

2.
LETCHER DEATON
UPPER BUFFALO
OWSLEY COUNTY
KENTUCKY
JULY 17, 1985

Dr. Garrett: I wish I had my tape recorder with me every time because you always tell me something interesting. You were telling me about your beans and your corn and stuff out there earlier, and about your tomato vines and so forth, but we were talking about the rifling of rifles and you were telling me about that. How did they do those screws for the breech plug?

Letcher Deaton: They cut coarse threads with a little old die that they had, you know. They didn't have these here fine threads like they got now. And these here tubes and cylinders wouldn't work in none of them old rifles. The threads was too coarse unless you rethread them. See what I mean.

Dr. Garrett: They had a die though that would do the cutting?

Letcher Deaton: They had a die.

Dr. Garrett: Where'd they get the die? Did they make it themselves?

Letcher Deaton: No, they didn't make 'em themselves. They was real old time stuff. I don't know where they come from. There weren't but very few of them. These old gunsmiths was the only ones that had 'em. They had little old wooden handles on 'em, you know. They cut 'em by hand and they had to turn that-a-away. They had wooden handles on 'em.

Dr. Garrett: You had to do it by hand? Would it cut the whole thing at one time or did he have to keep on cutting?

Letcher Deaton: Well, they just set it on there you know and they kept it greased with tallow. That's about all they had or ground hog oil or possum oil and they'd keep that greased you know, and they go down it once the deepness they wanted on their threads and they'd back it up, you know, and tighten it up and go down again until they could set the threads.

Dr. Garrett: I've never seen one of those.

Letcher Deaton: Bob Baker died and Ben Baker had his daddy's little old blacksmith's shop that he had all through his days and his tools and everything that he used all through his days and his tools and everything and he give them to Conley Baker. That's Lawrence Baker's boy, and you know Lawrence, don't you?

Dr. Garrett: No, I don't.

Letcher Deaton: Why, Lawrence is the one you went down yonder... Didn't you go down there to see Mag and Homer?

Dr. Garrett: No.

Letcher Deaton: Lived this side of Booneville.

Dr. Garrett: Yeah, oh yeah. Where does his boy live now?

Letcher Deaton: He lives in Texas.

Dr. Garrett: He's got those tools...

Letcher Deaton: He got the tools because Don Baker told me afore he died that he give them to Conley. Conley made 2 or 3, patched up 2 or 3, old hog rifles. Them old time ones, you know. Got ahold of barrels and things and he put tubes and cylinders in them.

Dr. Garrett: Did they make their own barrels? Any of the old timers up here?

Letcher Deaton: No, but back in olden times, I've read about it, and in these books they claim they made 'em.

Dr. Garrett: Yeah, they do that at Williamsburg, Virginia. They just take a bar of steel or iron and JUST WRAP IT AROUND A ROD AND THEN they take the rod out and go from there. It's a long, long thing. Did they make their own powder?

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, back in the olden times they did.

Dr. Garrett: Was there ever any lead found in this country to your knowledge?

Letcher Deaton: No, I don't think so, none that I ever heard of. Old man Tice Wilder lived up here on the head of the bank. He was raised over here on Indian Creek and the Horns were his ancestors. Come to this Horn Hill back here and that was where they settled. Well, he was raised over on Indian Creek and back here at the Horn Hill and he showed me where they made powder up on Indian Creek right in front of old man Bowlings, where you go above Joe Heltons, Where you go across that hill thar at the back of a field; abig cliff and that ah, oh, saltpeter they have to have that you know and that was where they got it under that cliff; and they burnt willer, willer is what they made that charcoal out of to mix with that saltpeter, that will make powder. Well, they make it down here at the school.

Dr. Garrett: But they actually made it and made their own powder on Indian Creek? How did they burn their willow? How did they prepare the willow, do you know?

Letcher Deaton: They burned it.

Dr. Garrett: Just in a fire or did they.....

Letcher Deaton: They dug 'em a pit. When you burn charcoal you have to dig you a pit and build a fire down in thar and you get, another thing, you pile your wood that you want to burn down in there and then you cover it over with rock or dirt and stuff, you know, and then smother it down and it will just char down and make that charcoal. If air hits it, it goes to ashes you know.

Dr. Garrett: And they mix that. Do you know the mixture they used on their saltpeter and charcoal?

Letcher Deaton: No, I don't.

Dr. Garrett: Did they put any sulphur in it in those days?

Letcher Deaton: I wouldn't know, he never said nothing about it, burnt the charcoal and got their saltpeter there.

Dr. Garrett: Yeah, they had a big use for powder in those days didn't they? They used their weapons a lot.

Letcher Deaton: Oh, that was about all they had you know.

Dr. Garrett: Now where was it, which hill was it that you told me used to have that primitive way of grinding corn Letcher, where they had the three hollow logs? Which hill was that on, what area?

Letcher Deaton: That was on this Pea Ridge back here.

Dr. Garrett: Pea Ridge? Have you found any more mill sites since I was here last time? Found any more where they had water mills before? Cause we photographed as much as we could the last time I was up.

