

Interview with Samuel Brown McLaughlin, Jr.

By Isabelle Chewing

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[Items enclosed in brackets [] are not on the audio, but are editorial notes inserted for elaboration or clarification]

Isabelle Chewing: Today is Monday, January the 21st. My name's Isabelle Chewing and I'm at the home of Sandy McLaughlin to do an interview with him for the Brownsburg Museum. Sandy's family, the McLaughlin family, has a long history in the Brownsburg area, and two of the topics I'm specifically interested in talking about are Camp Briar Hills, and Sandy's grandfather, Dr. Henry McLaughlin. First though, Sandy, could you give me a little background about yourself, your full name?

Sandy McLaughlin: I'm Samuel Brown McLaughlin Junior. I was born in Charlottesville, 1943. My father was teaching at Woodberry Forrest School then, and he was from Rockbridge County. His father, Henry McLaughlin, was pastor here at New Providence [Presbyterian Church], so he was born in the manse for New Providence [3882 Brownsburg Turnpike], and when I was born, was teaching school at Woodberry Forrest, a boys preparatory school near Orange, Virginia. He, at that time, was coming to Rockbridge County each summer to direct Camp Briar Hills [formerly located at 2508 Sterrett Road] which he did from the early '30s all the way up into the early '60s. He farmed here in Rockbridge County from 1949. He ran his farm all the way through – I think it was sold in the early '70s. [Camp] Briar Hills was located originally over near Brownsburg, and then moved over here into the Pisgah area to Briarwood Farms [957 Pisgah Road] around 1960 or so.

Isabelle Chewing: And so you were born in Charlottesville. Where did you primarily grow up?

Sandy McLaughlin: I grew up, ages one through six, in Charlottesville and then some of my most treasured years were here in Rockbridge County from age six 'til I was 12 when we moved back to Woodberry and he returned to teaching. He kept the farm during those years, but returned to teaching, and so my real growing-up years, my formative years really were here. My summers were always here with Camp Briar Hills. I went onto a career in science and worked at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and retired back here to Rockbridge County in 2004.

Isabelle Chewning: Did you actually go to school in Brownsburg when you were here?

Sandy McLaughlin: I went to Brownsburg Elementary School from first grade through the fifth grade. In fact, we just a reunion of our classmates last Friday night, which was interesting.

Isabelle Chewning: Who were your teachers when you were here, do you remember your teachers?

Sandy McLaughlin: Yeah, Miss Lib Ward was my first grade teacher; Mrs. Whipple, Mollie Sue Whipple was my second grade teacher; Mrs. Williams was the third grade; Mrs. [Nellie] Lowe the fourth grade; and Mrs. [Fanny] Buchanan was the fifth grade teacher.

Isabelle Chewning: I had four of those five in those grades!

Sandy McLaughlin: Did you really?

Isabelle Chewning: Right. I had a different third grade teacher. That's interesting though.

Sandy McLaughlin: Yeah and it was the old school up on the hill there at Brownsburg. We had a total of maybe less than 300, grades 1 through 12 in the whole school, but it was an interesting and special time.

Isabelle Chewning: Could we back up a little and talk just a little bit about your grandfather and his time here in Brownsburg?

Sandy McLaughlin: Yeah. Henry McLaughlin – we knew him as “Big Papa” – was a farm boy, grew up in West Virginia over near Lewisburg on a farm known as Maxwellton [correct name of the farm is Clifton], and became a Presbyterian minister. He came here to New Providence in 1909, and was very active and very innovative in setting up a lot of programs here. He helped to establish the Bank of Rockbridge [Brownsburg] with Mr. [David] Whipple. He had a ministry at Pisgah Chapel and preached around in other places other than just at New Providence. The membership really expanded dramatically under his leadership. He formed a cooperative as to help the farmers organize their finances, and he was a farmer himself. He maintained leadership and ownership of Maxwellton [Clifton] farm in West Virginia. They produced at least one world champion shorthorn cow, and sheep. He was very much into sheep. So he had a nice background, a farming background, and was continuing to be a farmer which helped him a lot in his ministry. Because of the success he had in building this rural ministry here in Rockbridge, he was ultimately in 1921 [correct

date is 1926], appointed to become the first of head of Rural Ministries for the Presbyterian Church, I guess it was of the US at that time. He moved to Richmond and was active with Union Theological Seminary teaching and administering this program in rural ministries, which was designed to help new pastors sort of equilibrate to expectations in a farming environment. [The new program he directed was called the Country Church Department, and its mission was to teach aspiring rural ministers] to know what to expect, to know how to reach farming families, and to build farming communities from a religious perspective.

Isabelle Chewning: Where had he gone to seminary?

