

Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
Special Collections Department
University of Arkansas Libraries
365 N. McIlroy Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-5330

This oral history interview is based on the memories and opinions of the subject being interviewed. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using this interview should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

Arkansas Memories Project

Interview with

Herbert Reed
Aly, Arkansas
15 November 1999

Interviewer: Roy Reed

Roy Reed: . . . This is Roy Reed and this is November the 15th, 1999, in Aly, Arkansas. We're getting ready to talk to my uncle, Herbert Reed. Now, if you'll give me your full name . . .

Herbert Reed: William Herbert Reed.

RR: Okay. And . . . we have your permission to use this tape in the oral history program at the University of Arkansas, is that right?

HR: Yes.

RR: Okay. Tell me when you were born, Uncle Herb.

HR: 19 and 9. The sixteenth of January, 1909.

RR: Okay. And whereabouts were you born?

HR: In Aly, Arkansas.

RR: Were you born at home?

HR: Yes.

RR: And give me your parents' full names, if you will.

HR: Jim Reed.

RR: What was his full name?

HR: James . . .

RR: Not Monroe . . . No. . . . Anyway, Jim Reed, and your mother was Hattie . . .

HR: Hattie . . . Hattie

RR: Barrows . . . Hattie Barrows . . . Reed.

HR: Yes, Hattie Barrows Reed.

RR: Yes. Let me ask you whether you remember any of your grandparents.

HR: I remember Grandpa Reed, Mitch Reed, and my Grandpa Barrows.

RR: What was his name, Grandpa Barrows?

HR: Sorry, I can't remember it; I don't remember.

RR: I've heard it was Chris.

HR: That's right . . . Chris.

RR: Was that short for Christopher?

HR: I think so.

RR: A lot of those people . . . reckon . . . his full name was Christopher Columbus
Barrows?

HR: I don't remember it that way.

RR: Yeah.

HR: Chris is all I remember.

RR: Yeah. And they came to Arkansas, Mitch Reed came from where to Yell County,
do you know?

HR: No.

RR: I believe he was in the Civil War, wasn't he?

HR: Yes.

RR: And Chris Barrows, do you know where he came from?

HR: No.

RR: Somewhere out of Arkansas, wasn't it?

HR: Yes. . . . somewhere north.

RR: Yes. If you'd talk to me a little bit about your childhood, growing up . . . I believe it was just a mile or two from here, wasn't it? [From] where we are sitting right now.

HR: Yes.

RR: What are your earliest memories about that place? . . . Maybe you remember my dad, Roy, who was two years older than you.

HR: Roy, no, [Ola??] was the oldest, and then Roy, and then me, and my brother Odell, and Idell, Jesse, Rubin, Carl, Lorene, Lena, Billy . . .

RR: Bill's in there . . .

HR: Billy, then Lena.

RR: Yes. Eleven of you altogether.

HR: Yes.

RR: Have you ever thought that it's kind of amazing that all eleven of you kids lived?

HR: Yes. Yes, and they still . . .

RR: And a lot of you are still alive.

HR: There's four gone. Two girls and two boys.

RR: Yes.

HR: Ola, Idell . . . just two of the girls are gone.

RR: Yes. But when you were kids around here, when you were little, do you remember hearing about other families losing kids, kids dying young?

HR: Yes. . . . to name any of them?

RR: But that was fairly common, wasn't it?

HR: Yes. Yes.

RR: What kind of . . . what did y'all do for fun when you were a little kid? What kind of play, what'd you do?

HR: Well, we . . . had a crosscut saw and cut what we called wheels [?] and we'd build what was called a truck wagon. And we'd pull it up the hill, and then a person would jump on it and ride it down hill. And we'd get to the foot of the hill to this hole [of] water; we'd turn it before it hit the water. And brother Reuben, he didn't turn it - laughing and laughing and [rode] right off into the hole of water. But we'd pull it up the hill and then ride it down. Work going up, but fun coming down.

RR: Yes. You say you'd cut the wheels; you're talking about off a log . . .

HR: . . . off a gum tree.

RR: A gum log . . . a round . . . yes.

HR: Yes. And that gum tree wouldn't bust and go to pieces. It didn't . . .

RR: Oh, like some other wood would. Yes.

HR: Yes.

RR: Well, that's pretty good. I'd never heard of a truck wagon, I don't think.

HR: That was the wheels. . . .

