water could very seldom swim.

RLN: Yes. Absolutely.

MK: So, this was an exception to that.

RLN: Yes. I grew up with a pretty large number of people who were my contemporaries, boys and girls. I was always small. That's why I'm sort of feisty because I had look out for myself. [laughter] So, I wouldn't about to let one of them jump off if I didn't jump off, too. [laughter] We knew something about what we were doing. But I don't recall that grownups were excited about our doing this or anything. When I'm watching over at that wharf then we did have a creek down back where I lived that we could – that had a sandy beach where we could [inaudible]. I was in the river a lot when I was a kid. I guess that's the main thing I can remember about here as a child.

MK: Whether the steamboat was anywhere near it, you would not be able to...

RLN: No, no. See, that's where I was beginning to say that we knew the schedule and we went when the steamboat went around because, boy, when the steamboat came, it's (turned?) up everything. It was offered. You just weren't – go get in there for several hours after this – until this – we went when the steamboat wasn't around. I guess it only came on certain days. I guess that we actually could go on a certain day, and there would be no steamboat coming in that day. I'm sure that's what it was, yes. I can't recall the line. I think you do. You have a record of the various lines that came along. There are pictures of the middle section of the Anne Arundel. That's Maryland one, one of the last one on the last run. It was Anne Arundel, and I think that came in up at Wheatland, up in Essex. We have one steamboat warehouse left up at Wheatland, up in Essex in the Anne Arundel where it made the last call there.

MK: When roughly?

RLN: It would be about a year after [19]33, all the wharves were washed away in the storm of [19]33. There were no more steamboats. When I was doing the research on this, I think they ran for about a year after that. I know the family that owns the Wheatland. I think they said [19]34 was the last call up there. That's why I was trying to get this article straight, so I could give you the dates right.

MK: So, you went with your dad. When the boat came in, there were lots of people around?

RLN: Oh, yes. Everybody knew. Oh, yes. Everybody who had orders or who were – there were people taking their produce to be shipped, and then there were people expecting goods to be delivered. Yes, yes. Let's see what else. Oh, something before you asked me, now I wanted to tell you about. I'll think of it in a minute.

MK: It will come around again.

RLN: Yes, yes. Oh, I know it. Oh, no. No, I told you that. [laughter] I'm having a little lapse right here right now. The steamboats in August, it was very important during August because that's when the produce (matured?) here. So, we had tomatoes and we had beans and we had watermelons. Watermelons in particular, they ship those to Baltimore. In fact, we had so many watermelons that we had to have special boats take the watermelon sometime. Like Larry and his buy boats, we had watermelon boats because the steamboat couldn't carry them all. But they were really a source of a big income in this area, I remember that.

MK: Livestock was shipped as well?

RLN: Yes. Oh, I know what I wanted to tell you. When I was doing the research on this article, I thought about all the older people I knew and to see what they could remember. That's when I found out from the older lady who said, "If you could get hired on as [inaudible], that that was good," because that was good pay, but you'd get to travel on the river. But I uncovered something else because I hadn't thought about how long the steamboats have been around.

Steamboats, I think I founded, had been around since the 1830s, maybe [18]34 or [18]35. So, that's before the Civil War. Knowing that, I accidentally found this little gym. I asked everybody that I could think of before if they could remember about the wharves. It turns out a friend owns property next to the Burhans Wharf. That's B-U-R-H-A-N-S, which is at Locust Hill. If there's anything left of it – because my father used that as much as he did, the one at Rosewood Park, the one at Mill Creek because just about the same distance. See, we are here and Burhans is here and Mill Creek is here, so daddy went up to Burhans sometimes. So, I asked him, "Is there anything left of it?" He said, "Any pilings or any of the warehouse or anything, it was a shorter wharf. It wasn't nearly as exciting as the Mill Creek Wharf. It didn't have a little rail cart on it." He said, "No, there's not a thing left except – " he said, "I've got a metal piece in my house that came out of some house that was down there." He said, "I don't know what it was." I guess in those days, they had fireplaces for heat. But he said, "That's all I know about it, except that I – " oh, and that is – "except," he says, "there's a cliff along the Rappahannock River." As you know, there are high banks and high enough that you can't call someone on the cliff. He said, "There is a cliff there and they always told me that there was a cave where slaves could hide, and it was probably underground." Well, I just almost dropped my teeth. I thought, here it is right here, and I never heard of that before. So, the same Black lady that said that she heard that if you could hire on as [inaudible], well, I asked her about it. I asked if there is anybody living who had an ancestor had given me any idea, either Black or white. I'd love to know the families that were involved in the underground right here in Middlesex County. Also, if there any survivors of any of the slaves who escaped. But she said, "No. All I know is that, that Burhans was underground. If you could make connection and if you could get on the steamboat, you just got on and you just sort of disappear as [inaudible]. If you could get to Baltimore, you could get in something. You could get in anything, empty, a carton or a box or a barrel, anything, and get rolled off the pier to Baltimore, and you are free." That's probably underground. So, I had not had a time to do that research, but that's the story that I would love to follow.

MK: Now, you said that they disappeared as [inaudible].

RLN: Yes, because all the people who worked and went on the boats were Black. So, if another one got on, he's Black, too, and he's just (joining?), riding with him and he sort of disappeared into the crew. Isn't that interesting?

MK: Yes.

RLN: But you see, if they did, they knew about the underground and they had a connection here that had a connection in Baltimore. Because see, when they got to Baltimore, they were out of their slave state then. I lived long enough. It'd be a fun story to try to follow.

MK: Why does that particular story interest you so much?

RLN: I just love to know what white family in Middlesex County was part of the underground. I love to know what black family has survived who had an ancestor who had the guts to try to escape the underground. I think it would be fascinating. Yes, yes.

Carrie Kline: But do you think that it was a white family would have been helping?

