

Interview

with

ED CLAYTON

June 21, 1994

by Chris Stewart

Transcribed by Jackie Gorman

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Transcription on deposit at
The Southern Historical Collection
Louis Round Wilson Library

Citation of this interview should be as follows:
"Southern Oral History Program,
in the Southern Historical Collection Manuscripts Department,
Wilson Library,
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill"

Copyright © 1996 The University of North Carolina

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

ED CLAYTON
JUNE 21, 1994

CHRIS STEWART: This will be an interview with Ed Clayton taking place on Tuesday, June 21, 1994, with Chris Stewart.

Okay, we'll go ahead and start. I would like to start, Mr. Clayton, by asking you when you first started working at White's?

ED CLAYTON: 1963. I don't remember the exact month. Probably about July of '63, I think that's when I started there.

CS: How did you find out about the job?

EC: I was looking for a job. I was just a young person, and I was looking for a job, and back then, like I said, most of the places, Mebane or either White's or King's Downs or whatever, and my dad worked there for like twenty-five years.

CS: Really?

EC: He did not want to see me come in White's.

CS: Really? Why didn't he want--?

EC: Because he thought I could do better elsewhere.

CS: In terms of wage or in terms of--?

EC: Wages and working conditions and what have you. But then I was married, and I had to have a job so White's became available so I went ahead and took the position up there.

CS: Uh, huh, and when--? What department did you start off working in?

EC: Hand sanding in the cabinet room.

CS: The cabinet room?

EC: In the cabinet room hand sanding.

CS: Okay.

EC: In other words, after the case goods were totally assembled they came down to be hand sanded before they went upstairs to have the finishing put on to it. That was my job, was hand sanding all the pieces; each drawer, each top, you know, the entire cabinet.

My supervisor was John Tuck.

CS: Right. I've heard of him.

EC: He was super nice. He was a nice gentleman. He was good to us, he really was. I started off like on night stands and dressers and chest of drawers and this type thing. After a couple of months they moved me to sanding just tables--table tops--me and another gentleman, George Mills, who is deceased now. George and I worked together about five or six years, I guess it was.

CS: Wow! So you were partners basically.

EC: Yeah, really. It was he and I. It sure was.

CS: How did it work, how did it work with the two of you?

EC: Real well, real well, sure did because we each knew what the other one was going to do, you know, I would do one end of the table and he would do the other end. Then we would go on to the next table. There was four of us.

CS: There were four of you?

EC: Right.

CS: Working together?

EC: There was two other gentlemen on another table right beside of us. Mr. Mills and myself were like on a table here, and there were two other gentlemen on this other table, you know. We both would see who could do the most tables.

Back then, you know, people took a lot of pride, you know, in their work. We would sort of race each other to see who would do the most or, you know, whatever.

CS: Sounds like friendly competition.

EC: It was, it was. We had a good time. Lot of good folks.

CS: Can you describe for me specifically what your work was, what exactly you did? Did you run an assembly line? Did the tables go by on an assembly line?

EC: No. In the sanding room--there was a sanding room up there--the tables were machine sanded up there by machines. Then they were brought down to another part of the cabinet room in which the slide rails and the leaves were actually fitted into the table tops themselves. Once the table tops and leaves were assembled together then they were stacked on a rolling cart. They were stacked like ten and twelve high. Then Mr. Mills and myself would go over and get them off the rolling cart and put them on our table. Then we would put the finishing touches and repair any dents or nicks or holes or set any screws that had to be set to actually get the table ready for the finish to be applied to it. That was what we did.

CS: How many tables would you do in a day?

EC: Oh, we could do seventy or eighty tables a day.

CS: That's that friendly competition!

EC: [laughter] Yeah, yeah, pretty much.

CS: Wow! How did you learn how to do, I mean, was Mr. Mills there first and did he teach you how?

EC: He was there first, yeah, yeah, and he sort of showed me how. Then Mr. Tuck was always available, you know. He showed us--. He showed me how, you know, like using a hand sander or an air powered little hand sander. Then you got to use sanding paper with your hands, you know. Then you had to use like plastic wood, you know, to fill in the little dents, nicks, and holes or whatever. Then you had to sand all of that down. It had to be perfectly smooth.

CS: So they didn't have any--at least for the hand sanding--sort of specific training program?

EC: No.

CS: Sort of learned on the job.

EC: You learned as you go.

CS: What if you made a mistake?

EC: Well, if you had a problem you'd just always contact Mr. Tuck and he would always be right there to tell you how to straighten it out or whatever.

CS: What kinds of things, I mean, when I think of furniture making I think of it as such a craft, you know?

EC: It was.

CS: So say if something--. I wish I knew more about how to make a table or how to sand a table, but, say, if there was a problem that you had with something and you didn't know how to fix it, how would--? I mean, would he just know what to do?

EC: He knew what to do.

CS: Can you think of an example of something like that? I mean, would the tables ever be uneven or something? Off balance?

EC: No, not really, not really. The only problem you would have sometimes if the table and the two ends, when you closed the table up or when you put the leaves in it, maybe one leaf wouldn't quite be the exact level with the other or one of the--what am I trying to say--it was like a little border went around underneath the table where the legs attached to, something they wouldn't line up exactly right, and you might have to take a shim and put a shim in it. Sometimes you could sand it down. You could actually take the hand sander and sand it down to make it be flush.

CS: Did you work in the hand sanding area or room the entire time you worked there?

EC: No. I worked there probably four years in the hand sanding department. That's where I started, to work there. After four years of that Mr. Jack Self who was one of the big superintendents--.

CS: Jack--.

EC: Self.

CS: Self?

EC: S E L F, yeah.

CS: Like myself.

EC: Yeah, yeah. He was nice. Real quiet, easy going, super nice gentleman, you know. He was sort of under Mr. Bean. Mr. Bean was the big, you know, man up there then. Mr. Self came down there one day and wanted to know if I would be willing to go upstairs and help coordinate the furniture when it came from our hand sanding department when it went upstairs to convey it--not convey it--but to get it coordinated from downstairs on to the finishing line which actually the finish was applied up there. So I went up there and worked with him and Mr. Ray Grubb.

CS: Ray Grubb?

EC: Ray Grubb, yeah. Now Ray Grubb's a super nice fellow. You need to met him.

CS: Is he still around?

EC: Oh, yes, yes, still around.

ED CLAYTON'S WIFE: Jack Self just died.

EC: Jack died.

WIFE: Probably six months ago.

CS: Really?

EC: Yeah.

CS: Ah.

EC: It's been six months. Super nice, super nice gentleman. Mr. Ray Grubb lives over here on North 7th. You need to talk to him. He can tell you some stuff about the finishing part, about prime and finishing. The actual finishing to the furniture.