RR: If you didn't have rubber wheels or steel wheels, why you made your own wheels.

HR: We made our own. [We'd] saw and saw and saw - big ones.

RR: Yes. Do you remember anything else you did for fun?

HR: Oh, we would, uh, we enjoyed . . . throwing rocks into hornet nests as big as five-

gallon buckets.

RR: [Laughter] To stir them up.

HR: And I learned . . . I had a black hat, and they'd come and hit you in the forehead, but using that black hat, I never got stung in the face or head. And the other kids would, didn't have a, . . . if you had on a black hat, you didn't get hit in the head with a hornet.

RR: I wonder why.

HR: I don't know.

RR: Something about that color black, I suppose.

HR: They'd hit that instead of hitting your face. I don't know why you'd go down when they'd hit you, but the average kid would go down. Then we'd fight wasps. We'd fight wasps. And . . . I remember one - if they'd just one at a time come at you, why, we'd, we could, I don't want . . . had more may the other, but we could knock them down. That was fun out doing the wasps, but this bunch come at me, and I turned around right quick and the old gatepost, and I had a scar here all my life.

RR: Well, I declare.

HR: Can't find it.

RR: Where you snagged yourself on the gatepost.

HR: . . . nail.

RR: A nail. . . . What kind of food did you all have to eat on the farm back in those days?

HR: Well, we would pick wild blackberries and wild huckleberries, and quite often in

the huckleberry patch, there'd be diamondback rattlesnakes. And then . . . I don't know why . . . I never knew of them eating them, but seems like we were always coming on those diamondback rattlesnakes in the huckleberry patch.

RR: What was the regular fare at mealtimes that Grandma would cook?

HR: Well, she always had good meals, homegrown and . . .

RR: What kind of meat?

HR: Pork. And then we'd eat lots of fish. And . . .

RR: Caught out of Reed's Creek?

HR: Yes. And Irong Creek.

RR: Yes. Did you ever eat chicken? Fried chicken?

HR: We would, uh, well, catch a chicken and wring its neck and go in the house and fry it for breakfast and milk gravy and hot biscuits. And at noon and at night, we'd have cornbread. Usually cornbread and milk for supper.

RR: And that cornbread probably came from meal - from corn grown on the place, I guess.

HR: Yes. And we'd take it down to the . . . down here, straight across here, there was a cotton gin and they'd grind corn there. Put corn, a sack of corn, on the horse or mule and take it down and have it ground Saturday morning. They'd take out so much toll . . .

RR: Toll, yes, for grinding it, they'd keep a certain amount.

HR: Yes. And then we'd raise cane and we'd strip the leaves off of them, cut it and take it to . . . that had . . . and make molasses. We had our own molasses year round.

RR: Sorghum molasses.

HR: Sorghum molasses.

RR: Sounds good. How many acres was on the farm there?

HR: I think it was thirty-eight.

RR: Thirty-eight acres

HR: Yes.

RR: What kind of clothing did you wear in the summertime?

HR: Well, usually overalls.

RR: Yes. That's what you're wearing today, I believe.

HR: Yes.

RR: Big Smith Overalls.

HR: Yes.

RR: Since 1916 it says on the label.

HR: Yes.

RR: What about in the wintertime? What'd you wear?

HR: We wore, I think, homemade long handle underwear. Just buy the cloth and make . . . make them like they did.

RR: Yes. Your outer coats, were they bought or were they homemade? [silence] Can't remember that?

HR: I think we wore bought coats.

RR: Where would there have been a store that you could, where you could buy a coat?

HR: Plainview. Twenty-five miles . . .

RR: Twenty-five miles . . .

HR: . . . across the mountain.

RR: . . . by wagon.

HR: By wagon.

RR: By horse-drawn or mules?

HR: Mules.

RR: Mules. That was a long trip, wasn't it?

HR: Yes. We'd stay overnight.

RR: Oh.

HR: Haul our cotton over there and stay all night.

RR: How long did it take to drive over there in a wagon?

HR: Big percent of the day.

RR: So you'd stay all night at the wagon yard, or . . . ?

HR: Yes, at the . . . ah, I wish the name of that guy would come to me . . . the guy that run a livery barn.

RR: Livery barn, yes. So there'd be a lot of wagons, I guess, people would . . .

HR: Yes.

RR: You'd just sleep in the wagon?