Sandy McLaughlin: He went to [Louisville] Theological Seminary himself, as I recall. He had one year he went to the Mideast, to Palestine, which was a formative year in his life. And he was a -- had a Doctorate of Divinity [which he obtained from Washington and Lee University in 1917], he was Dr. McLaughlin, and was very well known as a very eloquent speaker and very dynamic leader. It was in that capacity that he operated within the Presbyterian Church to build rural ministries across the country.

Isabelle Chewning: And it was quite a large family right?

Sandy McLaughlin: There were, there were six brothers and three sisters in the McLaughlin family, and most of those – I think the younger two thirds anyway – were born in the manse there at New Providence.

Isabelle Chewning: Of which your father was one?

Sandy McLaughlin: Including my father, Sam McLaughlin, yes. And his wife [Dr. McLaughlin's wife], Nell Swan Brown, who became Nell Swan McLaughlin, was a direct descendent of Mary Moore, the captive of Abbs Valley, who was captured by the Shawnee back in 1786. And there's a story, a book written about captives of Abbs Valley that recounts the history of her family back then. Her great, great grandfather was born in Rockbridge County, James Moore, and went to Abbs Valley to settle and raise horses where he was on the very frontier, and he was ultimately killed by a raid of Shawnees back in 1786. She was taken captive up into the Ohio River settlements and her brother, James Moore, recovered her about 4 years later. She was 10 when she was taken captive, and I think she was 14 when she came back. So this was my grandmother's great grandmother.

Isabelle Chewning: And so how did Dr. McLaughlin meet Nell?

Sandy McLaughlin: He met her in [Lewisburg] West Virginia [where she was a student at Lewisburg College]. He was doing some -- the Brown family was out in Lewisburg, and I think he was active out there in the church. [Nell's father, John Calvin Brown, was a minister there, and for a time served as President of the College.] There was a ministry in Lewisburg, there was actually a college there, and he met her out in that area. Of course his farm was in Lewisburg, which was nearby -- right outside Lewisburg in a little area called Maxwelton.

Isabelle Chewing: And is Maxwelton the name of the town or the name of the farm?

Sandy McLaughlin: It's sort of a crossroads there. [The original home was named Clifton and he eventually named the farm Maxwelton Stock Farm.] They actually named, I think he named the farm Maxwelton, and maybe there was a post office there recently when I was back there. But that farm was Maxwelton Farm. The original farm had been in Marlinton and his grandfather, Squire Hugh McLaughlin, had built a house there -- a log home there in 1849, and eventually the railroad bought that property from him and the town of Marlinton was formed there. [Squire Hugh's son and Henry's father, Andrew, a veteran of the Civil War who rode with Jeb Stuart] took the proceeds and went further down the valley towards Lewisburg and bought this farm on the Greenbrier River which was quite a nice cattle and sheep farm. [Their livestock competed in widespread competition under the name Maxwelton Stock Farm.]

Isabelle Chewing: Do you have personal recollections of your grandparents?

Sandy McLaughlin: Oh yeah, very definitely of Big Papa and Big Mama. Big Papa was pretty close to retirement when I was born, I guess. He used to take me fishing down in Hays Creek as a little boy. He loved to fish, and he would spend at least parts of his summers at Camp Briar Hills, which my father was running then. And my grandmother, Big Mama, was helping to run the camp, and to do the meal planning, and supervising the kitchen work. So I have very vivid memories of her. She was a sweet lady, and loved to bird watch, and pick berries, and had a strong naturalist tendency. My father ended up being a biology teacher, so that was well played out in his career and his profession.

Isabelle Chewing: When did they die?

Sandy McLaughlin: My grandfather died in 1950 [correct date is 1951], my grandmother died around early 1960s I think it was.

Isabelle Chewing: And were they buried in Rockbridge County?

Sandy McLaughlin: They're buried at New Providence.

Isabelle Chewning: Oh, they're buried at New Providence.

Sandy McLaughlin: Yes, as are Samuel Brown, after whom I'm named, and Mary Moore, who was his wife. Mary Moore came back from captivity and Samuel Brown, who was one of the early pastors of New Providence, married her around the early 1800s. And he had a ministry here as well. His home that he was building when he died was the home now owned by the Moneymakers out on Hays Creek Road [952 Hays Creek Road].

Isabelle Chewning: Bellevue.

Sandy McLaughlin: Bellevue.

Isabelle Chewning: How did he die?

Sandy McLaughlin: He was working harder than he should have been. He was actually working on building that house, and apparently he must have had a heart attack. From the description of his final moments, it sounded like that's what it was.

Isabelle Chewning: And then did she go on and have the house finished?

Sandy McLaughlin: Presumably so, I don't know the actual history. That was early 1800s, but it was finished yeah.

Isabelle Chewning: Do you know if she ever lived there?

Sandy McLaughlin: I presume that she did, I think he was sort of in the later stages of construction at the time that he died, but I don't have a strong knowledge base on that history.