CS: Really?

EC: Oh, yes. Yep, yep. Super nice.

CS: So how long did you--? So how long were you then doing the coordinating of that, sort of like, preparing the tables?

EC: I would say probably four and a half, maybe five years until I quit up there.

CS: Okay. So can you describe to me then what this job, this other job, that you were doing was like? What exactly did you do?

EC: Okay. When the--. Okay, let's use the tables for example. Once the hand sanding process was completed. We had to hand sand the legs. Be sure each leg tailored fit each individual slot. Once all that process was done then it went upstairs on a conveyor belt. It went upstairs, and it was stored up there because naturally sometime they'd produce more finished goods up there than they were able to process on the finishing line at one time so they were stored in an area. Okay, okay, now, each table had four legs. Okay, now, each chest of drawers, okay, for example, if you open a drawer and you look down in it, it's got a little sections that's divided off. All right, let's say, the chest of drawers had three drawers that had two sections each. That's six dividers. Okay, plus the back was not applied at that time plus any other hardware that had to go with it. So my job was when it came from downstairs I had to be sure that if I put one dresser on there I had to be sure I had the back, I had the dividers, and any other hardware or material that had to be finished in a mahogany color or they had another color called white, bone white. They had several different colors. My job was when it came from downstairs I had to get a lot number, like lot number 456. I had to be sure I got everything in that lot number from the chest of drawers, the tables, the legs, the backs, the panels, anything else that went with that, I had to be sure it all got on the conveyor belt for the guys to actually start finishing it. I had to coordinate the downstairs--stuff coming from downstairs--I had to coordinate all that together and be sure all of it got on the finishing line so when it came off the finishing line everything would be there for the guys on the other end of the finishing line to actually get it ready to pack it.

CS: So you were kind of the bridge between the sanders and the sort of--I don't want to say rough work, but --.

EC: Right, the hand sanders and the cabinet fitters, yeah, yeah. That was my job.

CS: So how was that sort of being--? I imagine that--I'm imagining, I don't really know--I'm imagining that if it went well it was good, but if it was not, I mean, if there was like lots of stuff coming up from downstairs or not enough stuff getting upstairs that you were kind of in between these people, that it could get a little hairy sometimes. [laughter]

EC: That's exactly right. Like I said, Mr. Ray Grubb--. Once it got on the line then I worked with Ray, and Ray would come and ask me, "Ed," said, our lot number 456, how many pieces do we have? How many chest of drawers, how many mirrors, how many night stands, how many tables have we got coming?" So he could talk to his people to get the proper material that was needed there for the finishing process to start. So there was a lot of paperwork involved there.

CS: Oh, okay.

EC: So I wouldn't have to tell Mr. Grubb, "Hey, I got five hundred tables, and I got seven hundred chests, and I got three hundred night stands, I got four hundred head boards coming." So then once that was started, then I went back to Mr. Jack Self, and Jack would sort of coordinate between me and the hand sanding department. The guys actually did a fitting downstairs. He would coordinate with me and say, "Ed, you got five hundred dressers coming up today." So Mr. Ray Grubb couldn't process but two hundred, then I had to store three hundred. So then I had to turn right around and pull the three hundred back out while this particular finish was in process.

CS: Did you have people who were working for you?

EC: Yes.

CS: Okay. How many people were working for you?

EC: I had two. I had two working for me up there. Mr. Barry Richmond was one of them. Naw, James Richmond, excuse me. I think he is deceased now, also. And Barry Burgess helped me some.

CS: So the three of you--. Would you have to--? You'd have to store these things yourself? You'd have to be sort of lifting and moving into storage?

EC: Well, I helped do it, but they did most of the lifting and storing. I helped, you know, if I got my paperwork caught up then I would jump in there with them and help them re-stack or help them remove. Like I said, if we had five hundred dressers coming up and Ray could only run two hundred then I'd have to help pull them off a conveyor belt as they came up and slide them. Sometimes we'd slide them the length of this house; fifty or sixty feet to get them stored. Then when they got ready to run them they'd turn and pull them all back out again to get them on a conveyor belt. I had to coordinate all that stuff.

CS: Where exactly were they stored?

EC: Upstairs.

CS: So you're talking downstairs and upstairs, and I'm trying to figure out what you mean. [laughter] Explain to me what you mean by downstairs and upstairs.

EC: Okay. Downstairs is where all the drawers were actually fitted into the dressers, night stands, and chest of drawers. Also, it's where the table tops were actually machine sanded and the runners put on the tables. That was all done downstairs, okay. Once all that was completely assembled--. Just imagine that stereo over there as being totally--no finish whatsoever on it. Once that was completely sanded down and ready for the finish to be applied then it went on a conveyor belt and went upstairs. At which time, like I said, if I had to store three hundred dressers, I would store them in a big room up there. Probably the room was a couple hundred feet by fifty feet up there.

CS: Was White's two stories basically, the downstairs and the upstairs?

EC: No, really three. There was a basement.

CS: There was a basement?

EC: There was a basement which was the veneer department where the veneer was applied, especially the table tops and tops of the night stands and chest of drawers and dressers and whatever. That was all done in the basement down there.

Then the upstairs--well, I'll confuse you now--but the downstairs also had the machine room which is on the total far () in the factory. That's where the actual rough lumber came in and was cut to specified lengths and shapes and routed and whatever.

CS: People call that the rough mill? Was that a different place?

EC: Yeah, yeah, that was a different department down there. That's where my Dad worked. He run, what you call, a rip saw down there.

CS: Okay.

EC: Yeah, yeah, that was a totally different department down there, and within that there was like two or three different within that down there.

CS: Okay.

EC: There was the rough lumber--. When I say rough lumber, I'm talking about the lumber you see stacked outside in these big stacks after they come back from the sawmill. That's where it came in through the machine room down there, and like I said, Dad's job was to cut the timbers four feet long or six feet long, whatever the case may be. And then it went over to what they call a joiner which is sort of to get the rough off of it, so to speak. Once the rough was taken off of it then it was sent to the sanding room over there and they machine sanded it over there, especially the tops and the backs and the sides and the tops of the chest of drawers, the dressers, the tables, this type thing over there. Then it was brought back out into the hand sanding department or the fitting room, the cabinet up there, which the guys over there then put the drawers, the dressers, and the mirrors; dressers, night stands and chest of drawers over there. Then more down towards

where I was at, we had two guys over there who actually put the rails on the tables. So all the rough stuff was done downstairs or on the first floor.

CS: You said your Dad didn't want you to work there because of the wages and the working conditions. What was it that he didn't like about it?