RLN: Yes, because the Blacks were – absolutely. Because the Blacks had no resources. I'd be shocked if it would be Black. I don't see how a Black family could've had the resources to have been part of the underground. I've lived in Richmond, so I heard so much about the underground in Richmond. They are prominent white people. There was one lady over on Church Hill who was really something. I've forgotten her name, but she really ran an underground that you would not believe. So, I'm sure it would be white.

CK: Did we have free Blacks down here?

RLN: No. I don't think so. I don't think so because I do a little logical research. Even in small plantation owners, like – let me see. I'd go back several generations. But from Matthews time, the man who built this house, his Forbach came from Matthews. That Forbach, his father and that Forbach owned slaves, but they owned five or six. They're small landholders. You just had to have somebody help you if you're doing agricultural work here. So, I'm telling you that, to say that the big plantation owners, we know about that and we know about the hundreds of slaves they had. But even in small plantation owners, they're [inaudible]. They would leave horses and cattle and slaves, so many slaves. They leave them to their wife or they leave them to their next son. Yes. That is interesting. So, that's why I think it would have to be white because I don't think the Blacks had the resources at that time. On the other side, there's (several water?) for them to have any kind of resources.

MK: So, you feel like it was really – did I hear you say you got courageous or brave?

RLN: Yes. Oh, absolutely. They would kill them. They would kill them if they...

MK: Who would kill whom?

RLN: The white person would kill the Black slave that escaped. They would certainly shoot them or do something with them. I don't think they'd ever trust them again. I mean, it was a real life and death thing. Don't you agree?

CK: Yes.

RLN: Yes.

CK: Yes, I do.

RLN: Yes. So, that's interesting.

MK: It is fascinating.

RLN: Yes. But then I want to tell you about the other gentleman that I found – the other story I found. This one I'm just telling you was the most shocking and it stopped me in my tracks because I always think of the underground taking place in a big place that we had going in years

that were just fascinating. But then this other gentleman who was about four or five years older than I am, and he's the founder of (Rivian Gas?). He had just started his business in 1935. So, I'm reading what he says. "One day in 1935, (HO?) said he noticed several local sheriff and state police cars were holding up the traffic along the road to Deltaville," right down here. "Along came a big black limousine followed by official cars from Washington. The entourage was led by President Franklin Roosevelt, who was going to North End, steamboat wharf, just west of Deltaville to meet his yacht, which had board at the end of the wharf. North End had been chosen, not only for its deep channel for his yacht, but because of the wide wharf on which there were [inaudible] on which the automobile could drive." So, Roosevelt in Middlesex in 1935, so I thought that was interesting, too.

MK: So, they were able to drive him out?

RLN: Yes. Drive him to sea. Nobody knew about his disability...

MK: Say that again, please.

RLN: I said nobody knew about his disability. So, when he wanted to stay along Chesapeake, he had to find a steamboat wharf that was wide enough that his limousine could take him out to his boat. Isn't that something? I mean, we understand that's why I chose it out of all the – it's not spoken because we still honor that tradition. You don't speak about Roosevelt's disability.

MK: You must have been a fairly frequent passenger on these boats?

RLN: Oh, I know what I was going to – no, no. I just only went for fun, once in a while for fun. But I have a sister-in-law who went to Mary Washington. Did you ever have a chance to follow that through?

CK: I called the person that you told me to call.

RLN: Yes, right.

CK: She said that she had talked to someone else in the office and they did not have any record of it.

RLN: They better have. I'll find it. It's up there somewhere. I'll find it. Anyway, wonderful stories about the girls from the Northern Neck who went to Mary Washington, and they went on the steamboat.

MK: Now, explain where Mary Washington is.

RLN: Yes. Mary Washington is in Fredericksburg, and Fredericksburg is at the upper end of the Rappahannock River where the Rappahannock River begins. Of course, it comes down from the mountains, but it forms into a proper river, about where Mary Washington and through [inaudible] over up there. So, it's almost one hundred miles off the river. The girls from the Northern Neck, in particular, went to Fredericksburg. I guess that's one reason I went to



Fredericksburg, but I went because you could go on seventeen, go on the road. From about that time, we had cars and my father – different members of the family took me back and forth in a car. But if the girls who were five years older than I, for the most part, packed their steamer trunks, and if you know what those steamer – in fact, I took a steamer trunk to Mary Washington myself. The steamer trunk was one of those old-fashioned wooden things with big straps on it. Some of them had flat tops and some of them had over tops. Mine had an over top, and the over tops are the older ones. It must have belonged to my grandmother when she came home from Baltimore. I guess that's what I packed up and took. In any case, that's what you packed and you get on the steamer boat. When you got to Fredericksburg, there was a company called Hilldrup, H-I-L-L-D-R-U-P, and they're still in business as a taxi. I don't know what they were called then. But where they came down and met the girls and would take their steamer trunks up to the dormitories and get them all settled in. Well, this girl went and she was very pampered. She was an only child. Her family had a general store and they were wealthy enough for her to enroll in a four-year program, which most people didn't – in those days, enrolled in a two-year program. Because then you would teach after two years, but she enrolled for four years. Her father was a little concerned because it was the first time she'd been away in here, anticipated that she wouldn't adjust to college life too quickly. So, he told another girl who had already been up there, to watch her for him and to keep her in college. Well, [inaudible] said she hadn't been up there in six weeks when she said to herself, "This is not for me. I'm going back home." So, she packed her steamer trunk up and she called up Hilldrup and said, "You come and pick me up. I'm going home." [laughter] Somehow the word got around to this other friend and she met her dad at the steamboat wharf and bring it back up to school and stayed. So, as a result of that, she stayed and got her degree all four years. But I think it's a wonderful steamboat wharf story. [laughter]

MK: So, he called her right at the wharf?