HR: I think we did. But he had room for the mules and wagons. A big yard.

RR: When you kids got a little older, I guess your entertainment changed a little bit. I've heard Dad talk about riding steers and that kind of thing.

HR: Well, now, we had a . . . [? Dad's uncle?] had a pair of steers and a log wagon, the ox yoke for the steers and haul logs to the sawmill.

RR: Oh, really?

HR: I remember that.

RR: Do you ever remember riding those steers?

HR: No. I remember them jumping the fence and getting into our corn field; [it] upset my dad.

RR: Yes. I thought I'd heard Dad tell some story about how y'all would go out to the barn lot on Sunday and ride the calves and the . . . a pretty rough sport, sometimes you'd get hurt.

HR: Yes. Yes. Especially when Dad and Mother would go someplace, we'd ride the calves and the . . . we'd get bucked off a lot of times, but . . . got hurt but we didn't want the folks to know it.

RR: Yes. Tell me about the time that you and my dad and some of the Swaim boys got a hold of some of Uncle Jackson's whiskey and Grandma found out about it.

HR: Yes. And my mother and two other ladies found Uncle Jackson's still and they tore it to pieces, burned it up.

RR: Really?

HR: Yes.

RR: Did they chop it up with a . . .

HR: . . . chopping axe and a sledgehammer.

RR: Hmm. Did that put him out of business or did he . . .

HR: No.

RR: [Laughter] He built back. . . .

HR: . . . He stayed in business. Easier than minding the farm.

RR: Yes. [Laughter] Where did you go to school?

HR: Aly. A mile and a quarter.

RR: And walked, I guess.

HR: Walked.

RR: How many grades did they teach there?

HR: Up to the eighth grade. That's as far as I got in school.

RR: Okay. Well, I've heard my dad say the same thing, that . . . he went through eight grades there.

HR: Yes.

RR: Remember who . . . any of the teachers were?

HR: Clayton Montgomery.

RR: C-L-A-Y-T-O-N, Clayton?

HR: I think so.

RR: Okay. Why do you remember him?

HR: He chewed tobacco.

[Laughter]

RR: Okay. Well, when you got even older and started dating the girls, how did you manage that? Did you date girls here in the community or go beyond?

HR: Both. I had a horse and saddle, I remember, I bought . . . paid \$52 for a saddle and had a horse. That's the way we'd go see our girlfriends, horseback.

RR: Yes.

HR: And the ones around here, Chula and Onyx and Sweet Home, down Irong Creek.

RR: Tell me about that dance that you all went to, uh, I guess, it was you and Uncle Odell, where you got into it with some of the local boys.

HR: We'd taken some homebrew with us on horseback. Taken some homebrew with us. Got over there and got to dancing with these big old baseball players' lady friends. They took us out and they . . . Odell walked out the door . . . one on one side and one on the other, and they both hit him at the same time, and down he went. And I hit one of them with a left and was going to lead with the right and he went down - with the left. Piled on him, grabbed him by the ears and . . . I grabbed him around the neck and somebody pulled me off. He went limp. I just grabbed his ear with my teeth and tore a big . . . half his ear off.

RR: Is that right? Spit it out.

HR: Spit it out.

RR: So, they were pulling on you from the other end. And . . . did he have a hold of you or you had a hold of him?

HR: I had a hold of him around his neck. He went limp and I just turned him loose. I was afraid of killing him. I took his ear with me, a big part of it.

RR: Oh, boy. Did they . . .

HR: . . . And I got a broken nose out of it and two black eyes. . . .

RR: Boy

HR: . . . never had a fight like that before.

RR: Must have been a pretty fierce fight.

HR: Yes. And I [recall?] another fight, too. We rode the mules, horses, down to Onyx Church and then went to swim in the afternoon. There was a kid there that was, kind of, the toughest down there, and, I suppose, we were the toughest at Aly. And they got us in a fight, and he could outdo me with his fists. And I . . . I was

good at wrestling, so I went to wrestling, and I got him down and had him around the neck. He passed out, and one of the grown Nichols boys - big boys - made me turn him loose. I wouldn't do it until my brother said he'd see to it that he wouldn't get back on me.

RR: Yes. Well, another pretty tough . . . Tell me how did . . . You've lived most of your adult life, most of your life, in Byers, Colorado. Tell me how it came about that you decided to go out there.