EC: Well, like I said, he thought it was sort of a dead end job down there, and he thought, you know, he wanted to see his son--. You know, everybody wants to see--their parents want to see their children do better than they're doing.

CS: Yeah.

EC: I think that's basically what the whole thing was because back then if you got into White's, you know, you more or less were stuck there in your lifetime. He thought I could do better working elsewhere. It was not that he didn't like the working conditions or the people there. It was not that at all, he just thought I could do better. He didn't want to see me get into that, I think, was the bottom line there.

CS: Yeah. What were your wages when you first started?

EC: Oh, Lord.

CS: I love this question. [laughter]

EC: [pause] I don't even remember.

CS: Were you paid by the piece or were you paid by the hour?

EC: No, by the hour. It was, I don't know, three or four dollars an hour.

CS: Was there any incentive for you to do more pieces, I mean, besides your friendly competition amongst yourselves? [laughter]

EC: No, No.

CS: What about when you were the sort of coordinator person? Was there any incentive there to--?

EC: No.

CS: Why do you think you got picked for that job?

EC: I really don't know. I really do not know. I never thought about that, I don't know.

CS: Do you think that you were just a really good worker down there in the sanding, in the sanding room?

EC: Well, I was there everyday, you know, and I worked, you know, while I was there. Why they picked me, I really don't know. Although, Mr. Self came up to me one day and wanted to see me in the office. I said, "Uh, oh, what have I done now?" When I went in the office he sat there and told me what he had available that he would like for me to try. He said, "Ed, I will be more than happy to work with you, to help you." I said, "Well, sure, I'll give it a try." Anything to get out of the sanding room for right then, you know.

CS: [laughter]

EC: So then when I got up there he got Mr. Grubb. Went into Mr. Grubb's office and sat down and the three of us talked. I think he gave me a fifty cent an hour raise or something or some such.

CS: So it was a step up for you?

EC: Yep.

CS: What was it like leaving your partner or did you leave your partner?

EC: I think Mr. Mills had passed away.

CD: By then?

EC: By that time or shortly--. He was out sick. I have forgotten what the case was there.

CS: I'd like to ask you a little bit about the sanding room or doing the sanding. Did you ever--. I mean, were you breathing in the--?

EC: Dust?

CS: I've refinished some furniture--yes--in my garage, you know.

EC: Oh, sure.

CS: So you were breathing in--. What was it like in the room itself?

EC: Well, they had big fans.

CS: Did they?

EC: They had big fans and in the summertime the windows were open and all of this. They provided us with dust masks if we chose to wear them which that was more of a problem than it was without it.

CS: So I've heard.

EC: As a result, nobody hardly ever wore the masks, but they did furnish them if we wanted too. And, of course, you can imagine, like you said, refinishing in your garage you're going to have a certain amount of dust and all this, and you're going to inhale some of it, you know. And when you came out at four o'clock in the afternoon you were dusty and dirty and whatever, but that was--. You took it with a grain of salt and went on.

CS: What about the heat in the summertime? These North Carolina summers are like cruel.

EC: We had a ball with that.

CS: You did? [laughter]

EC: [laughter] Like I said, the windows were open and had the fans and they were blowing hot air, is really what they were doing, you know, but you got accustomed to it. It didn't bother you that bad. Of course, there was always water fountains and all this stuff. You could stop and get water or whatever so the heat didn't bother me personally. It really did not.

CS: Did you work an eight hour day?

EC: Yes.

CS: Were there seasons during different times of the year where you were doing a lot more work, maybe, in preparation for a furniture show or something where you had to

get more work out? I mean, was the work heavier during certain parts of the year or was it pretty consistent throughout?

EC: It was pretty consistent throughout.

CS: It was?

EC: The furniture shows that you're talking about, yeah, now that put more work sometimes on people down in the machine room and the sanding room up there because you had to do what they call samples. In other words, you would do--. On a regular production run let's say you would do--. All right, I said five hundred dressers and mirrors a while ago. All right, a sample run you would do thirty dressers. You would do thirty chest of drawers, thirty, you know, tables. This type thing. The problem there was you was constantly, by the time you get set up and get going, you'd have to stop and re-set up for the next little piece or whatever there and then, here again, the samples--when you got upstairs--the finishing department up there--that was a lot of changing also, you know, changing the different materials for the different stains and different finishes that you'd want to achieve--so it was a lot of work; more or less changing, you know, from one set up to the next, you know, to run the samples through. But as far as more work one season or another, no, I wouldn't say so.

CS: When you were working either--. Well, let's start with down in the sanding, the hand sanding. You mentioned this kind of friendly competition that was going on, were there other kinds of--? Were there things that you would do to pass the time or were you, I mean, did you have to be very concentrated on what you were doing? In other words, you know, these four guys together, working together, were there, I don't know, telling stories, talking, singing?

EC: All the time, all the time, all the time.

CS: Really?

EC: All the time, yeah.

CS: [laughter]

EC: All the time because you knew what you had to do. You basically knew how to do it, and you could do that and talk and tell stories and laugh and cut up and pick on everybody else at the same time, but yet still get your work done. Oh, yeah. There's a lot of story telling. A lot of picking on other employees and other employees picking on me. You know, just a general fun--. There was a lot of work, but at the same time everybody laughed and kidded each other and cut up and went on and got the work done.

CS: Sounds like the work was hard work, but that the people who you were working with they were people that you enjoyed working with.

EC: Exactly, exactly, sure enough.

CS: Did you learn shortcuts? Were there shortcuts that you could take after having been there for a while and sort of learning the job, you know--I still talking in the sanding room--once you know--?

EC: Sure.

CS: What kinds of things? Can you remember what kinds of things?

EC: Well, you just knew the tricks of the trade.

CS: Right.

EC: You know, nothing just specifically pops out of my mind as what you would really call a shortcut. Well, it was like if you found a hole in a leaf or the table, you know, you'd just have to putty it up, you know, burn it in and sand it off. I would guess you really would call it a shortcut. You knew what you had to do, you went ahead and did it.

CS: Did you consider your work dangerous down there?

EC: No.

CS: Did you know of anybody in the areas that you worked in who got hurt while working, you know, on--?

EC: No.

K-90

CS: Were there different areas of the plant that might have been more dangerous than others if you're not careful, I mean, if you not aware of?

EC: Oh, yeah, yeah, like the machine room.

CS: Right.

EC: All those rip saws and band saws and stuff like this. In fact, my dad got three of his fingers cut off.

CS: He did?

EC: Down there, yeah. So I think the machine room is probably more of the dangerous work than anywhere else in the plant.