Letcher Deaton: Well, they was one in the head of, way in that Laurel Fork in thar. Whenever we were logging in there, they was a big road. We had to make roads in there you know, in that virgin timber. We was in the creek and it was kind of flat up through there and there was pretty good gravel. It wasn't creek gravel and it got wore down and they got to grumbling; the truck drivers did that. The road had to be fixed, so I took a crew of men up there, and you know there was a sill I don't know whether it was white oak or what but it was sound as it could be, and the trucks just wore that down, you know, going over that and there's where they had a water mill.

Dr. Garrett: Wonder where they got their stone in those days? Do you have any idea? The mill stones?

Letcher Deaton: No sir, I don't. I guess they just made 'em. I've seed 'em made out of a just a hard kind of sand stone.

Dr. Garrett: Where was that done?

Letcher Deaton: Well, they had a set of them up here at this old water mill where we went. They first had a set you know, with a look like hail grits was made out of you know and until a big tide washes out and then that old man's boy made a set the last time they run that mill up there.

Dr. Garrett: Just out of the local sandstone?

Letcher Deaton: Hard, white sandstone.

Dr. Garrett: Any little stones still lying around? Do you have any idea?

Letcher Deaton: I believe there was a little water mill used to be, when I was a boy, over there right below where we was raised. A big building was built across the branch. It was a dam made there and a big long building across that branch. Uncle Robby Burton, and he had a little water mill there and he had rocks made out of sandstone and I'm pretty sure they come a big flood and washed it out, after he had sold out there. And I'm pretty sure there was a set, I don't know now whether there was a set of them or whether there's a set of them or just one but I believe there is one or two over there at my brothers after my brother found them at the old place

Dr. Garrett: Where's that?

Letcher Deaton: Ats over in Breathitt. You know when you go across the head of Cow Creek up here Owsley and Breathitt line and you go across there. You go down the creek and on the right, right down below the foot of the hill, there is a little holler comes out on the right. That's that Jacson Branch. Then you go on down there about a quarter of a mile and they's a trailer setting there in the lower of that bottom and a old time weatherboard house. Well, the road before you get to that house goes around the foot of the hill leaving the black top, and they live right out there. You can see the top, you can see my nephew's house, the top of it, and a big baccar barn, the top of it, and my sister-in-law lives right across the creek there. You drive right up to her door, and there's where they live.

Dr. Garrett: Will you go over there sometime with me and show me that....

Letcher Deaton: Why yeah, or if you pass through there you could....

Dr. Garrett: Is that on Highway 30?

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, if that's the one going to Breathitt.

Dr. Garrett: Just across the hill.

Letcher Deaton: Just about half a mile.

Dr. Garrett: What's your name of the family over there? Your family.

Lether Deaton: Minnie May Deaton or Prez Deaton, anybody can tell you where they are at. If you have to pass through there just ride up by there and look at them.

Dr. Garrett: I'd like to see that.

Letcher Deaton: Now, I'll tell you another thing. You heard talk of old Hugh No Bishop ain't you? That there's Judge Bishop you know don't you...

Dr. Garrett: Roy Bishop?

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, Willie.

Dr. Garrett: I can't remember all that.

Letcher Deaton: Now Willie Bishop was brother to that one, to the Judge, isn't he?

Dr. Garrett: I guess so.

Letcher Deaton: Clay Bishop was the Judge. Jess Bishop, he was here yesterday, him and his wife. I was over there to get some sweet potato plants in the spring and he took me out there and showed me old Hugh No Bishop's water mill log. Now, buddy, I want to tell you what, there's some...

Dr. Garrett: Where was this? Where is this?

Letcher Deaton: That's over there in Clay County. You go, you know when you go through Manchester and get on top of the hill there. Well, you go up Road Run whenever you leave the river at the top of the hill there, well just across the top of the hill there's a road, a little black top. Turn right down. That's Rocky Branch. He lives down thar. You'll come to about a quarter of a mile and go to the top of the hill there. About a quarter of a mile down there, you come to a big fine house up on the hill to the left and a big lot

of fine cows and everything there. That's on his land and a little sawmill there, he ain't arunning it, and he lives, they got a big stone concrete walk goes up to his house on the bank there. That's where he lives and he's got that mill and that big barn up there, them rocks and everything. I never seed such work as that man done. He's got his mounds up there set up. It's ready to go, if you've got something to pull it.

Dr. Garrett: He's Clay Bishop's brother, Hugh-nogs boy.

Letcher Deaton: Hugh-nog's boy. But Jess Bishop, he bought that old Hugh place up there. You know, that big place and that big June flood come way years ago and washed his water mill away.

Dr. Garrett: Yeah, thats, whats his name?

Letcher Deaton: Jess. Jess Bishop. Put yeller there. Yeller Jess. One lives down here on the creek that's first cousins of mine. They call thisun yeller Jess. He's a dark skin feller. And you know that water mill and them big rocks washed away. Even Jess heared of that and he discovered them down there in that big rocky hole of water covered up about it. He discovered them and you know he got 'em, he always kept an awful good pair of mules and he got a block and line and hoist and things, and he got them. He got them right out and he saidthey'd weigh a ton to the rock. They's about, the bottom of them was about this big.

Dr. Garrett: About four feet or so across.

Letcher Deaton: And they come up just like this, round off up here; hail grits, looks just like.

Dr. Garrett: Did he buy them or make them?