HR: Oh, it was during the Depression. And I had been down in Port Arthur, Texas [in] '28 and '29 and [had] come back to Arkansas. And a couple of friends that I grew up with told me about being in Colorado. And I went to Colorado and got a good job on a ranch there, 1930 and '31. Board and Room and thirty dollars a month.

RR: Hmm. Which ranch was that?

HR: The Burton Ranch.

RR: Burton, B-U-R-T-O-N.

HR: B-U-R-T-O-N, yes. And worked there till 1933 and went to barber college in Denver. And come back out to Byers and worked as apprentice for a couple of years and then I bought the barber out and barbered there for close to fifty years.

RR: Yes.

HR: And raised two girls [I] sent to college.

RR: Tell me about the lady you married.

HR: Yes. I always wanted to dance and my folks, good Baptists, . . . so I had to go try . . . try and dance and couldn't do her - go take another drink of bootleg whiskey and go back and try again and one night I [was] dancing with this red-headed

Bohemian girl . . .

RR: Bohemian, yes. . . .

HR: And I got the rhythm. I went back to the bunch of boys there, and [they said,]
“Hey, kid, you done all right!” [I] said, “I’m going to marry that gal,” and I did.

RR: [Laughter]

HR: I’ve been dancing . . . ever since. I am ninety years old, and I go dancing twice a
week now at [Aurora?] Senior Citizens . . . Mondays and Fridays - best dancer in
eastern Colorado and ninety years old and really enjoying it.

RR: Yes, good.

HR: Not on any medication of any kind.

RR: Good. Who do you dance with at Aurora?

HR: . . . I dance . . . partner. [?]

RR: You’ve got a steady partner there?

HR: Yes. Stella Koepke

RR: Stella . . .

HR: Stella Koepke.

RR: How do you spell . . . Koepke?

HR: Epl . . . you could probably . . .

RR: Kepley?

HR: Yes.

RR: Okay. K-E-P-L-E-Y

HR: Yes.

RR: Any kin to old Bill Kepley who was a cowboy on the Burton Ranch?

HR: He was Kepple.

RR: Oh, Kepple.

HR: She's Koepke.

RR: Okay, Stella Koepke. Okay. When did Aunt Ethel die? What year? It's been a good while.

HR: Thirteen years ago.

RR: Thirteen years ago. And her maiden name was Ethel, what?

HR: Cockerill.

RR: C-O-C-K . . .

HR: R-E-L.

RR: R-E-L-L. Okay. And you say she was out of Bo . . . she was a Bohemian.

HR: Bohemian.

RR: Was there a pretty good sized Bohemian settlement around Byers?

HR: About 30 miles southwest. Anyway about 30, maybe 30 miles from Byers. Quite a Bohemian settlement. Yes.

RR: So here we had a Scotch-Irish kid from Arkansas teaming up with a Bohemian gal from Colorado . . .

HR: . . . and that's the first time I ever got rhythm, the dance. Yes.

RR: And she was a good dancer.

HR: She was a good dancer, and . . . her and I knew Koepke and her husband before either one of us was married.

RR: Hmm. You're talking about Stella now?

HR: Yes.

RR: Yes. And, Aunt Ethel, was she . . .

HR: They knew each other.

RR: Oh, yes. Yes.

HR: . . .before we were married.

RR: Well, you come back to Arkansas pretty regularly to visit relatives.

HR: Yes, every year.

RR: Yes. And hunting deer . . .

HR: Yes.

RR: Well, I guess you didn't hunt this year.

HR: No.

RR: How many years did you and your brothers . . . how long have you been meeting here at Aly to deer hunt?

HR: Thirty . . . right here on this place, thirty-seven years.

RR: Thirty-seven years. . . . Were there other Arkansas people that you knew who ended up in Colorado the same time you went out there?

HR: Yes, quite a few.

RR: Can you name some of them? . . . I believe my dad and mother were among them for a little while.

HR: Pittses.

RR: The Pitts, would that be Thurman Pitts?

HR: No. Herbert Pitts and Nelson Pitts . . .

RR: Herbert and Nelson . . .

HR: . . . and their families. And . . .

RR: Any Merediths?

HR: Merediths.

RR: Yes.

HR: Yes.

RR: What was it . . . you say this was during the Depression, and things were pretty tough around here, I guess, around Arkansas. Were times any better in Colorado during that time?

HR: Well, it was for me, yes.