CS: How did people? Do you remember people sort of taking care of each other in those areas where they knew it was going to be more dangerous? Were there ways in which, you know, workers--employees--would take care of each other to make sure that people wouldn't get hurt?

EC: Oh, yeah, yeah. That was all the time in all the departments that I was in. Everybody sort of looked after each other up there, oh, yeah, yeah. And when dad got his fingers cut off the saw which he operates had what you call a knee trigger or handle on it instead of actually making him saw with his hands. He just pressed his knee against it to make the saw--. He was very careful, but this particular day it was cold--in the wintertime--this particular day a board slipped or whatever and he just reached over and grabbed the board and when he did his foot slipped. His knee hit the trigger on the saw. It was too late then, you know.

CS: What happened when your father got hurt, I mean, what was the process, what would happen when he--? Did he lose all three fingers at once?

EC: Uh, huh.

CS: Okay, so do you remember that day and what happened?

EC: Ah--.

CS: Did he go to the hospital?

EC: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was not there. I think that was before I went to work in there. We got a call and it just said daddy had been in an accident at the plant, and they had carried him to the county hospital. When we got there, you know, they had already had him in the surgery working on his fingers. Of course, he lost them. The company's insurance paid it all, and I think they probably give him a little settlement or whatever, and I don't know exactly how much.

CS: Did you ever hear of something called the Hard Luck Fund for employees? We've heard people talk about employees who created a fund for people who might have had injuries or something happen where they would actually put money in a pot or something.

EC: They had a--if I understand it right--they had the vending machines that they had up there and I understand the profits from the vending machines went to just exactly that, you know, and then in situations where people needed more assistance or whatever the employees sometimes would get together and make up money, you know, to help a family until the man got back to work or whatever the case may be. That's the only quote, "Hard Luck Fund."

CS: That you heard of?

EC: That I know about.

CS: How many--? Well, how many men and women--? Were there women working in the plant when you were there?

EC: No, no.

CS: Not in the entire time that you were there?

EC: Well, let me back up here just a little bit. Yeah, they were upstairs in the finishing room, they were up there, but so far as downstairs in the machine room, cabinet room, or downstairs in what they called the basement or veneer room, no. There were no women there, but there were women upstairs whose job up there was like wiping off

K-90

sealer or wiping off varnish, whatever the case may be on an assembly line. There were women up there, yeah.

CS: How many women were working when you were there? Estimate.

EC: I don't know. I'd say ten or fifteen.

CS: Do you remember your father telling you when women started working in the plant or had women been working in the plant the whole time that he was there?

EC: I think women came in later.

CS: Yeah.

EC: I think. No, dad never said too much about women working in the plant, but they were there working. In fact, they came in when I was still there and worked up there in the finishing department up there.

CS: In fact, when Bill [Bamberger] was taking pictures most of the women worked in the finishing department still.

EC: Right, right.

CS: Very few women worked in other departments.

EC: I don't remember any women working in the other departments not when I was there.

CS: What about black men or Latino men, Hispanic men? Were there--?

EC: Lots of black men up there. Hispanic, Mexicans, they came later.

CS: Right. Were the jobs--? Did people sort of congregate together? Did the black men sort of congregate together doing different kinds of jobs like the women congregated together in the finishing room?

EC: Not really.

CS: So they were pretty much scattered all over the plant?

EC: All over.

CS: It sounds like you worked pretty closely with your supervisors and--.

EC: Definitely.

6-90

CS: And that worked well for you.

EC: I had too, to keep everything going because I had to know what was coming up. I had to know what was needed there. I had to work between these two guys to let them know what I needed to get the production out of there, yeah.

CS: You've talked a lot about the benefits of that. Did you feel like there were any sort of negative side effects to working closely with supervisors?

EC: Not at all. I enjoyed it, I really did.

CS: Sounds like they were really supportive.

EC: They were, very, very--. Because they knew after I trained up there and got familiar with what I was doing they knew that I knew what was needed, and if I told them I needed twenty cases they got them to me, you know, so I could, in turn, get them on the assembly line to be finished to get the quota out of there. They listened to what I said.

CS: Well, that's good.

EC: Yep.

CS: That's really good. You knew what you were doing.

EC: I knew what I was doing, and they listened to what I said.

CS: What about rules at White's? Were there rules about, say, smoking or eating in the factory? I mean, were there specific rules?

EC: There was no smoking in the factory. You knew you had to go outside on break. There was no eating or drinking allowed in the factory other than, of course, water or whatever like that. As far as bringing food and drink in there, no.

CS: Did they have break rooms for you like when you took lunch or stuff?

EC: No.

CS: So where did you go eat for lunch?

EC: Out in front of the building out there.

CS: I've heard about out in the front of the building. [laughter]

EC: [laughter] You see that bench out there?

CS: Uh, huh.

EC: That was break time. That was the dinner table. That was it right there.

CS: I've also heard about people hanging out the windows and talking to the folks who were down at break.

EC: All the time, all the time.

CS: [laughter] It sounds like that was so much fun.

EC: We used to have water fights up there.

CS: Water fights?

EC: [laughter]

CS: Really?

EC: And sometimes, you know, somebody would be outside and somebody would go upstairs and throw a bucket of water on your head. [laughter]

CS: Bomb. [laughter]

EC: [laughter] We had a good time. We really did.

CS: Now I know that when Bill [Bamberger] got in there, there was a break room for folks and there was a place for people to keep--. But when you were working--.

EC: I came a little bit later.

CS: When you were working--. Now this was in the wintertime or the summertime you were out on the bench eating?

EC: All.

CS: Cold sometimes, huh?

EC: Sometimes.

CS: Rainy sometimes, too, huh?

EC: [laughter]

CS: Well, I suppose when you got water dumped on your head--.

EC: We had some good times, we really did. It was a good bunch of people throughout the entire factory that I worked with. You know you got one sour grape now

and then, but ninety-nine percent of the people were very supportive of each other. Everybody worked, everybody laughed, everybody kidded each other.

CS: It sounds like there were a lot of--. That people--. Almost because people--. White's hired people from this area so you knew--.

EC: You knew everybody.

CS: Right, and that added to the () again.

EC: Really, it really did.

CS: Did you have dress codes?

EC: No.

CS: What was your--? Like what would you wear in the sanding room when you were sanding?

EC: Jeans and a shirt.

CS: Just regular clothes?

EC: Yep.

CS: So you didn't have any work clothes?

EC: No.

CS: So you really would come covered with--.

EC: Exactly.

CS: [laughter] Aprons, did they have any aprons?

EC: They did have aprons. If you wanted to wear them they did have aprons for you. Oh, yeah.

CS: Did you want to wear an apron?