Letcher Deaton: I Don't know. He got them out of the water. They was at old Hugh-nog water mill there. He told him that. And he's got 'em there buddy and he's got 'em mounted up. I've never seed nothing to beat that in my life. He's got 'em right in that thing there and he got 'em on big timbers, bolted down and that all built in on a hopper. That hopper will hold five bushel of corn, that's setting on top of that.

Dr. Garrett: That was one of the big mills.

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, that was on a big outfit. I'll reckon that old Hugh now he was an old man; I'll reckon that his ancestors was the ones that owned, had that mill there, I'm pretty sure. I guess that mill was built there whenever i'se, in my opinion. Some of the first settlers of Owsley County in my opinion built that mill of Clay County.

Dr. Garrett: He had a great big log dam apparently across there, was it?

Letcher Deaton: No, No. Doc, they had a chute made. This mill, the house set up here pretty high on a bench you know and they cut a , they was a chute that had to be made by hand in time. Water come through here and turned that wheel. You know through a chute. Well, that chute went right on quartering up the river little bit on that side and it had been there for years and years and the water. I guess they kept it repaired up you know, but then they had...when I moved here in 1930, I'd go down there to mill, get my meal ground out, and he ground all the time. He didn't have to get no water.

Dr. Garrett: That water washed out the '37 flood?

Letcher Deaton: It was in June. Big June flood.

Dr. Garrett: I used to see him and Miss Bishop come into my dad's store. That was when I was a little boy.

Letcher Deaton: He was a great big old stoop-shouldered feller. When I moved here in 1930, I'd go around there and get my meal ground and my corn ground for meal and he'd be at the mill agrinding. I never was there but what he was agrinding. Never could pass there but what he was setting there at his mill, agrinding.

Dr. Garrett: He just had to stay busy all the time. There weren't too many mills working. People didn't buy brought-on meal then.

Letcher Deaton: There weren't none. Well, they was a steam mill, a grist mill runs by steam and they was gasoline mills you know. But people wanted that water mill bread. It ground slow and didn't heat that meal up and change the taste of it so much.

Dr. Garrett: Oh, so that was the big difference.

Letcher Deaton: Yessir!

Dr. Garrett: Mother could always tell the difference between water ground and commercially ground but I didn't realize that was the reason.

Letcher Deaton: Well, it heats it you know. The power, they just can't slow 'em down and control 'em where they get too much power.

Dr. Garrett: And they want to turn out so much too that they don't wait.

Letcher Deaton: That old water mill you see just runs one way and the wheel just takes so much water. It don't speed up or nor it don't let down. And, I guess, they figure they'd make them wheels, the more water it'd take the faster it might turn but they had a way of making them, it's controlled by the water in the wheel that's in the bottom. You seed them water mills rollin' ain't ye?

Dr. Garrett: Yes, I've seen them.

Letcher Deaton: There's one thing I've never been able to figure out. I never did see it done. I've seed mills took apart and I've seed fellers sharpening the rocks even, but I never did know how they took ahold of that there little knob there and little rawhide string AROUND IT WHEN THEY WANTED TO TIGHTEN THEM rocks UP AND THEM AWEIGHING A TON TO THE ROCK. How they could take ahold of that knob AND TIGHTEN THAT UP TO MAKE THAT CUT THAT MEAL FINER. Or, how they get them rocks closer together. I never did know that.

Dr. Garrett: How they handled all that weight. That would have been a PROBLEM.

Letcher Deaton: I Don't understand that. He took me in there and showed me them there grist but I didn't have time to talk with him but i'm agoing back over there.

Dr. Garrett: Can you get into New Found by car now, by automobile?

Letcher Deaton: Yeah.

Dr. Garrett: Can you cross the river up there now or is that bridge washed out?

Letcher Deaton: No, you mean cross the river at New Found?

Dr. Garrett: Yes, at Rocky Creek?

Letcher Deaton: Oh, you can go on the black-top, I mean the highway, and you get thar and you go down Rocky Branch. You go down to the mouth of the Rocky Branch and theys a low water bridge thar. You cross it and come on down that side of the river to New Found and then down to the mouth of New Found there to where that...

Dr. Garrett: You can't go through Buffalo and up to New Found and across can you?

Letcher Deaton: No, you can't, but you can come down the river to the mouth of Buffalo.

Dr. Garrett: By car?

Letcher Deaton: Well, I don't know about a car but they drive trucks.

Dr. Garrett: Did you ever make hominy?

Letcher Deaton: Yeah.

Dr. Garrett: How did you make hominy in the early days?

Letcher Deaton: Well, you can take strong ashes and run you some lye to skin it with.

Dr. Garrett: How do you run your lye?

Letcher Deaton: Well, just take you a, what we used to do like a gum, like an old time bee gum, with a bottom on it and a hole cracked in it and put you a cloth over it for a strainer; and you had it where it would drain you know. And just put ashes in it AND POUR WATER IN ON IT AND let it soak and it would seep through that. When it come out it would just be red lye.

Dr. Garrett: What ashes did you use mainly?

Letcher Deaton: We used hickory most of it. Oak will do but a hickory is a lot better. And you put that corn in there and boil it with that ashes in there, I mean that lye;; I have used Mary War lye, that canned Lye. It is all right but then you take it out when it cooks you know, and when that skin comes off of it and just wash it good and that skin all comes off of it.