RLN: Yes, yes. Met her at the wharf and made her go back and said, "Your daddy told me to not let you come home." That story is written up at Mary Washington at some point. He said they can't find it, but I know who I gave it to, so I'll find it where it is. Because she remembered so many other wonderful things about that time in college.

MK: So, what was that one hundred miles like that the girls from the Northern Neck – or what was that trip like?

RLN: See, I think they could almost make it in a day. It depended. I suppose if you start from Irvington, it was overnight. It seems to me that it took – it couldn't take five or six hours to go from here to Tappahannock, on the river. I think it did because you were stopping at different wharfs. Because I remember the time that I took it, it was overnight, and I went to Tappahannock and came back. But I didn't sleep all night long. That was another exciting thing about it, you don't sleep. We stayed awake all night long. That was a grownup thing you would do. Most of them, I think, would make it. Once they got on the steamboat, they would arrive in Fredericksburg that same day. But I only know that from hearsay because I didn't do it that way.

MK: Were paddle steamers in use in your childhood? Do you remember the paddle steamers, sternwheelers or sidewheelers or...

RLN: They all were sidewheelers, I think. I think they were, yes. I don't have a picture up here of several people. All the pictures that I have seen – yes, the workers, I can remember how they churned the water up, just like a wheel on a corn mill, grease mill. The water is going over like that, yes. They rolled. You can look at all the pictures of the steamboats in this area. They were all built the same way.

MK: Was there one in particular that caught your eye?

RLN: No, no. No, I don't remember. I wouldn't even remember the names except I know that there was a Middlesex. We've got them all listed. They're all listed over there, so that's the reason I listed them all. Yes, I can't recall. I just remember steamboat because I was so little. Subtract, what, fifteen from thirty, what? Well, I was fifteen. No, I was younger than that. I was really young, maybe like ten. I mean, I'm talking about riding on the rail because after you get – be a little older, you wouldn't be caught doing that. [laughter] I think that's all I can think of.

MK: Tell me more about the store, how it was laid out. Did you work in the store yourself?

RLN: Oh, yes. That was another thing.

MK: Tell us about that story. You came in and what they talked about.

RLN: I thought that the next grownup thing I could do would be allowed to clerk in the store. That's what we called it. My father ran a small farm, too. So, my mother used to go out and stay while he farmed. So, I said, "Let me do that." Well, you have to get old enough. So, finally, when I was fourteen, I came home from school and I was allowed to – my mama went home, and I was allowed to stay. People would come in with their jars, with the glass jars, and they want a quarter of molasses. There was big molasses, barrels that had come down on the river. They had a pump and you'd pump the molasses out into the jar. I remember doing that. Oh, another thing that came down on the steamboat, these great wheels of cheddar cheese. The best cheddar cheese you ever ate in your life. I mean, they were that big. Then people would buy five cents, ten cents, twenty cents, and you'd slice off a hunk of it. It was in a container. They had, what they called cheese cases. They were enclosed and with wire, so that the flies or anything couldn't get in to keep them clean. You lift the half of it up and you cut off a slice of that. Let's see. Oh, people would buy five cents worth of sugar, ten cents worth of flour. They even brought little bottles and bought vanilla. I've forgotten how much vanilla, but I remember they were big, they're wonderful big jars of vanilla and lemon. Well, I've forgotten whatever kind of extract. Then there was a little thing, you measure it all, an ounce or two-ounce into their bottles. People brought their stuff, the containers with them, and they were usually glass. Isn't that something?

MK: Yes.

RLN: Let's see. What else is there? Oh, and bread was five cents and ten cents a loaf. Dad had a big bread container, big things. It was made especially for that around the counter, and he had the different loads, different sizes. That also had wire to protect it from the flies. The reason I

remember that is because I was pretty good at being a clerk in the store. The first day that dad let me do it, he said, "Now, I'm going to show you something, and don't you dare touch it, but you use it if you have to." In the top drawer of his desk, he had a pistol because we were on a highway. I don't recall anything dramatic having happened. He said it is loaded. He said, "If you pulled this trigger, it'll fire." He said, "If you're in danger, you do it, but don't touch it." But he scared me so bad. I thought it was like a black snake in that drawer that I hoped I'd never touch it. Well, I was a great reader, still I am. I was really into reading western stories, and I'm reading Zane Grey, *Writers of the Purple Sage*. I remember that very book. Oh, boy, I could just hear the hoofs going across the prairie. I'd be really lost. In the meantime, there was a network among the merchants in the family that if there's anybody holding up anybody, if there's any trouble in any stores anywhere, they called. There was a chain. One person called them and the other person called them holding down the line. While I'm reading, my phone is ringing. They were the days when we had phones so that everybody heard everybody's ring. I had one on the front porch. It had a crank there. You'd have a long, long and that would be yours. Or short, short and that would be your neighbors. Long, short, long would be somebody else's. Short, short, long would be somebody else's house. Ours was long, short, long. I didn't hear it. I'm reading that book and the phone has been ringing, and I didn't hear a thing. Then all of a sudden, the door to the store opened, and it was a big store. You know how they are laid out with a great – they called them a pit, front door, came into the main part of the store and then a counter. It was built around it. Then you were behind the counter. It was like a big U. I'm back here and the front door is up here. I heard the front door open, and there's a voice that was a strange voice. Not a Middlesex County accent, said, "Anybody home?" I looked up and here was this gypsy lady. I have a picture of her in my mind. This is dramatic as anything. Beautiful dark hair and one of those wonderful white peasant blouses and a skirt on that was white in front and black in the back, and barefooted. She was halfway in the store when she said that, but I hadn't heard her saying them. Because she was barefooted and I was so absorbed in what I was reading. I said, "Yes." She says, "Is anybody here but you?" I said, "Yes, my father is out back." I just like to let you know. Then she looked around and she said, "Do you have any bread?" I said, "Yes." Well, the bread was over on the side of the store where there was no window, no door, no outlet. I'm back here and the back door was here, and she's up here. I said, "Yes." I'm trying to think what I'm going to do, whether I'm going to stop by the drawer and get the pistol, what I'm going to do. [laughter] She turned around and went out. When she did, I went behind her, just like a bullet, and I locked that door so fast. Then I thought, "Oh, my Lord, I've locked myself in here." I don't know whether to lock myself in the back door or run. Well, I've decided to lock myself in. So, then she went out. When she went, I looked out because, of course, there's big glass all across the front. When I looked out, here was this huge touring cart. Do you know what a touring cart looked like? It's like a station wagon, longer than a station wagon with no enclosure. It was all wide open, and it was packed full of gypsies, male and female, children. That was common in those days. Every spring, we had big touring carts full of gypsies coming through, and they would steal from the country stores. They never do anything but steal from the country stores. So, I guess that's why they had that network going. I remember two of the men came in and put their hands over their face, looked in the store and they couldn't – I'm down behind the counter, but I can see them. They don't see anybody and they couldn't get the door open. They got in the car and drove away. I'll tell you, I went out that back door so fast to my home, which was not far back. [laughter] I left the back door open and everything. [laughter] But it was not eventful, but it scared me to death. But that's the kind of