Isabelle Chewning: Well thank you so much for the background on Dr. McLaughlin and family. I particularly wanted to get from you some information about Camp Briar Hills. Can you tell me a little of the background about how it started?

Sandy McLaughlin: Yeah. Briar Hills was located up on the hills overlooking Brownsburg, looking out to the beautiful view of Jump Mountain. It was about a 50 acre or so, 40 to 50 acre parcel of land that my father's sister Margaret McLaughlin Hogshead -- ultimately she married Fulton Hogshead of Augusta County -- ran for her children. It was sort of a summer recreational camp. She had two

daughters, Nell and Cara Fan, and a son Dickey, and they and some of their friends would come there in the summer. They had sort of a -- I'm not sure how it was organized -- but it was a group of visiting friends and whatnot, so sort of a co-ed summer country adventure for some young people during the summer months.

Isabelle Chewing: Were they primarily children who grew up in the city, or a less rural area?

Sandy McLaughlin: I presume they grew up in Augusta County. And I'm not sure, I somehow have the impression that some of the visitors that came were from Richmond and places like that. But the Hogshead farm was off of Brownsburg/Middlebrook Turnpike. Margaret died around 1930, as near as I can recall. And the very first pictures that we have of an actual camp -- it became an all male camp -- my father is pictured with his mother and his brother, Henry McLaughlin, with an all male camp with about -- I think there were maybe 14 young men, boys basically. They looked like they were from age anywhere from six to maybe 12 there in 1932. Daddy became ultimately the director, he was just 21 years old or 20 actually, in that picture when it was taken. Well, in midsummer he could have been 21. And he began directing it I know full time when he graduated from college, which was around -- he graduated from Hampden-Sydney around 1935. So presumably he and his brothers ran it with his mother in the very first couple of years, and then Daddy took it over. And his brother, Lee, his younger brother -- only younger brother -- when he came back from -- he was a Captain in the Navy in World War II -- came back and they co-directed Briar Hills. It grew very nicely, and began to be bigger than they felt comfortable with. The emphasis was on rustic sort of character building. The activities were riding, archery, and badminton, shop, athletics. There were six total activities -- riflery -- and the boys would do three of one activity one day and three the next. And they were divided into groups with Indian names: the Sioux, the Navajo, the Comanche, the Mohawks, Cherokee and the Apache, as I recall. There were six groups and there were typically anywhere from 50 to 65 campers in the camp. They began to have so many more applicants than they could take that they decided in 1948 -- the next year they divided into a more senior camp with the older boys up through early teens now being male members of camp Maxwelton which was under Uncle Lee's direction. And they initially held that camp -- the campsite was over here near Pisgah, just below where we're talking right now on what was my father's farm Briarwood Farms [957 Pisgah Road]. A lake was built, and some cabins were built to allow half of the camp to move over there in 1949. And Lee and Maxwelton has run ever since; it's now under the direction of Lee Junior, Lee Massey McLaughlin. And so Maxwelton ran at Briarwood Farm just below where we're seated right now for three or four years, and then Uncle Lee bought his own place, with Aunt Rosa, over at the foot of Jump Mountain [1629 Walkers Creek Road] and they called that Maxwelton, Maxwelton Farm, Maxwelton Camp, and it's run there ever since. Briar Hills, in the meantime, continued at its Brownsburg site until the very early '60s and Daddy moved it over [to Briarwood Farm] because we had facilities. We had a lake and we had cabins that were permanent cabins. A lot of the sleeping that was done at the old [Camp] Briar Hills was on wooden platforms in military tents, with about 5 campers and a counselor per tent. And the boys that weren't in tents were in sleeping porches which were metal roofed, screened porches. Very delightful, a wonderful place to sleep during the rainstorm with awnings that rolled down when you had blowing rain and whatnot. So a very