Dr. Garrett: Mother used to just put lye in a churn or old crock and fill it full of corn and water and let it sit for ten or twelve days and then it would shell off. Then it was real good.

Letcher Deaton: You mean before she cooked it?

Dr.,. Garrett: Yeah.

Letcher Deaton: I don't know. We always shelled what corn we wanted, good big sound corn, and put it in a kettle. We used a regular wash kettle and built a fire under it, and whenever that would go to boiling that would take a little

(while, and begin swelling up, then we'd put that lye in there, let it be out of the ashes or the can, and let it cook with that until the hull went to bursting on that corn good. Then take it out AND WE generally take it and put it in a washing tub and draw water out the well you know, and pour on it and washed it thataway and you know it'll come off itself about it. You'd have to rub some through your hands.

Dr. Garrett: How long did it take, that hominy?

Letcher Deaton: Well, I don't know. We put it out in stone churns or crocks and in cold weather, we'd have it all winter. I never did know of no hominy to ruin, but I guess it would in hot weather but we kept it in a big smokehouse in them crocks until it was used up.

Dr. Garrett: You've got one of the neatest smokehouses I've seen but a smokehouse was a necessity in those days. What was the reason for smoking hAMS?

Lethcer Deaton: Well, one thing you can I believe,...I never did try it but I've killed hogs and it'd turn off hot in November and I'd smoke my meat. I never did lose a piece of meat that was smoked. It'll keep better and then it makes, a lot of people like that hickory flavor you know.

(Dr. Garrett: How long did it take you to smoke it?

Letcher Deaton: Well, according to how strong you want it and how dark.

Dr. Garrett: You just use wet hickory?

Letcher Deaton: About 10 hours steady smoke under it, about 10 hours it'll turn it good and brown. But then you smoke it eight or ten more hours, it'll turn darker and drives that ~~smoike~~ right on in it, you know. I generally smoke it about, forwhat we use for about twelve hours.

Dr. Garrett: Do you use just any form of hickory? A certain size of hickory?

Letcher Deaton: Well, I just cut little white hickory poles, you know, just little things and hack them up. No, I wouldn't think that old big red hickory AND OLD HICKORY, I don't think it'd be as much flavor. But the one thing I have learned about it, if you let your wood, your little hickory wood be seasoned it gives it a sweeter taste.

Dr. Garrett: Season it first. Then wet it before you put it on your fire.

(

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, Let it be seasoned. I have a washing tub out there about half full of hickory left over from last year and I thought I'd use it. I been using green hickory. My daddy always did and my grand-daddy, AND YOU KNOW I thought I'd just use that and I did AND I'm telling you it was better meat. Sweeter and better taste. It's on the same smoking but it didn't smoke it as dark.

Dr. Garrett! How do you fix your fire?

Letcher Deaton: Fire? Well, just take me on a half a wood stove. ... Hello, robin. Take me a half bushel tub, cut me out a little hole down about two inches, three inches from the bottom of it, a little slot, put me some dirt in there and set it on some brick or rock or something in under my smoker. I build my fire up though out of kindling and I set it out here till my fire catches, chars down my first wood you know and quit smoking and then I lay my hickory on it.

Dr. Garrett: Do you wet your hickory?

Letcher Deaton: No, I put it in there and just fasten the door up and it can't blaze.

Dr. Garrett: It don't get enough air.

Letcher Deaton: No, it don't get enough air and that smoke just choke you down in there.. You want a little of the smoke to escape. It will in spite of you.

Dr. Garrett: Did you all always pen your hogs up and fatten them up before you killed them in the old days, or did you let them fatten up on mast before you killed them?

Letcher Deaton: No, we always fattened our hogs up on corn. we let them get fat on mast and then before we killed them about three weeks or a month we'd put 'em in a pen and feed 'em corn and water.

Dr. Garrett: What did the mast do to the flavor of the meat?

Letcher Deaton: Well, I've killed hogs we have offen the mast. If they're on mast and you kill them offen the old mast, your meat looks a little bit dark and your lard, it won't be, hit'll kindly be a little bit blue looking. But if you kill them off beech nuts, the lard won't get hard and it's just like ground hog oil. It won't even get hard of a winter time. It'll stay that, it's kind of a yeller looking.

Dr. Garrett: Kind of an oil?

(Letcher Deaton: Yes, AND YOUR MEAT TASTES DIFFERENT, KIND OF SWEET.

Dr. Garrett: Is it better than the oak?

Letcher Deaton: Oh, yeah.

Dr., Garrett: Now, did you have many on chestnuts? Do you remember when they, yeah, what did chestnuts do to them?

Letcher Deaton: Chestnuts was equal to corn.

Dr. Garrett: Do you have any chestnuts coming back in the hills now?

Letcher Deaton: No, they'll come up and get big enough and they maybe bear a few burrs and then the next spring they'll die.

Dr. Garrett: Were there a lot of hogs loose in these hills back in the old days?

Letcher Deaton: No, they haint now.

Dr. Garrett: Back though thirty or forty years ago, there were weren't there?

(Letcher Deaton: Oh, everybody's hogs run out.

Dr. Garrett: How did they know whose hogs they were when they gathered them up in the fall?

Letcher Deaton: They had them marked.

Dr. Garrett: Marked them all before they turned them loose.

Letcher Deaton: Every man had his own mark.

Dr. Garrett: And they followed real well.