thing that I remember. Then the other thing I remember, it was really fun to talk with all the salesman who came through to sell things to my daddy. Because they would've been crabbing all around in various places all the way from Tappahannock, all the way down the road. I could find out what was going on. Daddy wouldn't like that too because I was fourteen or fifteen where some of those guys were going to flirt with me. [laughter] So, I had to act like I was dumb.

MK: I would do that.

RLN: It wasn't easy. [laughter]

MK: [inaudible]

RLN: [laughter] I remember one fellow I had to really watch out for. I knew it. I was smart enough to know it. Oh, and another thing, I just don't believe that we didn't keep it. I guess when that era was over and we had gotten through Depression and things were so awful that when we closed the store, I was so happy to get rid of it that I didn't want any part of it. My daddy had a ledger and he recorded in it everything that people bought and how much they paid. Everybody had a charge account. They'd pay him sometimes with butter and sometimes with eggs. He recorded all of that. It wouldn't be fun to look and see what people paid for in those times.

MK: Do you still have that ledger?

RLN: No, we threw it away. I remember my mother and I looking at it and we decided, "We don't want any more part of this. We're going to throw it away." [laughter]

MK: It would be a significant document.

RLN: It would be, yes.

CK: What was on it, though? Pretend that was in front of you and you were reading it, what they...

RLN: Oh, it was like any kind of ledger where it would be the name. Each page had the name of a family. The family name would be at the top and a date would be – and my daddy had this wonderful handwriting, just kind of English script handwriting. He would put a date and he'd put like 9/17. He'd list whatever they bought half a pound of whatever. He'd list a plow point, a plow, horse collar, all these kinds of things that people bought.

MK: All the cloth?

RLN: Yes. Oh, that was another thing. That was a real training to learn how to measure the cloth and measure it. So, that when you cut it, it was cut straight. That wasn't easy to learn to do, but I did learn to do that. You bought the cloth by yards. You could buy three and five and ten yards according to what you needed or what you were making. But it was mostly for

clothing. I don't remember people buying fabric for draperies or anything like that.

MK: Who was your dad? Who were your parents?

RLN: Well, my father was SR Norris. My father was from the Norrises in the Northern Neck. The Norris bridge here, the bridge across the river is named Robert O. Norris from Lively, and my father was from Lively. They are distant cousins. Daddy came here to clerk in the store because he hadn't been able to find any employment over there. He wanted to be a merchant. He hoped someday to own his own store, which he did eventually. But we had ferries. I'm not sure when the ferries came. The ferries were here all during my childhood because I remember the smaller one that was down at the Piankatank. So, as a result, we didn't visit his family. But once a year or maybe twice a year, I remember we always visit in the fall because daddy wanted to see that his father had enough wood for the winter. [laughter] So, then when I graduated from Mary Washington, I got my first job teaching in Kilmarnock. So, I got to meet the Norrises from Lancaster. These people were related to me, but I never knew anybody except my grandfather's family immediately in Lively. So, I had a blind date with a guy named Norris, and I married him. [laughter] So, I'm a Norris-Norris. So, that's how that works. But my father was the only one – the other Norrises in Middlesex, but we're the Lancaster Norrises, double barreled.

MK: Your mother?

RLN: My mother was a Hall from – descended from the people from Matthews, and it was her uncle who built this house. I was reared in the house that her father built – no, actually her father lived in a house that was inherited on his wife's side. That's how they did in those days. That was around Hartfield. All of it is gone now. Yes, the store and the house and everything because people didn't think they were – they thought they could build something better. You know how it is.

MK: Was your mother a gentle woman? Was she a farm woman? Was she a store merchant? Who was she?

RLN: Mom was so like me. She was into all kinds of things. She was a teacher. She left Middlesex when she was, I think, fourteen and went to a school, the Methodist Church, ran in Blackstone, and was educated for two more years and got her teaching certificate. She was sixteen years old when she got her teaching certificate. Isn't that something? Yes. So, she taught a couple of years before she married my father, and my father was fifteen years older than my mom. Then when all of us grew up and when – let's see. When was the second war? After the second war, I came back home, and mom and I taught together for eight years. She went back and she renewed her certificate and I renewed my Virginia certificate, and we taught. So, mama was so like me, involved in community things and school and church and everything. She was a seamstress. My grandmother was a seamstress. The two of them (out of Napa?) sowed ever stich of clothes I've worn for four years in college. I was one of the best dressed girls on campus. [laughter] All custom-made.

MK: You are proud to wear those?

