

LETCHER DEATON  
7 October 1985

Dr. Garrett: ... called it Indian Silver Mine or whatever it was.

Mr. Deaton: That's what it is, that's what they called it.

Dr. Garrett: They call it Ditch Holler.

Mr. Deaton: My granddaddy, my great-granddaddy, he didn't know what it was all about whenever he settled there but he named it the Ditch Holler and whenever he let people log, you know. Railroad ties and stuff and they'd have to roll them logs across that ditch. If they got one of them in thar, they's loose it. Last time I was there it was filled up an awful lot, you know.

Dr. Garrett: Now, where are we going now, which way?

Mr. Deaton: Turn right.

Dr. Garrett: Now right up here.

Mr. Deaton: Now right up here, that holler right up thar is where them thar Indians got their flints. It's about this thick.

Dr. Garrett: How about showing us where that is when we come back.

Mr. Deaton: Well, it won't take us but five minutes to go up thar.

Dr. Garrett: I didn't know about that. They mined it out up there? How did you all celebrate Christmas when you were young?

Mr. Deaton: Well, we had plenty to eat. A few times we'd have a cedar out thar. Well, a box of old firecrackers a piece, little boys would.

Dr. Garrett: It never was a real big religious holiday though, was it?

Mr. Deaton: No, men folks would celebrate and slip a jug of moonshine or somethin or nother and maybe kill a hog, you know, or two, a beef or mutton or something.

Dr. Garrett: Every now and then they'd kill one another, didn't they?

Mr. Deaton: Well, yeh.

Dr. Garrett: That's a pretty field down there.

Mr. Deaton: That's old ....

Dr. Garrett: How's that spelled, Elliston, how's that spelled?

Mr. Deaton: E L S M O N - I guess.

Dr. Garrett: Now that White Branch weather is...

Mr. Deaton: Farewell summer.

Dr. Garrett: Farewell summer.

Mr. Deaton: See, theres some white and there is some purple. That's the last thing that blooms, but the frost won't kill it. Now, a frost like last night makes that honey flow when the sun hit it.

Dr. Garrett: That's when the bees love to work. You aren't going to rob your hives this year then.

Mr. Deaton: No, I tell you. The last year I took over five to six hundred pounds of honey and I just said I'll never take off no more and jar it up and fool with it, just too much trouble.

Dr. Garrett: They winter better if you don't, don't they? You say there's a big acorn crop this year.

Mr. Deaton: That's the only thing I've see'd, I'd say for several years.

Dr. Garrett: It tastes awful good on an acorn, doesn't it? Nuts.

Mr. Deaton: ... the \_\_\_\_\_ my granddaddy and then he had a deed made and Fred Gabbard, why he was down there at Frankfort a searchin for some records and he told me that he found that old patent down there at Frankfort on record. Said that old patent was made on some kind of a hide and with pokeberry ink.

Dr. Garrett: Did you all dry pumpkin .... Did you all ever dry pumpkin for eating?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, we used to dry punkins.

Dr. Garrett: How long did it take to dry?

Mr. Deaton: Didn't take too long if you cut it thin and got a good wood fire.

Dr. Garrett: Did you hang it over the fireplace?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, you hang it by a pole or something. Put it on a pole and let it hang down.

Dr. Garrett: How did you cook it then?

Mr. Deaton: They put it in a kettle and cooked it and just like they would dry beans. Put you a big piece of bacon of hog jowl in it. It was good eatin.

Dr. Garrett: Was the ears of corn and watermelons and pumpkins big back in the early days or was this always a small .... or what..

Mr. Deaton: Well, you'd find your corn, that old corn, you planted it and most people planted it in March and then it took, fodder time

was in September, fodder was ready to pull or top or shock in September. It took it that long to ripen.

Dr. Garrett: You thought that was richer than the hybrid corn?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh. they didn't use this fertilizer stuff and their food and everything kept better than it does now on account of... now here's the cemetery. You see, now right thar is where my granddaddy's old big log house set. You know, they built that two story log house, not a rotten log in it, ever log made out of white oak, right there's where..... Now, let's see here, we'll have to get off the road. There's the holler we go up.

A big old log house, just over on that wide of the road. It was a Hurley lived there.

Dr. Garrett: These people didn't sound like they had much to live on, what did they feed em, did you tell me?

Mr. Deaton: They didn't have nothing to feed im but they'd make a mash cake, out of corn meal and had a fire you know, and she raked them coals out here and made up that bowl and had that hog hot and then she'd put them live coals of fire on it and she got done with it they called it ash cake, that's what they'd eat.

Dr. Garrett: And the road was in the creek.

Mr. Deaton: Oh yeh, that's all the road we used to have.