character-oriented camp that Daddy did initially, and Lee does and young Lee still does lead a devotion every morning. The day started off seated on the porch with some Biblical lesson and some character development derivative from that that related to life as boys would see it at this time. Life that would help build a character. I remember one particularly poignant morning. I was occasionally spoiled enough to be able to go with my father when he was running the camp at Briar Hills and had the farm over at Briarwood Farm. He still had some farm chores to do, and he would get up very early in the morning, 5 o'clock. And very occasionally he would let me ride over with him, which was always a thrill, and we'd be back in time for breakfast at 8 o'clock. But it was just nice to be with your dad and have him to yourself as a young boy, because at camp he was of course "Sam". He was the leader and he was, you know, a dominant figure. But that particular morning we walked around the lake, and he was a biologist. He pulled up some frogs, tadpoles and frogs in various stages of development, and put them in a bucket. And that morning, our devotion dealt with different people being at different stages of development as they are building their characters to become who they will become and the tadpoles, low and behold, were part of the morning devotions. So that was very special. But Daddy was a biologist, and like all the McLaughlin children, they had a very strong sense of the natural world, and I think the natural world was just one more awe-inspiring component of their religious framework. He never ceased to be impressed and impress others with his understanding of biology and the significance of living things and their relationship to the Creator. So he was a very natural teacher, and those morning devotions were probably not more than 15 minutes, but it was each day some new aspect of character development that was particularly meaningful for young boys at that stage. And he was able to target his age range of campers very well. So the mornings were filled with these events, the six events that I mentioned, three each day. Afternoons were -- there was always a rest hour in the middle of the day, then you would have softball and swimming, and they would alternate. Half the camp would do one first, the other half would do the other. Our swimming hole was Hays Creek. It was dammed up with sandbags and it had to be built back typically at least once during the summer because there'd be a heavy rainfall and a flood event would come through, and that was all part of the character building aspect of being at Briar Hills. You fashioned your own swimming hole and you maintained it. In shop, you took blocks of wood and sanded them and made them into lamps and things like that, rather than to have some easy kit-type thing that was razzle-dazzle, the kids learned to work with wood and make paddle boats or anything they could take home as an example of their learned skills. Special events during the summer were -- a trip up Jump Mountain was always something greatly to be looked for. When you got to be perhaps as old as ten, you would be able to go up Jump with the campers and spend the night over there. Other trips that we took in the [Shenandoah] Valley, of course, we had the Lexington, the museum at VMI and W&L, the Lee Chapel, and some of the caverns, Grand Caverns, Luray Caverns. And so those would be interspersed during the six-week summer session for special events, outings and what-not. So Briar Hills ran at the camp site above Brownsburg all the way to, as I say, around 1960, '61 and so forth. And then it moved over here and my brother-in-law, George McVey -- Daddy retired from directing the camp around 1963 or so -- and my brother-in-law ran it for three years through 1966, 67 somewhere in that range. And it stopped at that point. George became Headmaster of St. Christopher's and he needed to be at Richmond at the Richmond campus year-round, and I had become a professional scientist and biologist, environmental scientist, and was not able to take summers off of my work to direct the camp. But Maxwellton has carried on the tradition, and still runs

today as both an all-boys camp and, with Camp Lachlan having been started – golly, I guess it must have been started 20 years ago as an all-girls camp -- that followed the boys camp. And that's at that Maxwellton site right at the base of Jump Mountain, which is an ideal location on Hays Creek for a camp, and of course there's a lake for swimming, and cabins. Everybody sleeps in cabins up on the hill there, so that's a nice permanent sleeping arrangement that's very dependable. Tents occasionally leaked, tents occasionally had to be repaired and platforms had to be repaired, but it was all a very nice and beautiful environment. One of the most poignant memories was at the end of camp each year -- and I should say Briar Hills emphasized improvement as much as doing well. So when the boys completed their morning activities, at lunch every day the camp counselors who led a particular event, whether it be riflery or archery or whatnot, would say "Okay in the Cherokees today, the best was so-and-so and the most improved was so-and-so." So everybody got recognized for improvement with equal weight as being the best. And of course the boys were put in groups that were of comparable abilities so that they could compete, and were a similar stage of development. At the end of the year, the final closing ceremonies awards were given out, and the best award was the same as the most improved award, they were all identical, and all received with great pride. And the closing ceremony was always capped off by singing "In the valley of Virginia, high up on a hill, where our hopes are realized and our dreams fulfilled, she is the best of all the rest, her spirit you cannot kill, hail to thee we sing this song, dear old Camp Briar Hills." And typically the sun was setting, or getting close to it on Jump, and it was just a very meaningful song, very meaningful camp for many, many young men for decades.

Isabelle Chewing: Could you tell me a little bit about the buildings, did your family build the main buildings that were there at the camp?

Sandy McLaughlin: I'm not certain that there weren't some buildings there before Aunt Margaret had it, I really don't know the history of those buildings. I know that some of them for sure were built. There were probably a couple of log cabins there that were added onto it with the sleeping porches. I began camp there in 1948 and it had been running for -- I was 5 years old then, so it had been running for 15 years roughly by the time that I went. But the center of the camp was a complex that had a kitchen, a big dining hall that was screened-in, and above the dining hall was a sleeping porch that held double rooms that held perhaps 15 to 20 young campers between the two of them, then another wing that held another perhaps ten. Then there was a separate log cabin, the east building, that had a sort of a general activities room, a downstairs sleeping area, and then another screened porch up top. Of course all covered metal roofed, and wood up to about belt high, and the upper portion would have been -- where windows would normally be -- was screened, with awnings that rolled down. And about half of the camp, when the camp got to its full size of perhaps maximum maybe 75 or so, about half of the older campers slept in tents which were military tents, I'm guessing they were probably 15, 20 feet by 20 feet and they were erected on wooden platforms, and the boys slept on cots that were obtained from VMI, graduating cadets, military cots. They had an inspection every morning to make sure they had made up their beds, and tidied up everything, and they got awards for having particularly neat beds and neat quarters. So those tents were really very pleasant to sleep in, the sides could be let up or down, and at night on normal nights they were up and you'd

have a wonderful -- it's like sleeping out of doors, but you had something over top of you, so a very nice sleeping environment.