EC: I did when I was especially working on tables. I did wear an apron when I was working on tables because I was always leaning over the table, you know, trying to reach the other side or other end or whatever. I did have an apron that I wore then, yeah, otherwise, no.

CS: You mentioned again--I again go back to your friendly competition, I love that--the sense that I'm getting is that you really had a lot of control over how much you got done.

EC: Oh, sure.

CS: Was there any time during the time that you were working and not necessarily in the sand room or when you were coordinating but even in any other place in the factory that you knew of where there were deliberate slow downs, where people would deliberately slow things down either because they thought work was going too fast or because there was too much, too?

EC: Upstairs in the finishing room I knew of instances where some things were slowed down because in some cases it was run too fast to do the job and do it right.

CS: To do it right. So people took great pride in being able to do it right?

EC: Exactly. Back then, back in the 60s when I was there, most of the people in there took great pride in their workmanship, the quality of the work that they did up there, yeah.

CS: Now you mentioned that this was in the finishing room, and you also mentioned earlier that women worked in this finishing room, was it the women who instigated slowing down?

EC: No.

CS: No.

EC: No.

CS: Would they follow or would they not follow?

EC: The women?

CS: Yeah.

EC: They would follow whatever the men told them to do, oh, yeah.

CS: Okay. So there were times where you thought--up there anyway--that in order to do a good job the work was going too fast in order for people to do a good job?

EC: It was not what I thought, but the guys who actually worked on the conveyor line itself.

CS: They thought?

EC: Uh, huh, they thought it was going much too fast to get the proper quality that should be achieved. In some cases they slowed it down.

CS: During the time that you were there--. How many years were you there, sir?

EC: About nine years.

CS: Do you think that the quality remained as high as--.

EC: Pretty much the same.

CS: Okay.

EC: Pretty much the same.

CS: Because we've heard from other people that especially when Hickory came in--.

EC: Oh, it went downhill in a hurry.

CS: Right.

EC: Uh, huh. I have friends who worked there up until the end, and they said at the last, I mean, they would show Hickory defects or stuff that needed to be changed and they would push it on through and say that all that can go. As a result it came back to them.

CS: Why do you think that White's, that the White family was able to keep such a high quality product going, I mean, for such a long time because it was an incredibly high quality product? Do you think--? You know, you hear these days that you can make more money by putting more out, right--that you put more out--but yet, they didn't necessarily do that. I mean, they put out a really high quality piece.

EC: That's the bottom line because White's--. The men that they hired, the men that they had working for them back when I was there took great pride in the quality of their workmanship, the quality of the furniture that went out of there. They were more

interested in quality more so than quantity. Just like I just said just now, the people on the conveyor line in the finishing room up there would slow it down to achieve the correct finish so when it came off the conveyor belt then it was actually ready to be boxed up and shipped out.

CS: It sounds sort of like the employees had a lot of control over the quality of the product. [laughter]

EC: That's exactly what I'm saying. That's exactly what I'm saying.

CS: That it wasn't so much the White family, but rather--.

EC: It was the employees.

CS: What was it? Why do you think the employees had so much invested in this?

EC: Personal pride of doing a good job.

CS: Do you think--? You said that there weren't necessarily incentives, either monetary incentives or other kinds of incentives.

EC: White's, up until the mid 60s, used to pay a very, very good Christmas bonus.

CS: They did?

EC: Oh, yeah. They cut it out mid to late 60s. They used to pay out a healthy bonus at Christmas time. I remember the first two I got, you know, the first two years I was there at Christmastime. It was a good bonus. Then they said they weren't making enough money or some reason and they cut it out up there. But the employees themselves took great pride in their work up there.

CS: It sounds like and, you know, I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like the fact that, you know, that you did have basically friends and neighbors working together and that really contributed to taking a lot of pride in that.

EC: It really did.

CS: Did you buy White's furniture yourself? Do you have White's furniture?

EC: No.

CS: No, how come?

EC: I couldn't buy it.

CS: Couldn't afford it?

EC: Too high. [laughter] It was too high. Couldn't afford it.

CS: Do you know people who did?

EC: Oh, yeah. I bought a secondhand bed that was White's, but I bought it secondhand from somebody else outside the factory.

CS: Did you know any of the White family?

EC: Yeah.

CS: You did?

EC: Uh, huh.

CS: Did any of--. I've met Steve White.

EC: Right.

CS: And his wife Margaret.

EC: Right.

CS: They've come around a couple of times.

EC: Right.

CS: They came to the show a couple of times. Did they--? I know Margaret worked in the office. Did any of the White family come down into the factory and--?

EC: Sam White which is Steve's son, he came through occasionally. I knew him, you know, and Mr. White's first wife, I remember her.

CS: You do?

EC: Yeah.

CS: Why would Sam White come through? Would he just come through to see folks?

EC: Naw, he would come through like coming from the front office coming down to the factory office which Mr. Bean, you know, the supervisor down there. He would just walk through and say good morning, how are you, and keep going.

CS: What about Steve White's first wife? Was she working there as well?

EC: No. I guess she was just a housewife. She never worked that I knew of.

CS: Did she ever come to the factory?

EC: Not out in the factory, you know. She may have come to the front office up there on occasions, but not out in the factory. I never saw her out there.

CS: What were employees--? How did the employees in the factory or, you know, if you want to just talk specifically about you, what were their feelings about the White family about, you know, their relationship to the factory, to the community at large? What did people think about?

EC: I guess everybody had a positive attitude, I guess, towards them. As far as I know there wasn't a whole lot ever said, to be honest.

CS: Really?

EC: Wasn't a whole lot ever said.

CS: I know there's been a lot said especially since, you know, Hickory came in and I know people that we've talked to have really sort of longed for the days of when, you know, the White family owned exclusively the factory and have really had quite wonderful things to say.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

ED CLAYTON
JUNE 21, 1994

EC: there, yeah, but there was no like dental or anything like that it was just medical. If you had to go to the hospital they paid, what, eighty percent of it or whatever it was and that was it.

CS: Okay. Did you have to work there for a certain amount of time before you got medical benefits?

EC: About a year, I think.

CS: Really? Yeah, that's probably about the average now. What about educational benefits? Did they offer any sort of educational benefits through community colleges or tech schools or anything like that?

EC: No, not when I was there.

CS: Uh, huh.

EC: When my first child was born I missed collecting insurance by one day.
[laughter] One day.

CS: Wow! And they wouldn't give it to you by one day, huh? Well, we have a whole bunch of questions about--and you can tell me if you want to answer any of these questions, but since you didn't work there during the time of the take over and the subsequent closing of the factory it's not necessary--but we have a whole bunch of questions about the take over, and if you would like to comment at all on anything that you know about, I mean, you've mentioned that you did hear that the quality of work did go down and that it's had an impact on this community economically, for sure. What are some of the other places in town that people could or are there places sort of in the area that people could get work from who got laid off from White's?