Dr. Garrett: In those days people just didn't have anything but a little fat meat and bread a lot of times, did they?

Unidentified voice: Had a little barn and they couldn't even put a horse in it, just tied it up outside.

Mr. Deaton: Tied it up under a little old hang-over. Couldn't put the horse in the barn.

Dr. Garrett: Didn't have much, all they needed was the horse to haul it out.

Mr. Deaton: All they needed was a horse to carry the stuff on. Well, you know what...

Unidentified: What was their name?

Mr. Deaton: Well, I forgot. Whenever my granddaddy and my grandmother married, my grandmother, that was his daughter. Well, they moved out in a little, where an old deer hunter had a little cabin built up here... You see that bit holler yonder? Right down back this-a-way, theres a little holler comes out thar and on the left side thar, there's a little old cabin that an old deer hunter built. He'd come there twice a year, in the Spring and the Fall and I don't know whar he was from, I forgot. He'd come to deer hunt with his hounds. Well, My grandmother and my granddaddy moved in thar. They were both Turners but weren't no relation. They moved in that thar and stayed

there two year. My grandpap Wes here, he never would go about em, never would have anything to do with em. They didn't have nothing but a jenny, an old jenny my granddaddy had and a few \_\_\_\_\_ and old Preacher Burton lived over ynder whar my brother lived, I showed you that brick home there? Well, old Preacher Burton in three year, my granddaddy would go to church over thar, had a big horse, law, he had these hills full of sheep, hogs, everything and he rode up one morning and hollered over to my granddaddy, said, 'John, I want you to go over to Preacher Burtons to church with me'. He said, "Polly can ride up behind me on the horse and you can ride your jenny." Well that tickled my granddaddy to death, you know. He come on and they got on top of the mountain and my granddaddy got down and opened the little old gate that was thar. Paw sat down on a log, he said, "John, guess you may think you feel hard by not having nothing to do with you and Polly for three year."

My Granddaddy said, "No, no hard feelings." He said I done that to see if you and Polly would starve or part and he said you stayed together and he said now, I'm going over here to Preacher Burton's this morning, he is a wantin to sell out and said buy him out for you. He went right on and after church was over, he said, here Preacher, he said I come over here to buy you out. He said you want to sell out and he said, Yeh I do. He said, how much do you want? He said 3500 dollars. How many acres you got? Grandpap Wilson owned, you know. He said, I'm going to trade with you, I'm givin you 500 dollars. Preacher Burton said I don't do no tradin with money on Sunday. He said if my word ain't worth 500 dollars, it ain't worth nothin. He said in the morning, if you want to, come back, we'll do business.

Well, he went over there and he bought him out. They made the deed. Well, he had over 500 bushel of corn and he had 35 head of cattle and 60 some head of hogs and granddaddy didn't know it, that he was a gettin that. Preacher Burton told him, that all goes with it. Well granddaddy then had Preacher Burton moved out in about two weeks and granddaddy and my grandmaw moved in there. Grandpap Wilson said, I ain't a givin that to you, he made that deed to them. He said, I ain't givin that to you but he said, I'm going for you to pay it back as you can. Well, granddaddy agreed to it you know.

Well in about a month, he come and got my granddaddy, took him to Frankfort, bought him a 200 dollar Poplar Still, bought his license come back, put him up a water mill in the creek over thar to grind his grain on and bought him a black \_\_\_\_\_ and in about two months put him up a number one store over there and in about four or five year granddaddy had him paid back and he built an ice house.

Dr. Garrett: Was that a legal still?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh.

Dr. Garrett: What kind of whiskey did he make?

Mr. Deaton: He made corn whiskey and brandy.

Dr. Garrett: What brand did he use? Where was the still? Over along that road?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, he had a big still over there. Right in down behind where lived, in that house thar. The water mill was right down there in the creek.

Dr. Garrett: When did the water mill go out, do you have any idea?

Mr. Deaton: Oh, I don't know, I don't remember when the water mill was there. I remember when the ice house was there. We used to, granddaddy had walnut trees there. Old Preacher Burton never would have them cut or nothing and us boys would pick up walnuts and kind of put in that ice house and you, know, it was 12 inches thick, them walls was, with sawdust packed in there, the floor and the same way overhead. And, that mill pond would freeze over and they'd take boats and go in there, granddaddy would, and cut that out, them big, from two to four to five inches and they'd put it in boats and haul it down thar and put it on a sled and haul it up there and they would lay a layer of ice and then a layer of sawdust. Then, granddaddy would sell that brandy and stuff like that, you know, wine and stuff he'd make and whenever he'd.... He would sell to, you know, these men would start a drinking, wanted em a drink, well, granddaddy would get all the business. His brother Berry, he had one, Ed Callahan had one, Lee Bolen had one and them fellars would come from down in thar and drink with granddaddy. Ed Callahan didn't have no still at the time, well, his grandpap and son lived right here and he said, Ed Callahan, you ever lay a hand on my son-in-law in any way, I'll have you killed before the next night. Which he would, you know.