Isabelle Chewning: And they were named --

Sandy McLaughlin: They were all named after Confederate Generals: Longstreet, Jackson and so forth, A.P. Hill. There were as many as six tents at one time, maybe seven, but all named after Confederate Generals.

Isabelle Chewning: And the tents were taken down after the end of the season?

Sandy McLaughlin: They were taken down at the end of the season and stored away, and so just the wooden platform would be there over the winter.

Isabelle Chewning: And then latrines -- was there a shower facility, or was swimming in Hays Creek --

Sandy McLaughlin: Everybody swam every day in Hays Creek. We took a skinny dip on Sunday mornings before going to church, and that water was really cold in the morning, even in the summer. So everybody took a classical soap bath, and soaped up, and had to be inspected as being soaped up, in Hays Creek on Sunday morning. But the johnny houses were wooden, two- and three-seaters, and so they were the classic outdoor commode. The only plumbing for purposes of hygiene was there was an area where the boys kept their toothbrushes and soap and whatnot, and they had to be inspected after breakfast and supper, before they went to bed to have brushed their teeth and they had to show their gums and show their teeth and make sure they had cleaned themselves and properly taken care of dental hygiene. So there was a covered area with spigots and people had cups and basins that were assigned to them by number, and so they did their wash up, and tooth brushing at that running water facility. But the main, you know, facility basically had just a kitchen with of course running water and whatnot. The water came from a spring down there at Hays Creek and it was piped up into a cistern right up above the main area of camp. We'd dug our own tennis courts out of the side of the hill. I think they used a mule and a wheelbarrow as a sort of a scoop to get that out. And of course we built our own rifle range, and the archery range were just bales of hay and whatnot, that were set up with targets.

Isabelle Chewning: Where did you find a place flat enough for softball?

Sandy McLaughlin: There was a meadow down on the way -- halfway down from Briar Hills down to Hays Creek. And there was a meadow [there along Hays Creek] also -- we had field days, too, in

which we did competition and track and field, you know, the classical events: high jump, races, long jumps and things like that. And that was done down in the meadow beside Hays Creek, as well as some events on the softball diamond. The softball diamond was perhaps 400 yards below the main camp site on the way down to the creek, and so it was very convenient to either, you either swam first as I indicated, or played softball first and then rotated, so they were sort of on the way as you went down towards the creek.

Isabelle Chewing: Did you have a big Fourth of July celebration?

Sandy McLaughlin: There was always a fireworks of some type. Typically sometimes we'd have a group going up Jump so they would be up there with their flashlights signaling back to the campers on the hill there above Briar Hills. And yeah we had fireworks every Fourth of July up there on the big hill looking out over Brownsburg, and that was always a big treat.

Isabelle Chewing: Was there a parent's day, did these boys see their parents at all during the whole six weeks?

Sandy McLaughlin: There was a visitor's day half way through the camp session, and they would come and they could take their sons out to a meal in Lexington or whatever, or go to Goshen with them or whatnot. It was typically an afternoon and they were back by, certainly by bed time. So it was just about a half a day midway through camp, and there was the typical letter writing. The boys had supervised letter writing sessions to make sure they corresponded with their parents back home, and so it was a special time. Daddy was very good at sort of gauging young boys. Some of these boys -- it was real interesting. The ones that it had the most effect on were perhaps some from the inner city, you know, being Richmond or Washington or whatever -- that really hadn't ever done things for themselves, and so there was a tremendous sense of accomplishment in a young boy for the first time riding a horse, or shooting a rifle, or shooting a bow, just the sense that you could do that. And of course you were placed with a group of comparable abilities so you were competing with boys of your age, but as I said you got recognized for improvement as well as for being the very best at each one of those events. So it was a very strongly oriented camp towards character development; fall down, get up and try again. Keep doing it until you, you know, you get better at it, and be happy to have improved. Even if you're not the very best at it, you know that you tried, that you kept at it. So I can remember Daddy frequently talking about intestinal fortitude, guts, you know, having the guts to -- if you're Daniel in the lion's den you had the guts to be dependent on the Lord for your protection. And/or if you, whatever -- plenty of examples from life of folks that gutted it out and were able to succeed. And I think Briar Hill's campers went away with a good sense of self worth, and a good sense of what they were capable of doing, either as provided by physical or mental capacity, or the capacity to improve by working at something.