RLN: Oh, yes. Everybody envied what I had and they borrowed my patterns and take them home to their parents. So, that's how it was. Everybody were the same weight in those days, except I encountered the first city girls when I went to Mary Washington. But it was fun. It was an exploration.

CK: Is there any steamboat entertainment to which you could wear your beautiful clothes?

RLN: [laughter] Well, I'll tell you, it's the show. What did they call – not showboat.

CK: James Adams.

RLN: Yes, James Adams. You got it. Floating theater. James Adams Floating Theater. That was a steamboat entertainment. Yes. Has somebody told you about that?

MK: No.

CK: Tell us.

RLN: Well, every summer, the floating theater would come and it would come to Urbanna. It would come to Kilmarnock, Irvington. No, I guess it came to Irvington and Urbanna. That's all I remember. But it stopped at Tappahannock all day on. Did you have a floating theater on the Piankatank? I bet you didn't. You did?

CK: Yes.

RLN: Those people who played the players were just as big of stars as we have on television. I mean, people would just go gaga when they were in the grocery stores shopping or when they saw them on the streets in Irvington or Kilmarnock. Everybody saved up. Well, we never did have money to go but one night, but my husband said they saved up and they'd go several nights. They might see the same play, but it didn't make any difference because they've got to see these stars. I'd have no idea. I cannot remember a thing about the plays. I just can't remember a thing about it. I just remember the excitement of the cast being among us, having real actors.  
[laughter]

MK: What do you mean being among you?

RLN: Well, I mean, in the grocery store shopping, with them walking down the street in Urbanna.

MK: They came into your store?

RLN: No, no. No, in Urbanna. Because see, they came into the port. They came into Urbanna and they came into, I think, Irvington. I'm pretty sure Irvington. They don't [inaudible].

MK: So, you wanted to be in town when they were in town?

RLN: Yes, yes. You saved up, so you'd go one night. Now, I can't remember that. Surely, there must be some record of what their plays were somewhere.

CK: Where would you sit? Were you on the pier or...

RLN: Oh, no. You're in a floating theater. There was a floating theater. It was a real theater. I mean, you had seats and the boat was built for – as a theater. So, you went in and – where just like you went in in a theater for a lot of play. Yes. So, that was really exciting. That was a summertime thing. [laughter]

CK: Could you tell you were on the water then?

RLN: I don't remember anything about that. No, not at all. No, it was just like being in a theater anywhere. All I could think of as I'm talking is kind of honky-tonk music I'm hearing in the back of my head, the first part of the century kind of music. There was a band. There were music goers, I guess, of some sort. I have no idea. [laughter]

CK: Honky-tonk?

RLN: [laughter] That's right.

MK: So, there was a lot of excitement when the floating theater came?

RLN: Oh, yes, yes. I mean, all we've talked about who had seen whom and what they were wearing. [laughter] Yes. I don't remember so much talking about what the plays were. We just excited about real-life actors being here on a theater. Of course, we had no theaters, nothing like that in this area at that time. How, they had to move the theater. [laughter]

MK: Do you remember peddlers, traveling circuses, medicine shelves, any of those kind of things that came through?

RLN: No, no.

MK: Nothing like that?

RLN: No, we didn't have that.

CK You mentioned peddlers in the store.

RLN: We were too isolated. They couldn't make that. Even they had to travel so far to – I don't recall any peddlers. There were salesmen and they would sell the other things that would get shipped down from Baltimore.

MK: Yes. That's not what I'm talking about.

RLN: Yes, yes. We didn't have that.

MK: Oh, interesting.

RLN: Yes.

MK: That would walk their feet off to try to...

RLN: Yes. You had to drive so far from one store to another. They couldn't have made any money. Yes.

CK: When you'd be on the steamboat, you wouldn't bother to go to bed because it was a grownup thing. What did people do at night there?

RLN: Oh, I don't know. I mean, that was just what we did as a group. We would go and know that it was going to be all-night thing. So, we'd stay up all night. See, I have no experience to tell you anything about it being a passenger on the boat. I hadn't been able to find anybody who's still surviving to be able to tell us about it because it – I think it struck the cord when I asked this lady who traveled often. She said that they didn't have money to eat in a dining room, but they had money to buy the passage and spend the night and to get to Baltimore. But that's all she could remember. I guess that's probably the story because nobody had money in those days on either side of the river. I guess you'd have to travel – you'd have to get up into the industrial area. You'd have to get up to Philadelphia, I guess, to get some real steamboat stories.

CK: Were there Black people who worked on the steamboats?

RLN: Yes. That's where I've talked about the hands. All I know were the people who have on the cargo. The only person that I knew personally was the man who was the captain of a steamboat, and he lived not far from here. We'd looked upon him as a very important man. We just thought he was because he had this wonderful uniform, but he stayed away from home all the time. We felt so sorry for his wife and his daughter because he was never home.

MK: Who was that?

RLN: I can't recall his – yes, I did. His last name was Cropper, C-R-O-P-P-E-R. He lived about two miles from here, and he had a nice home. He earned a good living, but we don't – and he wasn't here very much. But that's the only personnel on the crew on the boat that I know anything about. I don't know anything about the first maid or the – any of that or the crew quarters or anything.

CK: Or women who worked on boats.

RLN: I'm sure there must have been some. I don't know. Men may have been cooks on the boats because we had this tradition of men cooking on fishing boats. So, I'm not even sure that there were women who – I can say I don't recall ever seeing a woman working on a steamboat. I don't believe that's true. I don't believe you're going to find one. I'd be shocked if you did.



CK: Not even waitresses?

RLN: No, no.

CK: What about the uniform? What did it look like?

RLN: I don't know.

CK: Captain Cropper's.

RLN: I have no idea. I can't tell you. I wouldn't even begin to try to tell you as such. It's so dim in my mind. Except that I was impressed with his captain's uniform, but I don't know. [laughter]

MK: Well, this has been wonderful.