EC: I understand several people went to Craftique.

CS: Craftique, is that another furniture--?

EC: That's another furniture place.

CS: Where's that located?

EC: Up highway 70 towards Haw River. Highway 70 about three miles out of town. They make exclusively mahogany, solid mahogany.

CS: So there the quality of their furniture is pretty good as well.

EC: Very good.

CS: Was Craftique operating while you were at White's?

EC: Oh, yes. Craftique has been around as long as White's has.

CS: Was there any kind of competition between White furniture makers and Craftique furniture makers? [laughter]

EC: No, not really.

CS: Did ya'll make different kinds of--?

EC: Different kinds of furniture. See, they deal more like in the solid mahogany where a lot of White's stuff is veneer.

CS: Oh, it was?

EC: Oh, yeah, in fact, ninety percent of their stuff is veneered.

CS: Really? I didn't know that.

EC: Yeah, yeah.

CS: I did not know that.

EC: Ninety percent of their stuff is veneered.

CS: Wow! And that's during--. That's always been?

EC: It's always been veneer. In fact, downstairs in the very basement that's what they did was to put veneer on the table tops and cabinet tops and dresser tops and stuff like this.

CS: See, I didn't realize that at all. I always thought it was--. Well, that's a good thing to know in case I come across any secondhand legs.

EC: It's veneer.

CS: Good quality veneer, but veneer nonetheless. [laughter]

EC: That's it, good quality, but nonetheless it's veneer.

CS: [laughter] It sounds like you enjoyed your work.

EC: I did, I really did.

CS: Why did you quit?

EC: I went to work for a local retail furniture store, Reliable Furniture, which is a retail outlet store. I went to work over there.

CS: Have you worked there ever since?

EC: I worked there sixteen years.

CS: Oh, my!

EC: Now I'm with Roch Image Analyst in Burlington.

CS: Oh, okay.

EC: I haven't worked with Reliable--. This is getting off the subject just a little bit.

CS: Oh, no, that's okay.

EC: But, when I first got married, okay, we bought some used furniture from Reliable, okay? So then the owner and manager of Reliable came to see me one day after I had paid my bill, you know, been paid off for a couple of months and I thought, why is he coming to see me. He said he had an opening if I wanted to take it in the store. I said no, and I told him I appreciated it. Anyway, this is like June or July. All right, like October he came back and wanted to know if I would be interested in helping him like on the weekends or afternoons delivering furniture. I said, sure as a second job if I needed a little extra income. I worked there till March of the following year part time. He came over to me one day and handed me a set of keys to one of the company trucks. He said, "These are yours permanently if you want it." That's how I went to work at Reliable.

CS: Wow!

EC: Of course, I got more money and better benefits at Reliable than I had at White's and that's why I went to Reliable.

CS: Did they sell White furniture?

EC: No.

CS: They didn't.

EC: Did you feel though that you had expertise in selling furniture because you had worked in a furniture, that you had actually built furniture?

EC: I knew a little bit about it, yeah, yeah, sure did.

CS: Yeah, so they gave you better pay?

EC: Better benefits. I was outside, you know, had a company truck. I was always going, you know.

CS: On the road.

EC: On the road delivering to people's houses, helping service men service the appliances or whatever the case may be. I was outside going, and I was happy.

CS: Sure. Very different from your work at White's being inside the factory all the time.

EC: Yeah, yeah.

CS: Did you like the other work better?

EC: Reliable?

CS: Uh, huh.

EC: Oh, yeah, yeah, because I was outside. I was always traveling. I was going somewhere, doing something different.

CS: Was your father happy that you got a job at Reliable?

EC: Yeah, I think so.

CS: [laughter] I bet. Oh, that's much better. [laughter]

EC: Sure enough. [laughter]

CS: Yeah. Let's see. Do you remember the letter and I think it was published in the Mebane newspaper, that Steve White wrote to the employees of the factory?

EC: Uh, huh.

CS: What did you think about that?

EC: I sincerely think he meant everything he said.

CS: You do?

EC: I really do. I think he's like everybody else, he hated to see it close, really.

CS: How did other folks respond to that?

EC: I really don't know.

CS: Yeah, I'm so--.

EC: I've not heard too much comment.

CS: Really?

EC: About that letter, really have not.

CS: It was really amazing to see it published in the newspaper.

EC: Uh, huh. Right.

CS: It was pretty amazing I thought.

EC: I think Mr. Steve White had a real caring for his employees, you know. I think he probably hated to see this thing happen as much as the employees themselves did.

CS: Yeah. Do you remember any union organizing during the time that you were there or any talk of any unionizing?

EC: They tried, yeah, but they got nowhere.

CS: I've heard that.

EC: Yeah.

CS: What do you mean by they got nowhere? [laughter] I've got people saying the same thing.

EC: The employees wouldn't accept it.

CS: Why not?

EC: They were happy with like they were. They didn't want a union coming because they knew the union would probably drive up prices and whatever. They didn't want it down there.

CS: Uh, huh. Was this when you were working there?

EC: Yeah.

CS: Or was it earlier?

EC: When I was there.

CS: Okay.

EC: I forget what year, but I was there at the time.

CS: One of the people who was working on this project read something and I don't know if it was in a newspaper or he came across something that said there is an attempt at some kind of union organizing even in the 50s. Do you remember?

EC: That was before my time. [laughter]

CS: And your father wouldn't have said anything about anything like that?

EC: I've never heard him mention it. Never heard him mention that. I know nothing about that.

CS: I'm remembering. Robert Riley said the exact same thing that you said about the union in that there was some attempt but that people were not at all interested in it because they didn't think it was going to help them any. They were very happy with what they had.

EC: That's exactly right, exactly right.

CS: But that there was--it was sort of still around, but nobody was really involved in it?

EC: In the union?

CS: Yeah.

K-90

EC: It may have been, but nobody likes it and nobody was involved in it so it finally just faded out.

CS: Yeah. Where did the--. What part of the factory did this sort of come up?

EC: The union?

CS: Yeah.

EC: I guess the entire factory.

CS: It was? I was hoping you were going to say the finishing room. [laughter]

EC: Oh, really?

CS: [laughter]

EC: No, I think most of the entire factory. I don't think that they singled out any specific department. No.

CS: So did an outside organizer come in to the factory and try to organize or was it gotten from within?

EC: There was some meetings. Yeah, there was outside organizers.

CS: Okay.

EC: I think there was a couple of union meetings, but nobody participated or whatever.