Isabelle Chewing: You mentioned -- did they call him "Sam"?

Sandy McLaughlin: Yes they did. Yeah he was called "Sam." Of course I couldn't call him "Sam" [laugh]. But it was a little -- you know, it was a little strange for me. Of course I worshipped him. He was, you know, he was sort of the hero as camp director, and he was a really smart guy and he had the right answers for most questions and most situations. But he was referred to as "Sam" by campers and counselors alike. So for me, he was sort of borrowed, you know, he was the property of all the boys. I couldn't have a -- other than the special situation of his allowing me to go over to the farm with him in the mornings occasionally, and it wasn't a frequent thing, maybe maximum of four times during the summer I would get to do that. That was the only privilege I got. I also got my poor little rear end worn out by him one time 'cause I had more demerits -- they called them black marks -- than anybody else at camp! And I always felt like the counselors -- maybe I was so much of a brat at that stage, but I seemed to be getting demerits very, very easily! And I sure enough got my belting as he was wont to do, and just like anybody else would have. I also was -- once there was an altercation with another camper, and occasionally he would have them put on boxing gloves to settle a dispute if there was something that he thought needed to be settled in that way. So I was supervising a boxing match at one time with another little boy who was particularly fractious and we got that settled. [laugh]

Isabelle Chewing: [Laugh] Were there local counselors and campers?

Sandy McLaughlin: There were a few local counselors. And I know Fred Whipple went as a camper, he was never a counselor, I don't think. Bruce Alexander, who I think now is a medical doctor, from over near Fairfield was there as counselor for a year or two. Donnie Swope, the son of Carl Swope who ran the general store in Brownsburg, was there as counselor. But not a whole lot of local boys, just a smattering. [Steve Heffelfinger was one of those and a good friend of mine growing up. He had a unique mode of self defense that earned him the name Steve "Heffelbite" as a very young camper.]

Isabelle Chewing: Any famous alums?

Sandy McLaughlin: Yeah, one of our alums became Governor of West Virginia, Gordon Caperton, Austin Caperton. And George East was our only loss in World War II. He was a counselor there and he was on a destroyer that was sunk by a torpedo. And so we had the East Room and I still have a drum that George East made, an Indian drum that's about the size of a good-sized nail keg with rawhide [thongs as lacing] and rawhide drum surfaces that he made and painted, and that was always part of ritual that we had. We had story hours every night, and counselors were responsible for telling stories before we went to bed. There would be some supper or some activity of Andy-Over or some game that would be played, and then we'd have story hour and then we'd go to bed and "Taps." And so the East Room was the place where typically where we had story hour, and George East's drum was in that building, and when it rained we'd have skits. We'd do some kind of plays of some silly type. It was, you know, that kept the times occupied, or played games or things like this.

Now that's the one thing you really hope doesn't happen is to have extended rainy days when you've got 50 or 60 young kids full of energy and wanting to be out and doing things. But we always managed to tough it out and do fine.

Isabelle Chewning: Any homesickness? Did the parents have to come a lot?

Sandy McLaughlin: Oh yeah, there were always a few. I don't think -- never more than a handful total over time that I'm aware of that couldn't stay. I think they always stayed, you know, they toughed it out. I don't remember -- actually I don't remember anybody going home homesick. They, you know, the idea is to get them feeling a part of a group, that's why they're in the Indian group together, and they go around with their friends of their age group. So, you know, obviously you're going to have some homesickness, but they seemed to do very well. [Everyone, campers and counselors alike, had to sing, both as a part of the camp group, but also solo in front of the whole camp twice each year. That was an equalizer and a barrier breaker that helped everyone feel a part of the larger camp body. I remember well Daddy singing "I ain't got nobody—" with great feigned distress, which always drew laughs."]

Isabelle Chewning: And how about the local folks who worked for your dad?

Sandy McLaughlin: We had a really great group of African American folks that worked in the kitchen with meal preparation. One individual, Bob Shultz, and his wife Bert [Roberta] were really a mainstay part of the camp in the sense that he was sort of the general handyman, a very physically able man, able to do most anything with a hammer or axe or whatever, a hardworking individual. Bert was the maître d of the kitchen, and supervised the cooking. The meal planning was always done by my grandmother or my mother, eventually. But there was Lucille Brown and I think Betty Brown, who now works in the Post Office, as a young girl was there for at least one summer. And Dorothy Shultz [Randolph] was a really treasured part of the camp. So they were a real part and parcel of the camp spirit, and very fine additions to the staff.

Isabelle Chewning: When the camp moved out here to Pisgah, did your family sell the property at Briar Hills in Brownsburg?