CK: Yes. I love hearing about your family and about the store.

RLN: [laughter] I know. It was fascinating to have – growing up in that. I always felt so apologetic when my cousins used to come visit me from the city. My cousins from West Virginia, and I thought I'm a country girl. They used to call me that, country cousin. They still do. I was so apologetic within myself. Now that we've grown up, they used to tell me, they thought it was the most wonderful thing they had a cousin whose father had a store that had this big case of candy and we were allowed to come and pick out some candy. [laughter] So, they said that was one of the reasons they loved coming to the country because they would be able to go to the country store and pick out candy.

MK: They were referring to...

RLN: To my father's store. Yes. Daddy would only do that when we had company because daddy used to say to us that we had – be sure to have permission to get any candy because we're four girls. We'd eat up the profit. [laughter] So, we knew to ask. I even had to ask to get a slice of cheese out of that big cheddar cheese. I loved that better than I did the candy. It was so good. [laughter]

MK: Was the store generally a community meeting place?

RLN: Yes.

MK: You mentioned the salesmen.

RLN: Yes.

MK: But what about just the ordinary neighbors?

RLN: Yes. Daddy's store is not that much – I think it was because daddy was so – what did I

want to say – so stern and he was so serious, and he kept everything in order. He went about having somebody sit around. They weren't producing. I think they didn't gather in his store. But we used to have a store right here that was a Topping store, where the big magnolia tree is where you drove up. It was a huge point. It was a big one with big porch on the front and living quarters upstairs and downstairs. That was the gathering place because the man who ran that was just real mild and laid back. There'd be four and five men in there every night when he closed the store. He found when he closed in that there was a big old black, no potbelly, but a big old black stove right in the middle of the pit and they'd sit around on it. I remember one man sat on old log from a tree. All these we see around here make just a good size to sit on. He was always sitting there. I didn't realize what else they sat on. They would come. There was a name for what they used to call that. When they would all come at the end of the day, they just sit too close, and talk about all the things that happened. It was just accepted and that's what they did, but they didn't do that in the store. [laughter]

MK: There was a certain time they call it hobnobbing or something else.

RLN: No. It was something like hanging out, but it wasn't hanging out. I can't recall. Maybe my son can remember. He remembers things like that. I'll ask him, but I can't recall what they called it, but that's what they were doing. [laughter] They didn't come home late at night. Everybody knew that's what they were doing. They just came up chatted about all the things that had happened as far as farming and what kind of season we were having and how things were going as far as their crops were concerned. You knew who was generous and you knew who was stingy. [laughter] There was one man who was so stingy. They called him Razor. [laughter] So, that's another horror story.

CK: Razor?

RLN: So stingy, they called him Razor. [laughter]

MK: What a treat?

CK: Razor would come into the store?

RLN: Yes. He was going there to hang out at night. He was a nice guy. He was a deacon in the Baptist Church, but he also had another image. [laughter] Well, thinking back, I wish I could have answered more of your questions.

MK: No, you did great. Did she not? It was outstanding.

CK: Ruby Lee never disappoints me. This is wonderful. You just brought the whole era to life for us.

RLN: So, when am I going to see it? You go edit it and do stuff with it?

MK: Yes. We will have it back here over here tomorrow morning. [laughter] We are excited about it because everybody is pulling their best memories forward.

RLN: Yes. It really is exciting. Diane and I were talking, sometimes, if I could get that Black lady, if I could get some folks and bounce off each other, because even as you talk and ask me things I remember, I had forgotten about the captain crop and the steamboat wharf. I really had forgotten about that. Then if they say things right, it'll help us remember.

MK: What is the name of that old Black woman?

RLN: Her name is Martine. I don't think she's even as old as I am.

CK: Do you think we could get her to do interview?

RLN: She might. It's really hard to get that people to tell you what they know. Because I was shocked that she even told me what she said about she always knew that if you could get on the steamboat, then you could get off in Baltimore, you'd be free. She admitted that she knew that.

MK: How did she know that?

RLN: She's almost as old as I am so she remembers it from her parents. It came down from her parents. You see, her parents and grandparents lived down the road not far from here.

MK: Can you say that again? There was a truck going by. Her parents?

RLN: I said her parents and grandparents live down the road not far from here. So, you see, I live where I live. The Black people and the White people have owned the property three and four generations. We've all been here together. We go away and we come back. It's an ebb and flow. But if your name is so and so, it means that you belong here and Martine, trust me, that's the reason she would say that. She might not say it in front of you. So, this is a thing.

CK: What is this all about? What is the fear?

RLN: It goes all the way back from being descendant of slaves. The slaves never told the White people anything. They had their own codes. They lived in another world. They had their own way of communicating. So, it is one of the ways they survived. So, it's probably always going to be there. You only confide in the people you really trust. I mean, you just wouldn't. I mean, even though it's safe for you to say something, it's inherited in their tradition.

MK: Why bother to say it?

RLN: Yes.

MK: There is a reason not to. It will not get you in any trouble.

RLN: That's right.

CK: It has even been challenging finding Black people to talk about working on the steamboats.

RLN: Yes.

CK: I guess, for the same reason, would you suppose?

RLN: Yes. The things that they've been told, and it's all our history, the things they've been told, they are not telling just anybody because it's part of their family story. I asked her if she talked and think about it and she said she wouldn't. I hadn't pursued. I haven't had time. But she's the oldest person I know who's smart enough to -- I've thought of one other one and I've got to find out if she's old enough who lives down the road here. She's really verbal and she's a little more going than Martine. I'll check and see if she...

CK: I think you got out together?

RLN: Yes.

MK: We will be deeply honored to meet them and to hear anything they have to share.

RLN: Both of them are longtime residents, living on family property like I do. If they will talk to anybody, they will talk to me. So, I'll see.