CS: Nobody went?

EC: There maybe would have been one or two, you know.

CS: Yeah. Well, we've sort of noticed that throughout in most furniture factories there hasn't been any mainly because people have been real happy with what they had.

EC: Right. Like I said, you know, everybody took pride in their work, you know, and everybody was satisfied with the way things worked so they thought it would hurt us more than help us.

CS: Yep. Do you remember anybody getting fired while you were there?

EC: There were occasions, sure.

CS: What kind--? Under what--? You know, it certainly is not necessary for you to talk about specific people, but under what circumstances, what would a person have to do in order to get--?

EC: Generally, basically what I know is just like people wouldn't work.

CS: Right. Okay.

EC: They wouldn't show up or they would be constantly late or, you know, that was basically the main reason. They just wouldn't show up or whatever.

CS: Would the supervisors give them a couple of chances?

EC: Oh, yeah, sure.

CS: Yeah. And again that sounds like it's because people knew each other and wanted each other to do well and work hard.

EC: I know one case, you know, in the cabinet room down there where they gave this one guy several different chances, you know, to straighten up.

CS: Uh, huh, he just didn't do it.

EC: Right.

CS: Did you--? Did people from the Hillsborough plant ever come to work in the Mebane plant while you were there?

EC: Not that often.

CS: Was there back and forth movement at all between the two plants?

EC: In the shipping department there was a couple of guys up there who would transfer supplies mainly from the Mebane to the Hillsborough plant. Sometimes the Hillsborough plant would do (run) a sample cutting for us perhaps, and we'd transport it back up here to have the finish applied up here. That's basically all I'm aware of.

CS: Uh, huh. Robert Riley worked at the Hillsborough plant for a while, and he said that there were certain things that they didn't do over at the Hillsborough plant; that they would, like, get to a certain point and then they'd ship their stuff--put it in a truck and drive it over to the Mebane plant and then Mebane plant would finish off what--.

EC: That's exactly what I'm saying.

CS: Yeah.

EC: That's right.

CS: Yeah, so, they worked, not necessarily closely together, but they were working together really, sort of.

EC: Oh, sure.

CS: When did the Hillsborough close?

EC: [hesitation]

CS: In the 80s?

EC: In the 80s. When did it close, hon? [Ed asks his wife] Don't quote me. I'm saying probably '85, '88, somewhere right along in there.

CS: I was thinking in the mid 80s.

EC: I'm not sure exactly.

CS: Gosh, I'm trying to--. Oh, I have just a couple more questions relating to the relationship between the factory and the town. White factory is located, like, smack dab right there in the middle of the town. [laughter] You talked a little bit, especially about, you know, sitting out on the bench.

EC: Right.

CS: And that kind of stuff. But it is very centrally located. Can you talk to me a little bit about what you think the relationship was between the factory--as a factory--or as employees making up the factory and the town of Mebane itself, especially, given the fact that your father also worked there?

EC: Right. Because of the location of White's and King's Down people came in like my father. We were born and raised down () County. We moved to Mebane in 1953, no, '55, excuse me. We built a house over here cause daddy had already left the farm and came to White's to work.

CS: He went directly from the farm to White's?

EC: To White's, yeah.

CS: Was that--? Was your dad unusual in doing that or did lots of families go directly from the farm to the factory?

EC: It was getting on the farm--. It was getting to where labor was getting to be hard to find, work was getting to be--. Really by--. They had transferred him to--. We did not own our farm out there and this was more of a security benefit for dad, you know, to come into White's and go to work.

CS: Uh, huh.

EC: I guess, you know, the town just sort of built around White's as well as King's Down because King's Down has been there since, what, 18 something, way back like White's.

CS: Oh, gosh, I had a question right on the tip of my tongue and now I just lost it. Oh, what percentage of the town, would you say, especially during the time when you were coming up, what percentage of the town do you think worked for White's, and I'm just asking you to guess?

EC: Ah, seventy-five or eighty percent.

EC: If you didn't work at White's you worked at King's Down.

CS: Right. Where is King's Down?

EC: Right across the railroad tracks.

CS: See, oh, oh, oh, oh.

EC: Right across the railroad tracks.

CS: Yes. [laughter] I'm sorry. Yeah, so if you didn't work there you worked at--

EC: King's Down.

CS: Okay.

EC: King's Down, White's, and Craftique were probably, back then, the only three major employers in Mebane.

K-90

CS: Did they pay pretty much the same or did they pay different?

WIFE: King's Down pays a lot more than White's.

EC: That's what I was thinking, King's Down probably pays more than White's.

CS: Was it harder to get a job at King's Down?

EC: I never tried so I can't say it was hard, I can't say that because I never tried. I don't know.

CS: Was King's Down family owned as well?

EC: Oh, yes. Yeah.

CS: Who?

EC: The Corbet.

CS: Boy, I'm finding out all kinds of things here.

EC: The Corbets' founded King's Down.

CS: Are they from this area?

EC: Oh, yes.

CS: Do they still own King's Down or do you know?

EC: I'm not real sure about that now because Mr. Corbet has passed away. As to who inherited it or who took it over, you need to talk to somebody else about that. I don't really know.

CS: Yeah, yeah. Was there a--? Boy, it would be really wonderful to get Steve White and somebody from the Corbet family to talk about, you know, and somebody from Craftique to talk about the three places that people worked at and what they did to get workers.

EC: Right.

WIFE: I'm sure Steve White would probably like to be interviewed.

EC: I'm sure he probably would.

CS: Yeah, in fact, we were really hoping to interview him. We want to interview his wife as well, both of them.

WIFE: L.P. Best was the one that founded Craftique, wasn't he?

EC: Exactly right.

WIFE: And he's still living.

CS: Is he in this area as well?

EC: Yeah.

WIFE: Yes.

EC: Right here on Forest Lake.

CS: What did--? Is King's Down a furniture--?

WIFE & EC: Mattresses.

CS: That's right. So you got the bedroom suites made over at the White's, the mattresses made--. [laughter]

EC: At King's Down.

WIFE: At the next railroad crossing across the street.

EC: Exactly. They make good mattresses. A King's Down mattress is a very good mattress. It really is.

CS: I wonder what they had going there. [laughter]

So really the town came up around these places.

EC: Exactly, exactly. There's a railroad and then the railroad track right through the middle. White's had a side track until, what, five years ago, three years ago to where's they actually pulled boxcars in there and shipped furniture out by the boxcar load out of White's.

CS: Wow!

EC: Oh, yeah, in fact, I used to help load some of those boxcars on occasions.

CS: Really? Would you do--? Say for example, if there was, say, they were busy in another part of the factory would they pull employees, would like supervisors pull employees from a certain part of the factory that wasn't that busy and they'd move it?