Sandy McLaughlin: No they kept that for a time, and eventually I think Steve Heffelfinger bought it and ran some cattle on it. There was -- a nice log cabin was built [fairly recently] actually above the old camp site up on the hill, that's still there today. I don't know Lucy's last name, but it's currently owned by someone from the Washington area I think.

Isabelle Chewning: Rhame. Lucy Rhame.

Sandy McLaughlin: So, you know, folks that go there [to Lucy's log cabin] -- I was to a gathering there two years ago, and that magnificent view of Jump and the North Range is of course still there, and still impressive.

Isabelle Chewning: Did your family move anything from that camp out here to Pisgah?

Sandy McLaughlin: Just some of the tents. I think we had three tents out here of the sleeping tents. There were enough cabins, there were four cabins, each of which would sleep perhaps 15 campers or so. So we had the sleeping capacity with the permanent cabins, and made up the difference with tents when we needed to.

Isabelle Chewning: Was there a garden there?

Sandy McLaughlin: There was always a garden. That was one of the things that Bob Shoultz took care of. He would till it, and take care of it, and occasionally some of the campers were involved in weeding it and whatnot, but we got corn and tomatoes and beans and whatnot from the garden, just as they do at Maxwellton now. So yeah there was a garden at both places. Of course the horses went from the old camp to the new camp and there were some colorful horses. Blaze was Daddy's. He was a very spirited horse and only Daddy and one other camp riding instructor, Stuart Hopewell, really rode Blaze. He was a little much for just an average rider to handle but he was a very impressive male horse. And there were other really well-dispositioned horses. One of them, Silver, was a white horse. I remember vividly one rainy day, all day long. And just before sunset, we thought maybe the sun had gone down, and the front came through, and the sun came breaking out over Jump and this like a golden beam shot out, and there was Silver standing up in the hill, just shining in this golden beam. And the sky -- this was a frontal system passing through -- and it was the most brilliant sunset with all variety of blues and greens and pinks and yellows that evening, and Silver standing out there like some grand divine hand had reached down and painted him silver. It was really special. But yeah Silver, Major, Tony were some of the horses' names. And when they rode, when we rode, we rode trails which they were all around the old camp, and it was a follow-the-leader thing. You were in a line, you were not out riding individually but you were following the lead rider who was a counselor. Depending on which horse you got -- and they were used to being in a particular arrangement, and they got upset if they were out of their arrangement. They had their place in the line and so they were very comfortable with that.

Isabelle Chewning: How about the farm here at Briarwood, what kind of farming did your dad do here?

Sandy McLaughlin: Dad predominantly raised cattle and sheep. There were some hogs on the farm when we got here. It's a wonderful old farm, it's the McChesney house. It was built in 1785.

There actually had been some slaves involved back when, and there was some of the slave quarters that burned down I think, just about the year that we got there, or the year before. But it was about -- when he bought it, I think 370 acres of rolling hills and valleys, and probably a fourth or less of that was woodland. He raised Black Angus cattle and Hampshire sheep predominantly, but the main operation was cattle for beef.

Isabelle Chewning: And so he was teaching over in Orange County -- did he have a farm manager here?

Sandy McLaughlin: Yeah he had actually Jerry Swisher. It must have been Jerry Swisher's father that he co-managed with Daddy. Jerry would feed the cattle during the winter, we typically had a hundred head or so, something like that. And so of course when we lived here, Daddy ran the farm. When he went back to Woodberry Jerry would look after the cattle, and they partnered in doing that. And now Jerry Swisher, presumably his son, is managing the MacElvane farm, and comes in routinely to look after the cattle there, so it's interesting.

Isabelle Chewning: And that's the owner now who lives --

Sandy McLaughlin: Frank MacElvane is the current owner. He's bought two farms adjoining the original farm, I think he's got over a thousand acres now, and Jerry Swisher comes in and manages the cattle operation apparently.

Isabelle Chewning: And that's our contemporary?

Sandy McLaughlin: Yes, our contemporary.

Isabelle Chewning: When did your parents retire back here?

Sandy McLaughlin: It was around 1970, I think it was. No, I guess it was actually late '60s. Actually they were back here around the mid '60s I think, they were back here. Daddy taught at Woodberry, 1956 through mid to late '60s, and of course the farm was maintained. They would come back here for summers. But then they came back and were at the farm for a couple of years in the early '70s and then sold the farm to Dick Glenn and moved into Lexington and lived there for a couple of years. And then they moved eventually to Powhatan near Richmond. Daddy was an avid golfer, was an excellent coach. He coached golf and football and baseball and basketball at various times at Woodberry; had an incredible winning percentage. I went back and looked through some of the records, and I think he won 80% of his matches no matter which sport, his teams won 80% of the matches, no matter what sport he was in. Ultimately, he had really good teams, he was a great

motivator. But golfing was one of his real loves and he played that actively. He died in 1987 and he was 76, and shot his age twice, I think, during that year. So when he went back, he was active with the Lexington Golf Club; I think he was in some sort of maybe advisory capacity relative to the course. But when he went back to Powhatan, initially he helped with the golf course that was built around the lake situation there where he lived next to some dear friends of his and my mother's, the Odens [Martha and Phil Odens] on the lake there at Powhatan. So the golf course was right there, which was very convenient for him.