CK: That would be wonderful. We have made some tapes based on recordings gathered in West Virginia and Ohio. Stories and songs that people saying that they brought from the Underground Railroad.

MK: We will give you a copy of that to pass along.

RLN: That'd be wonderful.

CK: That is a good idea.

RLN: That would be.

CK: Because we want to save people's stories so younger people coming up can learn.

RLN: I know.

MK: That is the other thing that you might say to her is that we could make a copy of the tape for her to pass along to her grandchildren or whatever.

RLN: That's a good idea. That's the thought, but we'll see.

MK: This has been a treat today.

RLN: My pleasure. [laughter]

CK: Your recollections are so vivid.

RLN: I always have had my antenna right.

MK: That exactly explain it, I think.

CK: You could be in a room of people and you know that she is picking up everything.  
[laughter]

MK: She pick it all up. I think Diane is a little bit that way too.

RLN: Yes. I think so, too. That's what I do. I get it cooled off and then I turn it off.

CK: It works well.

RLN: You're in the new part. We got the old part, the new part of this house.

CK: Did somebody in your family made this beautiful blanket? I just love it.

RLN: My sister-in-law. You see, this family that I'm telling you about, there were eight children.

MK: Do you want to sit down? We still have the audio recorder. The videotapes are finished. Is this all right?

RLN: I see.

MK: You can give us some more family history.

RLN: I can tell you just about the Norris' that I'm at. My husband was the youngest of eight children. I'm the only one left. Everybody married but one sister. They weren't very prolific. They have a lot of children. Everybody has died now except me. I'm the youngest in-law. So, I've inherited all these things. Every now and then if something will come along, that's what this is. This is my sister-in-law's couch and she made this. She lived in Carolina. That was her table. Shenandoah Valley of Virginia is noted for making furniture, and still is. So, that's Honduras mahogany and was made in 1910 in the Shenandoah Valley. It's a copy of a colonial banquet table. You can pull it out and it could sit twelve people. I've done it a couple of times.

MK: So, I have seen lamps like that hanging in the old country church.

RLN: That lamp came out of the country store. I have several things. I've got a whole country store story I can tell you. This store was where magnolia tree is coming with a property. In the [19]50s when we moved to Richmond and had to buy a house because we thought we here forever and we're going to have to buy a home where we had to buy a home and put our son through college estate at the same time and the store needed all kind of help. That was way down on our list. So, we tore it down. We have had to because I couldn't stand it not being

properly maintained. So, if it were two of those lamps, solid brass, the chain is solid brass. I saved the other one for my sister. I have one sister who's left living. There was an icebox, the kind that they had in country stores with a top lifted up, and you put a whole cake or ice in it. I had that in my bedroom. I had the telephone that we ring and that was the first telephone at Topping. When telephones came to the country, they were installed in the country stores. They were not installed in the homes. Now, whether the price was prohibitive or what, but they were not in the homes except that Mr. Boris installed this one in the front hall here and not in the store. So, when we left in the [19]50s, I took that lamp and the telephone with me and the icebox. [laughter] Then when I came back in the [19]80s, I brought them all back. So, I have some country store mementos over here, but they were from the store here not from my father's store. But that's wonderful milk glass and it's got a little gauge at the top to let you know how much kerosene is in it and it has a little, I don't know what you call it, a little thing it goes up and down. It let you know how high the wick is up and down. I preserved it all and we just render the electrical wire around the frame. So, I think it's fun to have that. Let's see what else do I have from the country store? The country store storage part of it had huge Dutch doors. You know what Dutch door is? The big door is cut half in two. It is a huge thing. It's cut in half in two. I don't know why we could open the top and leave the bottom closed. But the key to it must have been that long, a great big-long brass key.

CK: How long would you say that would be?

RLN: At least six inches and it was solid brass. But I gave it to one of the whole descendants because I told her she had the key to Topping. I thought that somebody who really appreciated should have it because my son didn't care about the Topping and he has the key to the Narsh Bridge. My grandchildren used to tell their friends who came to me, "You know about [inaudible] got a bridge name from?" "Come on. I'll show you a bridge is named Norris." So, we route across the bridge. It was pretty impressive. [laughter]

MK: We know two brothers, twins, with the name of Norris from Chaptico across the Potomac and St. Mary's County on the Wicomico River. They are about fifty-years-old this year. They are fabulous singers. They have written a thousand songs.

RLN: Oh, my word.

MK: They are all about the Chesapeake region. They come from a very old family, the Norris family there.

RLN: That's interesting. The research I've done with the Norris' and I've just gotten back to the Civil War, but they are farmers and they are merchants. On my mother's side, there is a long tradition of sailing. Ships like that, the skipjacks, those ships. The ancestor of the man who built his house, they had a shipyard and they built those. One of them owned one who was the captain of one and they sail overseas. So, we had that sailor. The interesting thing about that is that in the last five years, I've tried to get the current generation together and all of them have got sailing and boating in their blood. They have yachts and they have sail boats, all of them. It's just incredible. We never knew about our sailing tradition until just recently. In fact, I wrote a story about our get-together and about our sailing tradition in the local paper. This lady from Mathews

called and said, "I've got to come talk to you. I always did say I was related to the Middlesex Halls." She had done all this research and she was in the united dollars of the American Revolution because she had done the research back that far and her research just dovetails with ours completely. She's descended from the brother of these two [inaudible] and from these two brothers' generations back. So, it's been really exciting.

MK: Of Norris?

RLN: No, this is Halls. This is on my mother's side. We were talking about the Chesapeake Bay and to sailing tradition. That's on my mother's side. My father's side, it seems to be, if you can get them off the farm, they will become a merchant or a salesman. Everybody in my husband's generation, they were men and women were big time salesmen and sales ladies. So, I don't know. I haven't gotten the Norris' out of Lancaster, Canada, so, I don't know the ones that we were dealing in the eastern shore.