Letcher Deaton: That's right. Yeah. They'd mark 'em when they was pigs and they could catch them you know.

Dr. Garrett: Yeah, What did they have to do, shoot them to bring them out or kind of herd them out?

Letcher Deaton: Oh you have dogs. You used to have dogs, and you got out there and you wanted to catch you a hog you showed him to your dogs and your dogs got him and held him till you tied him up.

(Dr. Garrett: Dogs trained, huh?

(Letcher Deaton: Yeah.

Dr. Garrett: Were the boars dangerous or did they have many of them out there?

Letcher Deaton: Oh, if you got them hemmed and got to fighting them, yeah. The last one I caught was in '57 and old man Dan Gabbard down here had 'em and one took old man Nate Higgs corn field over yonder and he'd do his stirring of a night and he wouldn't tear the fence down. He would just crawl over a fence rail anywhere he wanted and eat what he wanted and go back to a cave that HE stayed in. Old man Dan Gabbard told me he'd give me \$10.00 to catch it. Well, me and Marty Adams, we went to catch that hog AND TOOK two dogs. We went to the cornfield. He'd been in thar the night before and we went early that morning and them dogs found his sign. They trailed him about 3/4 of a mile and went to baying him in under that cave. Marty Adams crawled back in under thar, had to, and took a forked stick and put a rope over that hog's nose in a loop and his tushes held him. Well, them dogs was fighting him in under there and us, we had him by the nose and a good rope around him. We like to never got him out from under there. When we got him out, he made at Marty and I went around the tree with that rope out from the cliff and held him and then we tied him by the hind leg and one of us led him and the other one drove him till we got offen the hill. And you couldn't get him to go till thissun in front made a noise at him and he'd run onto him and we'd have to give him slack in the other rope you know.

Dr. Garrett: How big was he?

Letcher Deaton: I guess he was about, I guess he weighed about 250 lbs.

Dr. Garrett: He was a big hog.

Letcher Deaton: Well, he would have been a big hog, and there was nothing to have kept him from being fat but (Tape runs out here) (Turn tape over & start again)

Dr. Garrett: Why were those bristles so long on his back?

Letcher Deaton: He was just as slick as he could be all but them bristles. They was a row of them sticking up plumb down from the back of his neck plumb down to the root of his tail.

Dr. Garrett: So he gave you that hog.

Letcher Deaton: He give us the hog for the \$10.00 so we, Marty come to my house and got a mule and a sled and come back to the swine and we loaded him up and we took him up and decided we'd eat him. I said I don't believe we can eat him; I said. Marty said yeah. He was standing. Well, we couldn't scrape him. He was such a lot of old gum you know. His hide was so tough and we built a fire and hung him with a windlass right up over the fire, a big fire and singed him. Then we scraped that hide off and Marty cut a piece. We cut him up, and Marty said I'll fix some for dinner. He just took a butcher knife and started on one of them hams and cut it to the bone. He took a bunch in and my wife started frying it. She come to the kitchen door and hollered at me. She said, "Come in here". I said, "What's the matter?" She says, "This here meat is running me out of the house". I want to tell you what, hit fumed our whole house up. Just exactly like a mad boar. That was the worse smell I believe I ever smelt.

Dr. Garrett: Was that because he was upset, was mad and so forth? That has an effect on them.

Letcher Deaton: He was a boar, and I guess he was old. Why these old billy goats aint nothing to the side of that.

Dr. Garrett: Smelled that bad! Used to be a lot of wild turkeys. Are there any back here now?

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, they claim they are. They claim they're getting back in but now they're not the old original wild turkeys. That big snow come and big sleet and stayed on about forty some days. It could carry a man, sheep, hogs and they couldn't get nothing to eat and they starved to death. Well, they been a-stocking up with them wild turkeys over here at Redbird and you know that haint over there, I guess of course, as it haint over three miles from here to Redbird. Them turkeys, they claim they've overstocked with them over that and I guess they've been getting out of there you know, coming to a different place and they've got 'em in Jackson County. They claim they've got plenty over there in Jackson County.

Dr. Garrett: Were there a lot of deer here when you were young?

Letcher Deaton: No, No. Weren't none that I ever heard of. Oh, i'd hear of there being some years before.

Dr. Garrett: Any bear in your lifetime?

Letcher Deaton: No.

Dr. Garrett: How many banty roosters do you raise out there? What do you raise them for?

Letcher Deaton:: Them banties? See right there what they are doing. See that one younder. That little 'un going there.

Dr. Garrett: They're your.....

Letcher Deaton: Watch them.

Dr. Garrett: They keep all the insects down, don't they?

Letcher Deaton: They won't let these old Japanese beetles, them Japanese beetles can't live where them's at. See they come out of the ground when they hatch, them beetles does and they're very weak when they try to fly and when they're little, they fly to the top of some of these trees and leaves and eat and stay there MAYBE UNTIL THE NEXT DAY. Then come back. Then when they get some hours old, they come back to the ground and lay their eggs. They mate while they're up there. Them chickens will either get them as they come up or they'll get 'em as they come to the ground.

Dr. Garrett: Did you ever have Japanese beetles when you were younger?

Letcher Deaton: No.

Dr. Garrett: They've been introduced, haven't they? What did you do for fertilizer in the earlier days or what did you do for insects back before the days of commercial stuff?