Isabelle Chewning: Was your mother a local person?

Sandy McLaughlin: Mother was born Nancy Harrison and she was from Petersburg and so she was a city girl. So when they came up here in 1949, it was sort of a rude awakening for her, but she was a character type, and strong character and she did well under that circumstance.

Isabelle Chewning: Now was your dad part of the crowd in Brownsburg that would go into the stores and loaf and tell stories and play practical jokes?

Sandy McLaughlin: He would do that, yeah. I know of one story that I was told regarding his being in the store there. I think there was someone who was a professional entomologist who taught biology and insects and whatnot, and Daddy was in the store with probably Doug Whipple, I think or somebody like that. And he was talking about a particular bug that they were studying, and they were trying to determine what it was eating, and there was a real mystery involved with it, and they didn't know how it processed its food somehow. And he tantalized -- knowing this guy was an entomologist, he told just enough to get this guy interested, and got him to ask, "Well how did they actually determine what was going on inside the abdomen of this insect?" It was some predatory insect. And Daddy, with a straight face said, "Well they put a little glass window in there and they put a windshield wiper and it would sweep back and forth and they could look in there and see." And of course the guy knew he was being jacked with. And another thing that happened that was sort of interesting with my father and this was with Doug Whipple. Daddy wore a pistol when he was out walking around checking the cattle and whatnot, you know. He would shoot groundhogs or foxes or whatever. And he and Doug Whipple had a great relationship, sort of a kidding. They were classmates together when they were boys growing up. And Doug was kidding "Well what are you wearing that pistol for?" And Daddy said, "Well, you know, occasionally I want to shoot squirrels and things out of the top of trees, and I typically just shoot the left eyes out when I do that." And they were walking along and low and behold there was a squirrel up in the tree, and Daddy pulled out his pistol and shot the squirrel, and it fell out and his left eye was out. [Laugh] So a fairly amazing fortuitous situation by strictest and wildest luck, but that's what happened.

Isabelle Chewning: Do you remember any of the Brownsburg characters when you were growing up?

Sandy McLaughlin: No particular characters. I mean there was the usual group in the store. Daddy's friends that he kidded around with a lot with were the Whipples. The character out here in Pisgah who was really special was George Lotts who was a shade-tree mechanic with incredible instincts for fixing things, just an old country fellow who had tremendous insight how things worked. He had a garage and shop down here just below where we're sitting right now, and was a great coon hunter and drove a Model T around the roads here. He had his two coon hounds, Rattler and Brownie, and they were typically sitting up in the seat beside him, and it looked like three people going down the road. George was a great big old moon-faced guy with a chew of tobacco, and normally there was a stain coming down one side of his mouth to the other. He wore bib overalls and played a fiddle, and was just a wonderful country character. And his mother Sarah Liz Sweet lived in the little house that you drove by on the way to my house where we're sitting, which is an historical cabin that her -- I'm not sure whether it was her mother or grandmother lived in, who was a post-Civil War person. The father came back from the Civil War injured, and made shoes apparently and lived in that house. It was built in the late 1860s or so. So, yeah, George and Lizzie Lotts were wonderful and treasured assets and components of this Pisgah community for years and years.

Isabelle Chewing: Any other stories or reminiscences from Brownsburg that you'd like to share with us? I've gotten through my questions.

Sandy McLaughlin: Just I think there's an innate sense of self-sufficiency that derives from growing up in the country. And the feeling of being a part of that rural community, you know, where other boys were proud of what they could do, you know, what they had developed to that stage, whether it was driving a tractor or this, that or the other. Whatever they -- the metrics of being a successful growing young country person who is able to, you know, to make do, and be resourceful. That was a special feeling that I came away from this community with. Whether it was justified or not, I always felt like I had an edge over the city boys who hadn't done all these things, and didn't have that savvy and sort of innate resourcefulness that comes with growing up in the country. Of course we rode the school bus. I can remember walking occasionally in the snow home, once just about knee deep because the cars couldn't get out to get us, I guess. We got caught at school with the big snow. But anyway it was a special time growing up.

Isabelle Chewing: Well, thank you so much for sharing your camp memories.

Sandy McLaughlin: You're certainly welcome.

Isabelle Chewing: And Dr. McLaughlin memories.

Sandy McLaughlin: Pleased to be able to do so.

[End of Tape]

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