MK: This is the western shore, just on the other side of the Potomac.

RLN: Yes. Well, probably because [inaudible] mother was from -- the father is out on Prince George. He was from up there so could be.

CK: Vernon Norris was there?

RLN: Yes.

CK: Some of them went to Kentucky. In the 17[00] and 1800s, came back.

RLN: I bet.

CK: Any civil war stories come down to your family?

RLN: Well, the only thing that I have is with the Norris'. I haven't gotten any from the Halls. We all seem to be a fighting ground. But the Norris', we have a really sad story. My husband and our two common ancestors. My husband's great, great, whatever it was, was ten-years-old when both his parents died and my ancestors' family reared him. He went to war. I don't know. All I know is he went to war. He was one of the men who froze somewhere. He [inaudible] or somewhere, wherever. But he didn't go until late because the guns that he took with him were called Fowling, F-O-W-L-I-N-G. They were not the guns that we have. There are two of them. He may have stayed at home more than may have gone to war, but he came back with one of them. They said that toward the end of the civil war that people were drafted or needed to go to war just took anything they had. They didn't necessarily have a government issue. So, we have those two guns. We know what regiment and we know that he came back with these. His toes were so frozen. So bad the damage, he was not able to work anymore after the war. So, I have led them to the museum in Haysville, the Hewlett tavern that's opened, and they have mounted over the wall in the dining room because they're Northern Neck guns. It's related to that area and I just had them stuck in the closet. So, that's the only civil war story that I have. I forgot I got a fabulous one on my mother's side. We had a sailing captain on these kinds of ships. That's what

they were sailing in the Civil War. He's sailing with a load of wheat out into river out in the Rappahannock Grover and the Yankees are closing in on Urbana. He's often most of the creek in Urbana and the Yankee ships are closing in on him. So, he sailed into the harbor in Urbana and sailed up on shore in Urbana. A slave lady, as well as the owner, helped him take his China and his furniture off the boat. Then he sailed back out in Urbana and sank his boat so the Yankees couldn't get his load of wheat. That's on my mother's side. I'm trying to think what his last name is, I mean, the first name is [inaudible]. But anyway, that's civil war story. But imagine, he owned a boat that was his livelihood, but rather than the Yankees get it, he sank it because they were going to take it anyway.

CK: Slave lady sank it?

RLN: No, he sank his own boat. The slave lady helped him unload. They had proper furniture and China on the boats. One picture survives. The family of the people who helped him save it has the picture. It's in Larry's book, one of Larry's [inaudible].

CK: Is it?

RLN: Yes, the picture of it. But I just think that shows you how things were during the war. It was just awful. It's awful. So, you have forgotten that one that is civil war. The revolutionary war stories on the Hall's side also is this sailing tradition. The girl that got in the dollars American Revolution has documented that there was a Robert Hall, who also owned his ship. He sailed for the Virginia Navy because when the revolution came, same thing happened. A boat or anything was commandeered by the government. He sailed for the Virginia Navy. The reason we know is that he applied for pension. So, we have that to document that he sailed with it. So, he sailed for Virginia Navy. His name was Robert Hall. That's as far back as we've gotten. We haven't gotten across the water yet or it takes too much time.

MK: These Norris brothers, we told you, though, limit chapter quo which was plundered and burned in 1812 by the British advancing on Washington to burn the White House? They said they just never gotten over that which is devastating.

RLN: I know.

CK: Was that a hard time here too?

RLN: I don't know anything about 1812. I want to have heard things about the civil war. We have a fun story in the Hall family about civil war. I forgot to tell you that. I had an uncle named Beauregard Hall. He was named General Beauregard. Then after the mother named him, she was scared to death for the rest of the time. Whenever the troops were coming or heard they were coming, they would hide him, they would hide him in the corn crib. They said that was a place where they stored the corn. They would hide him in little outhouses in the farm because they thought if they found a baby named Beauregard, they will surely take him. [laughter]

CK: Can you fill me of Beauregard?



RLN: General Beauregard was a general for the southern [inaudible 01:24:22]. They admired him so much and I forgotten. There's a little story about some connection they had with him. But they admired him so much, they named their son and that's the only name he had. He didn't have another name. It was just Beauregard Hall. We called him Uncle Barry. He was one of our favorites. He was a doll. But I loved the story about having a baby and the corn crib because they thought the Yankees would get him.

CK: I guess, the Yankees must have come pretty close then.

RLN: They did. They pillaged the land. They took the chickens and the pigs and everything. They took your ham and they took everything you had because that's how they got fed because the Union didn't have money to feed them either. That was the way they survived.

MK: That was told down through the family?

RLN: Yes.

CK: Did you hear that in your family? Did that story come to you?

RLN: No, I haven't heard any stories about the Yankees taking food from us. But oh, heavens, they ramp it everywhere. As I said, the reason I don't have is because we were, what you call, planters. We own small pieces of property like 30, 50 acres. But in those days, you own hundreds of acres. You had to own hundreds of acres. The way they farm and you farm this field and you farm that, you had to keep on going because we didn't know about fertilizer. So, the Yankees would go to the big plantations or the big landowners where they had produced. The little folks didn't have a lot. It's not worth their time. So, I think that's one reason I have survived because it was so small. They had no use for it. They would call planters, homes, and planters.

CK: What were the planters raising?

RLN: Everything that everybody else raised. Whatever crops were being grown. They had corn and they had tomatoes and they had gardens and they had vegetables and chickens and pigs and cows and horses in the whole nine yards. Just on a smaller scale.

CK: Not tobacco?

RLN: No, not here.

CK: You have so much to teach us. [laughter]

MK: You have been very generous.

CK: You have been.

RLN: It's been my pleasure.

MK: You do not want to take advantage of you.

RLN: No, you're not. I enjoyed. Where are you staying?

MK: We are staying with friends over in Whitestone.

[end of transcript]