Letcher Deaton: We weren't bothered by nothing back when I was growing up but these little flea beetles and we used wood ashes.

Dr. Garrett: Wood ashes? You didn't have anything else that bothered beans or potatoes or anything like that, to any extent?

Letcher Deaton: Never heard OF 'em.

Dr. Garrett: Now Letcher, how in the world did they get good corn in those days before the hybrid corn. Tell me how you all picked your corn and seed every year, bean seed or any kind of seed.

Letcher Deaton: Well, they had the bean seed. They'd save 'em and if a neighbor lost their bean seed or didn't have bean seed another neighbor halved 'em or divided with 'em. They kept everybody agoing. They was neighbors back then. They were helpful to each other. Well, they had three different kinds of them old fall beans, had a little greasy bean, had a little October bean. They had the little white navy bean they called 'em and when they planted a patch of corn in this rich basin, you'd see a woman come in the field when they got to planting corn there and she'd walk right beside that old corn jobber and put three beans to the hill of corn

(Letcher Deaton: (Con't) till she planted maybe an acre. And about every people that clear these old hillsides out; they would tend them in corn every other year. They would pest 'em. They'd let the weeds grow on 'em and they'd grub 'em out and clean 'em up and grow corn on 'em the third year. Every other year, rotates. Keeping them from washing away. And at that, they would finally wear out. But these old big, rich, rocky coves, they couldn't wear them out. Them rock I guess helped hold that soil, you know. And they had different kinds of white corn, and they had a little hog snap corn, they called it. It got ripe about three weeks or maybe a month before that big yeller open pone yeller got ripe. And they started planting corn generally in March, and we wound up and got through along by the middle of April. We'd be through planting cornall but just, you know, just a late packet or something and then fodder time. The fodder would get ripe on it in September. It took a long time to make itself. And now the corn you get, it haint got no strength in it. This hybrid corn you buy and plant it, you can feed your work mules and give them a big armful of it. They'll eat it or you can feed your hog that much again. Six or seven good ears of the open pone corn, a mule or a horse, or a drummer or a business man or a doctor stays slick fat on that. Now you can't. A hog, it takes as much again as that of that hybrid corn.

(Dr. Garrett: I did not know that!

Letcher Deaton: Oh yeah. It won't make. That hybrid corn won't make, it won't make a quart of corn liquor and that tempered down to 80 proof. It won't make a quart to the bushel. That hybrid corn... No, I tried it.

Dr. Garrett: You tried it? When did you try that, Letcher?

(Letcher Deaton: Why, I treid it with that old man Joe Wilder over here. I was the first man planted hybrid corn in this country. I bought it from Henry Campbell down here at Booneville. He brought it in. Charlie Seales and Henry was there talking about it and looking at it; and it was that little nub. Henry Campbell said, "Letch, do you want to take a little of this and try it out?"? He says it supposed to be awfully good corn. "NO," I said, "that don't look to suit me." Charles Seales, that's Judge Seales, he said, "Now Letcher, I'll see that he he told where he seed it agrowing. Now get you some of that". Now then i said I'll try it and I said if I don't raise good corn I said, I'll be looking to you fellers for my corn. Well, they just laughed you know and you know I bought a bushel of it. I got a half-a-bushel a yeller and a half-a-bushel of white. I had five acres of new ground cleared back yonder. Right inthere where we had logged that virgin timber out. Well, I tended that and worke d it three

(Letcher Deaton: (Cont'd) times. Boy, I never seed such a crop of corn growed out of the ground, and the finest white corn that ever was. Well, I decided I would make me a run of corn liquor out of it you know.

Dr. Garrett: What year was this?

Letcher Deaton: Well, let me see now. That was about... I logged that holler out... that mill started about 1942, 1941 or 1942. Well, I took me, shelled me out two bushel of that yeller corn, finest that ever was, that hybrid. Took it over here to old man Joe Wilder. He had a little gasoline mill, grist mill, over here on Indian Creek. Took it over and told him "Uncle Joe, I want you to grind this fer me". He says, "What do you want with that?" I said, "I want to make some corn liquor out of it". "All right", he said. He liked him a drink. I heared of him taking a drink ever once in a while, a pint or a quart. So he ground that for me and I brought it back and had good clean barreels and evry-thing. Was sprouting my malt out of that same corn and it were ready, a bushel of malt.

Dr. Garrett: What do you mean sprouting your malt?

Letcher Deaton: To work my liquor with.

(Dr. Garrett: Oh, your MALT.

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, I done had it. It was already sprouted and I took it out and dried it you know, just like you would dried beans. I took it over and he ground it for me one night. I come back and I made two mashers in two barreels, good clean barreels: and I've made corn liquor before and I had a good still. You know it'd run, it'd run about a pint of awful strong high proof alcohol and then it'd cut off and run right weak single. Well, I'd temper down. I got hardly, a quart and the other 'un done the same thing. Well, I said, there ain't much sense for that. Well, I got to feeding it to my hogs and my work stock, mules. It weren't doing them much good. I was afeeding the same amount of ears I'd been afeeding of that other, you know, that old open pone corn. Well, you can take that open pone corn and I'd allus get about a gallon and a pint to a gallon and a quart on sweet mash to the bushel. Out of the open pone corn. You couldn't do it out of this here.