EC: Uh, huh.

CS: Yeah. Were there specific--? What were the places where they would usually have to pull them to? Loading and shipping?

EC: Occasionally. I know on occasions when I was still downstairs hand sanding, you know, I got moved up to the machine sanding up there which actually did some of the rough sanding up there. Then on occasion, like you said, I had to go out--I did go out--help them load boxcars or load trucks, you know, just wherever they needed me that's where I would go, you know. But once I got upstairs that pretty much took all of my time up there.

CS: Yeah. How noisy was the factory?

EC: The machine room is extremely noisy, extremely. You had to wear ear plugs down there. The cabinet room wasn't. It was noisy, but it wasn't that bad. Upstairs, not bad at all.

CS: I'm almost finished. I'd like to ask you what you thought about the exhibit and when you went to go to the exhibit and when you were looking at the pictures what were you thinking about? What did you--?

EC: The big thing I was really thinking about that exhibit, it was real nice. I would love for them to have been able to get pictures with the older, some of the older employees. That was my first impression. I got to looking at the different employees, and my first impression was going back to some of the guys that was there earlier.

WIFE: Right out of high school.

EC: Huh?

WIFE: A lot of them were there right out of high school.

CS: Really.

EC: Well, I'm talking employees back in the 50s and 60s when I was there. Some of them--. Some of their pictures--. Some of the guys up there were there, have been there all their life, but there was a lot of other people, you know, like John Tuck, you

know, these folks, you know, I would have liked for some of their pictures to have been included in some of this.

CS: Yeah, as you say that I realize when I'm sort of thinking about the exhibit and even thinking about all the pictures that I've seen that weren't in the exhibit that there weren't a lot of the older people or older employees in those pictures. It was mainly, you know, probably people in their thirty's and forty's and maybe in their fifty's.

EC: Uh, huh.

CS: Maybe.

EC: We had one gentleman up there; he worked there fifty years.

CS: Oh, my goodness.

EC: Early Wilson. Black gentleman.

CS: Early Wilson? Is he still alive?

EC: That's his [inaudible]. Called Ray Wilson.

CS: Is he still alive?

EC: No, no. He worked there fifty years.

CS: Fifty years! And he was there when you were there?

EC: Uh, huh. I knew him very well.

CS: When did he stop working?

EC: [hesitation]

CS: Do you have any sense, I mean, I'm trying to get an idea of when he started?

EC: I'd say he stopped [hesitation]. This is '94. I'd say probably '80, 1980.

Somewhere along in there. I don't know exactly.

CS: [laughter] Oh, wow! Did he work in a lot of different areas?

EC: He worked upstairs in the finishing department.

CS: He did?

EC: Uh, huh.

CS: Oh, he worked in the finishing department. [laughter]

EC: He sure did.

CS: How many men were working in the finishing department as opposed to women? You said you mentioned while you were there, there was about ten women.

EC: Oh, I'd say there was probably one woman to every ten men.

CS: Wow! So there weren't very many.

EC: No.

CS: There since were quite a few, in fact.

EC: I understand later there were more.

CS: Yeah, yeah.

EC: I'd say there was probably one woman per ten men that were there.

CS: Wow, in the finishing department. Well, if you--. If there's anything that I haven't asked you that you would like people to know for posterity about the factory this is your opportunity. [laughter] I know I've asked you a lot of questions, but if you can think of anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to--.

EC: Naw, I can't think of anything.

CS: I have asked you a lot of questions. [laughter]

EC: I enjoyed the time I was there. Like I said, a good bunch of folks that we worked with. Everybody would laugh and kid and cut up. I will tell you one experience. This is funny.

CS: Okay.

EC: Mr. Jack Self who like I said was my supervisor, you know, quiet and easy going fellow. They had a big wash-off vat which is a big square tub probably twelve feet square. It had like paint thinner and lacquer in it. They used it to actually wash the finish off. If a finish was bad and they had to wash it off to refinish it, that's what they would set it in. Mr. Reginald Dotson, that was one of his main jobs to wash off stuff.

Well, one time we had a bad batch of finish so as a result we probably had fifty, sixty dressers and chest of drawers to be washed off. Well, this particular day was in the

summertime and it was hot, okay, and, of course, all the windows were open, fans were going and all this. Mr. Self asked me would I go down and help Mr. Dotson wash off stuff. I was sort of in limbo at that particular time till I find out when the next shipment was going to be. I went down to help Mr. Dotson wash off and I enjoyed it, I really did. I got to laughing and talking to him and Mr. Self came by probably about an hour later and went to check on me at my desk on some stuff I had already run. Well, I walked ten feet away from that vat with Mr. Self talking to him, and I remember I got dizzy. I couldn't stand up, you know, I got to staggering all over the place. Mr. Self said, "Hey, what's wrong with you?" I smarted off something real smart to him, "none of his business."

CS: [laughter]

EC: He said, "You are drunk." I said, "Drunk, hey, nothing. I ain't had nothing to drink." He said, "You've been inhaling them fumes up there and you're not used to it." I went to the sick room right then. [laughter] I'll never forget I told him wasn't nothing to it, wasn't nothing wrong with me, you know.

CS: So this Mr. Dotson, cause he's been inhaling it all the time, it didn't affect him.

EC: It didn't affect him.

WIFE: He's dead now.

EC: Uh, huh.

CS: [laughter]

EC: I'll never forget that, you know, it wasn't like me to smart off to somebody, but I told him he was crazy. He said, "You are drunk."

CS: Those fumes got your head.

EC: I'll never forget that. I went downstairs to the sick room and I went on home that day. I'll never forget that.

CS: Oh, wow! That's wild. That will do it to you, too. I'm sure it will.

EC: I woke up with a headache.

CS: I suppose once you get used to it--.

EC: Uh, huh, you don't pay no attention to it.

CS: Yeah, yeah, especially if you are doing it all the time.

WIFE: In the summertime when they had the mill open you could drive by there and smell the fumes.

CS: You could?

EC: Uh, huh.

WIFE: And my granddaddy worked there, and he would come home for lunch and you could smell the fumes on him. I don't know what department he worked in.

EC: You could drive by the street and smell the lacquer, the finish, on the street out there.

CS: Wow.

EC: Of course, nobody complained back then because it didn't bother you.

WIFE: I liked to smell it.

EC: Uh, huh. [laughter]

WIFE: I thought it smelled good.

CS: [laughter] Smelled like home, it sure did.

EC: [laughter]

CS: Well, the final thing that I have to do is to turn off the tape recorder. Well, we almost went through--.

END OF INTERVIEW