Dr. Garrett: Callahan was in trouble a lot anyhow wasn't he?  
Ed Callahan ...

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, anybody got in his way, he just had em killed.

Dr. Garrett: He got rid of quite a few of them, didn't he. Did he kill some himself?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh.

Dr. Garrett: How many men did Ed Callahan kill, seven or eight?

Mr. Deaton: Well, I just don't know.

Dr. Garrett: Wasn't he sheriff?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh.

Dr. Garrett: He killed seven or eight people, I think, at least, and plus whatever he hired killed. Anybody that interfered with him, why, he got them shot. Now tell me, did he raise grapes over there and what kind of brandy did he make? What did he make his brandy out of?

Mr. Deaton: Granddaddy? Why, he made apple brandy and that's all he'd fool with.

Dr. Garrett: How did he make apple brandy, do you know?

Mr. Deaton: I made it myself.

Dr. Garrett: Tell me how you made it.

Mr. Deaton: Well, you take the apples when they get good and ripe, the way I done it. A little people just put rotten ones and everything in it. I just take em and beat em up, you know. I didn't have nothing to grind em up.

Dr. Garrett: Hull and all.

Mr. Deaton: Just beat em up, good sound apples, good and ripe. Now, you can't use sweet apples, use sour and put em in barrels, don't put no water in em and just let em work in there, you know, it takes em about 30 days and all them apples comes up to the top, just dry and the juice is in the bottom. If you want pure apple drink, just pour that juice off and you got it. I'd put sometimes sugar in it to make more, you know.

Dr. Garrett: Now wait a minute, can you drink the juice in the bottom of the barrel? Is that the brandy or ...

Mr. Deaton: No, thats just, you know...

Dr. Garrett: You have to distill that off to make the brandy.

Mr. Deaton: Now, you drank this here apple cider they call it, that you can buy around these orchards. Well, now thats some of it. Now if you have enough of that and re-work it.

Dr. Garrett: Let it ferment?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, that ain't been worked you see. They put stuff in thar to make it cheap, and out yonder where I lived was a big orchard and he had to keep his'n, he wouldn't put nothing in it, he just had the real juice and he had a walk-in freezer that was as long as from that post to that yonder and I you it was 12 foot up here and he had that stacked in thar, you know, where it would stay cold. It would freeze and mush out and brother, you got you a jug of that, you had, it wasn't a thing in the world but just pure apple juice. A lot of them thar fellers just put something in there to make it...

Dr. Garrett: Well, after you get this juice, after you ferment these apples, do you just let, do you have to distill that juice off?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, you distill it off just like you would still beer, you know.

Dr. Garrett: Now you told me last time that you did that a time or two.

Mr. Deaton: Yeh and I didn't hide from no federal judge either.



Dr. Garrett: The federal judge didn't get hold of you did he?

Mr. Deaton: No. (Unintelligible)

Dr. Garrett: You mean you had to go to a federal judge, Letcher. For what?

Mr. Deaton: Moonshinin.

Dr. Garrett: Making moonshine?

Mr. Deaton: That's right. Well, the way they do, my neighbor had to put em up thar in the Guy Branch, they was over a half a mile into Rollie Combs's land and I said boys, you gonna cause me to get in trouble. They said the wouldn't and they were loaded. Well, somebody had found it and reported it and it was just two barrels, they wasn't nothing in them cept a little dab of old mash and it rotten, that had been left in the barrel. Alcohol detective, he swore that it was closer than 80 feet in my yard gate out there where I had been a feedin my hogs slop. Well, here was his deputy with him and I was a sittin thar and some old man right behind him said, ain't that one of your cases. He said yeh. He said was you a witness in it. He said, no they won't use me. He said, well I tell the truth and he said Mr. Creech won't tell the truth.

Well, I just turned around and said to him, well, I'll have you for my witness. He said they won't allow it. Well, I just asked the judge and the judge told them to allow it. I said, judge, can I question him? Yessir, he said, go ahead. So, I just ask him three questions just like that. The judge said, Mr. Deaton, are you guilty of moonshinin and bootleggin. I said, I am. He said, well, you a big stout young man, he said why did you do that? Violate the law? Well, I said, I got three daughters and two are in high school and another ready for high school and I said, I said I am a poor man and I want my girls to be like other girls. I said I want them to wear clothes and I want them to get an education and I ain't got no other way, no job and no education and I said, I want to school my children. He said you ain't guilty of this. No sir, I said, I ain't and I said every .... boy, I was hot and I had every word Mr. Creech told you right here on the witness stand is a lie. He said, come around, leader of the jury and find this man not guilty. Well, buddy he told them right in open court. He said, I want the people in here to know that I don't have people brought in for the name of it, he said, in my court.