Dr. Garrett: You'd only get about a quarter on this.

Letcher Deaton: Yes, less than a quarter.

Dr. Garrett: Now, you said you fixed your mash up in the, you fixed your mash....How did you do your mash that you had ground? What did you use and how did you do it?

Letcher Deaton: Well, I put my corn in a coffee sack, just shelled it and put it in a coffee sack and put me a lot of shucks down in a barrel. Put me down a lot of shucks around it, put the sack right in the middle and then I kept that damp. It just sprouted and come right through that coffee sack.

Dr. Garrett: You put a bushel in there maybe?

Letcher Deaton: Put a bushel in for my two barrels. Put a half bushel to each barrel, but law, that swelled up and them roots was just like crawdads you know.

Dr. Garrett: How long did that take to do?

Letcher Deaton: Well, it'll go to sprouting in about three days. It takes it about six or seven days to get that little green... you want it, you know, roots and stuff to come out.

Dr. Garrett: Then you dried it?

Letcher Deaton: I dried it. It's easy to dry.

Dr. Garrett: Could you have made that into liquor or do you have to grind it every time?

Letcher Deaton: Well, it won't work if you don't grind it you know. I have ground it on a sausage mill. It's a bad job.

Dr. Garrett: I suppose the miller knew that you were going to do when you ground that malt up, huh?

Letcher Deaton: You mean the old man? Why, law yes. Well, you know I allus paid him. Well, I always offered to pay him and he wouldn't take it. I said, I'll tell you what I said, "I'll bring you over a quart". Well, I'd go to town aboutleggin and I'd give him a pint or a quart and in a week or two I'd give him a quart to grind my malt. That wasn't the first he'd ground for me.

Dr. Garrett: You've got it down to 80 proof all the time?

Letcher Deaton: Well, I'se atrying to get something out of it you know. To have enough to sorta drink a little on. I worried, I always left it about 110 proof.

Dr. Garrett: Well, your still, did you use copper tubing and stuff?

Letcher Deaton: I have a copper worm and my still was made out of 16 inch yellow poplar boards and the bottom was copper on one side and nickel on the other. And I turned the copper next to my beer you know. And I had my lid I had my lid to it put in there so I could stir it and it'd go to boiling and then I had a cap you know coming up. My cap was 7 inch square down here.

Dr. Garrett: You mean you had a tulip poplar box and you just put a bottom on it.....

Letcher Deaton: Like these old cane mills, these old molasses boxes. You've seed them home-made...

Dr. Garrett: Yeah, so the heat went in the bottom and didn't bother the sides at all and then you had the cap over that to your worm.

Letcher Deaton: I had me a lid down here because of my box and then in the back end back here I had me a cap. It come up here about 24 inches high and fitted down in this hole here, square hole, and then I had a hole bored here for my arm to go in and hit was right here, that arm was and then hit, one cope up and went into that check. It went down into my thumping kegs. Then there was another chuck come out here, and another set just like it and then an arm went into my worm.

Dr. Garrett: Now, explain to me what a thumping keg was and what it's for. Why did you call it a thumping keg?

Letcher Deaton: It thumped all the time. When it's aboiling. I guess that's what made it. It just THUMP THUMP. All that continually. I used a ten gallon one.

Dr. Garrett: The steam went into that.

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, that boils in that keg too, you know. It boils in here in your boiler; it goes through into that keg aboiling and steam, and then it goes through them arms, that steam does aboiling and then when it hits that worm it cools it down and here comes.....

Dr., Garrett: The purpose is to separate your alcohol in the thumping keg, that's basically the thump...

Letcher Deaton: If you just make it and run it straight from your box, your still straight out, it makes kind of poor liquor, and if you don't double it back well there you run it off.. Your supposed to then clean your box out and pour it back in there and run it again that way. They call that single

Letcher Deaton: (Cont'd) express run out. Well, if that goes through that thumping keg, through that process, you don't have to double back, you know. You don't have no singlings.

Dr. Garrett: Now, what are the singlings?

Letcher Deaton: That's where you run it one time. It's first come out strong alcohol.

Dr. Garrett: Then the water goes with it and it gets too weak?

Letcher Deaton: Well, you temper it down with water. A lot of fellers keep them there singlings whenever they had just run them down. It gets weak. It had a funny smell to it. I never would fool with them. I always quit whenever it was a good twist.

Dr. Garrett: In other words, they were trying to get the last little bit out of the mash and it wouldn't be any good? Did you feed the mash to your hogs then?

Letcher Deaton: Yes, I had a big pit dug fer that. Give them a drink.

Dr. Garrett: Was the law bad in those days about stills?

Letcher Deaton: \$50.00 reward for anybody that would report a moonshiner there. Had any liquor. If they found you with a still worm or a check or beer parrell or still, you were guilty. You'd see revenue time then.

Dr. Garrett: I guess there was a lot of liquor made in these hills in those days.

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, at one time, that was in the 30's, for about 5 year, people had all kind of livestock and couldn't get nothing fer it. Had everything they needed but money. Couldn't get money to buy clothes with in this country and there weren't hardly a house that I know of, well they was a preacher or two lived on this creek, but what you couldn't stop and get you something to drink.

Dr. Garrett: What was the old flint corn? Do you recall the old flint corn? Dad called it flint corn, a hard white corn.

Letcher Deaton: The hardest corn I knowed of was this here old district cane. Had an old flat grain to it. Hit was the hardest corn I knowed of. Now there was a little yellow corn I was talking about. They called it hog snap corn, old fellers used to have. Hit was hard.

Dr. Garrett: Now you ate that same corn all year didn't you? Had it in the summer and spring, fried and boiled and then you had cornbread and hominy, and then had cornbread the rest of the year.

Letcher Deaton: You know poeple never had none of them old corn borers or weevils that gets in their cribs of corn. We never had none of that till we got that hybrid corn.

Dr. Garrett: I didn't realize that.

Letcher Deaton: No sir, there weren't such as that, never heard tell of, till we got that hybrid corn. The first blight that ever I heard talk about was whenever the chestnut timber, it hit the chestnut timber. Killed the chestnuts. And then the bean bugs come in, them old bean bugs.

Dr. Garrett: Did you raise gourds up here?

Letcher Deaton: I have raised gourds.

Dr. Garrett: Did people use them for storage in the early days?

Letcher Deaton: Used them for lard. To put their lard in. They had them old big grease gourds they called them. They was an old feller, last uns I seedbeing raised was over here on Indian Creek.

Dr. Garrett: I raise some myself every year.

Letcher Deaton: You Mean them old big grease gourds?

Dr. Garrett: I'll bring you some down the next time I come.

Letcher Deaton: How big do you go?

Dr. Garrett: Oh, they get big enough to hold 3 or 4 gallons.

Letcher Deaton: Well, you know, he had them over there that was, well, I'd say they was was bigger than these bushel baskets, and he'd....used youn for anything?

Dr. Garrett: I just raise them for fun. I'll bring you a bunch down next time I come down. I've got a lot planted this year.

Letcher Deaton: I'd love to have some of them seeds.

Dr. Garrett: I'll get you some seeds for all kinds of it, dipper and bushel gourds and all.

Letcher Deaton: Oh, that old man had them over there and hesold them for a high price. He used them all through his days in his smokehouse under his meat bench to keep his lard in.

Dr. Garrett: When I was little, my grandmother had beans and cornmeal and sugar in gourds. And there's an old song "Sugar in the Gourds", and of course, sugar was pretty scarce for awhile in the early days of this country. Did you all ever make maple sugar up here? Did you make a fair amount of it?

Letcher Deaton: Well, you can make sugar or you can make that syrup, you know. You can quit boiling it when it's syrup but it'd take you quite a lot of that water to make a pound of sugar.

Dr. Garrett: Did you make it?

Letcher Deaton: Yeah, I've made it.

Dr. Garrett: Did you keep your own orchard of maple trees?

Letcher Deaton: No, there was plenty of big sugar tress before this timber was cut. There was sugar trees 30 and 40 inches in here and over there where I was raised, we'd make it. It was just getting the water.

Dr. Garrett: What were the biggest trees on this creek, Letcher?

Letcher Deaton: Well, the biggest trees was yeller poplar and water oak. Name of them was mountain oak. That's that old big coarse grain oak. That was the biggest 'un they was.

Dr. Garrett: How big did they get?

Letcher Deaton: The biggest ones I guess was about 50 or 60 inches. The biggest tree, I'll take that back, the biggest tree was in this forest was here on the head of Lucky Fork and they cut it for staves and they give \$2.40 a day and they give Jack McIntosh and he lived up there, a young feller, and somebody else, yeah, Homer Snapper on Long Creek. They give em \$25.00 to saw that tree up after it was cut down. They give 'em a 7 foot crosscut saw to use on it and they had to take one handle off and they'd saw thisaway with it on the log, then they'd turn it the other way and then they'd saw in the middle till they'd get it off one end of the saw. It took them several days to saw it up. They didn't make no money at that.

Dr. Garrett: Poplar was a good tree wasn't it?

Letcher Deaton: Yeah

Dr. Garrett: Did people always live in log cabins up here in the early days or did they live in under the cliffs or anything?

Letcher Deaton: They had to live I guess in log cabins. They didn't have no....in the beginning, I guess.

Dr. Garrett: You know, one of the best things I did was to take you up to Courtland Cemetery last year and tape you up there. I want to take you back up there this fall. I'm going to come and take you back up if you'll go and run through there again. Cause that was more family history you told me that day than anybody has ever had on them and....

Letcher Deaton: Now out here, last fall, and it was two men and a woman come around here and I'd forgot 'em and the man gave a funny kind of laugh. Well, I said, ain't that Granville Noble. You know Granville Noble and his wife and some guy in the middle and they was avisiting and they wanted to know where the McIntosh Cemetery was at. Well, I studied a minute and I said, "Well, there's one McIntosh Cemetery over on the Mill Branch over in Breathitt County". "Well", they said, "we know where that one is and that one is the wrong one". Oh, it had to be up here on Steel Trap. And they went up there and visited every cemetery and he told me here back about election time, Granville did, they hadn't got around at 'em all yet and they'e taking all the old dates and everything down and I don't know.

Dr. Garrett: They're sending them into the state for a census. Listen, I'd better let you do something else. I'm going...

Letcher Deaton: I'm going up there to see what's in there.

Dr. Garrett: Well, I'm holding you up too much.

END OF TAPE