Well, I was the last man that was tried and as I went down out of there, I went to the Federal Building, old Creech was right in front of me and I overtook him on the stairway winding around. He said, looked right at me and he said well, I guess you feel better. I went there on Monday morning and that was Friday evening. He said, I guess you feel better than you did a Monday morning when we had you on that stool taking you picture with your cell badge on. Well, now you know, I lied to him, not a bit better. He said, look, people generally does. I said well when I ain't guilty of something, I don't feel like that. He said act bad over it. He laughed a big horse laugh right in my face. Well, there come, I didn't know these alcohol detectives comin down and here they stopped, two of me.

Well, I want to ask you a question, Mr. Creech, I said, you never did see me before adn never did know me nor nothing. No. I said, why how come you swore all them lies against me? Trying to send me away from my family. Them fellas went to pattin on him and a laughin and you know, he turned around and went right back up there and turned in 500 dollars worth of \_\_\_\_\_.

They notified me to come in and pay off. Well, I talked to James Cochran. You might of knowed him, the detective. Well, I got him for a lawyer. I told him and he said you don't pay no attention to that, you was tried by a judge and jury and set free. He said you don't pay that. You know, it went on five year and I got a notice from them, the five years was hardly up, and they wanted every piece of furniture in my house, every piece of stock I had, every bit of land that I had and they was havin a revenue sale if I didn't come in and they sent the notice through the mail, if I didn't come in and pay it. I went in and paid it off, the interest and all was up.

Dr. Garrett: You were telling me about somebody down there once that you went out and captured, brought in a big old boy that had gone wild.

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, that was Dan Gabbard.

Dr. Garrett: How big was that hog, did you tell me?

Mr. Deaton: Well, I guess it would have weighed 200 or 250.

Dr. Garrett: They get pretty mean?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, well we tied him, put a rope around his tuskes and put a rope around his tuskes and had him tied around the hind leg and around one other and we couldn't get him to goin unless (unintelligible).

They'd give his slack on the rope and after we got him out, well, got him on a sled and the mules, you know, and had him bailed up in there and he had a stick crosswise in his mouth around the back of his head so if he got loose he couldn't bite.

Dr. Garrett: Was it good eating? Or was it pretty strong?

Mr. Deaton: Why, you couldn't eat a bite of that, I guess if a fella was about to starve, he could. Cut out some of the terderloins \_\_\_\_\_ Evans did and he said I'll take them in and that will be plenty enough for my wife to fix for dinner. He took them in and in about 15 minutes she come out and hollered at him and said come in here. She said that meat is smellin up everything in the house.

Dr. Garrett: How did the people live when they first come in her, did they have much to eat or was it pretty scrawny? How did they make it?



Mr. Deaton: Well, how did they make it?

Dr. Garrett: Yeh, I mean, did they live on game or a few hogs or what, what did they have?

Mr. Deaton: Well, I imagine that they lived on game and they'd have maybe a few hogs, maybe a cow to give milke, you know and butter. They'd raise em a patch of corn and enough stuff for the winter. They knowed pretty well, you know, and they kept an old horse or mule or a jenny or a jack or something, to carry on or to ride.

Dr. Garrett: It was all work, wasn't it?

Mr. Deaton: They settled high up where the timber was right, the ground was poor and they couldn't handle them big timber down in the valley like on Buffalo. They settled on top of them ridges back there.

Dr. Garrett: It was all work.

Mr. Deaton: That's right.

Dr. Garrett: Corn and corn meal but by late winter though, they were hurting, weren't they?

Mr. Deaton: Well, they'd dry the beans, dry their apples, dry their punkins and didn't know nothing about canning stuff, you know, but they had got some dry and it would keep. Well, whenever there come a wet spell, they'd lay out all those dried vegetables, they'd lay it out in the sun and let the sun, the featherbeds, you know and all that stuff.

Dr. Garrett: Did you ever eat parsnips?

Mr. Deaton: Parsnips? Yeh, one year.

Dr. Garrett: Don't like them?

Mr. Deaton: Yeh, I liked them, but I just never did, the only year that I ever raised any. Yeh, parsnips is good food and healthy.

Dr. Garrett: Now, old Ned Callahan lived not far from here, didn't he?

Mr. Deaton: Up here at the fork. It comes down this way and ... You know, on my daddy's side and my great granddaddy McDaniel and my grandma, great grandma and my (end of tape).