RR: Yes. Was it just easier to find work out there?

HR: Yes.

RR: I wonder why that is. . . or was.

HR: I don't know, but there were lots of Arkansas people who went there.

RR: Just look at that country now and look at this country now, and we're talking about eastern Colorado and western Arkansas, one of them looks about as prosperous as the other, . . .

HR: Yes.

RR: . . . but back then I guess it was different.

HR: Yes. And it was [loads?] of them that were on homestead places in the thirties and sold out, and it's all big farming now - wheat, sunflowers, millet, maize . . .

RR: Yes.

HR: . . . pinto beans, cattle.

RR: Yes. Meanwhile, what's happened to the land in Yell County that you grew up with?

HR: Well, . . . I think most of it has been bought up by lumber companies and . . .

RR: Where we're sitting right now, I can see young pine trees about four or five feet tall. Is this land owned by one of the lumber companies, or is this private . . . ?

HR: No, this is private property.

RR: This is McCormick land.

HR: Yes.

RR: Well, the Reed Place, up there where you grew up, who owns that now?

HR: I don't know. There's houses on the place, but I don't know who owns it.

RR: Did Cecil Blaylock own that at one time?

HR: No, Jackson Reed.

RR: Jackson owned it? You mean before your dad did, or after?

HR: At the same time.

RR: Oh, at the same time?

HR: Yes. They both . . . Grandpa Reed owned land . . .

RR: Mitchell, you're talking about . . .

HR: Mitchell. We joined him, and Jackson owned land that joined it. And Cecil Blaylock has most of it now.

RR: Yes. But, let me be clear on this, the land - that thirty-eight acres that you grew up on - are you saying that it was owned jointly by your dad and his brother Jackson?

HR: No. It was Grandpa Mitch. We joined Grandpa Mitchell Reed.

RR: Okay. But the thirty-eight acres were owned by whom?

HR: By my dad.

RR: By your dad, Jim.

HR: Yes.

RR: And then Mitchell was adjoining that, and Jackson had land in the same area.

HR: Yes.

RR: I guess they named Reed Creek because so many Reeds lived right along the bank of it.

HR: Yes. Yes.

RR: Uncle Jackson, I gather he was the prosperous member of the family. . . .

HR: Yes. He lost his wife . . . [whispers]

RR: I'll turn it off if you want . . .

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

RR: Just a little bit more about how things were in Yell County in 1928 that caused you to leave. You mentioned times were pretty hard and you went down to Port Arthur.

HR: Yes.

RR: Tell me why you thought it was bad times here.

HR: Well, it was . . . it was time for me to get out of the nest. It was a big family, and Uncle Joe Barrows and his wife came visiting and I went back home with them and got a job at the shipping port in Port Arthur.

RR: At the shipping port.

HR: Yes. And was . . .

RR: So you just lived down there . . .

HR: I thought I'd told you . . .

RR: You mentioned being down there before you came home . . .

HR: Yes.

RR: But if you had stayed around here, what would there have been for you to do?

HR: Well, I just couldn't see a future here at that time.

RR: Was that because . . .

HR: The Depression.

RR: Yes.

HR: I just couldn't see a future.

RR: What if you had bought some land and farmed?

HR: If I'd have done that and made livestock, I could've made a go of it. I can see, nowadays, I could've.

RR: How hard would it have been for you to buy some land?

HR: You just had to borrow money for it, of course.

RR: Yes. You didn't have any money.

HR: No.

RR: And a young man, you were about twenty, I guess.

HR: Yes. I did have some - [Laughter] - I had an old jersey cow, and she'd have, oh, calves all the time, and I left that all with the folks. When I left, I left that with my folks and my horse and saddle and what little I had.

RR: How did you get to Colorado?

HR: Borrowed money and rode the train out there.

RR: Rode the train?

HR: Yes.

RR: You didn't "ride the rails," as they say, then, did you?

HR: That time I didn't.

RR: Did you ever do that?

HR: Oh, yes. When I was going back and forth. Rode the rails and hitchhiked.

RR: Tell me about riding the rails. How did . . . that work? How did you do that?

HR: Well, you just catch a freight train.

RR: You mean just stand around the railroad yard and get in one of the empties, is that the way it is done?

HR: Yes. Just like hundreds of others doing the same thing.

RR: Where would you go to get the train?

HR: At Ola, Arkansas.

RR: At Ola, yes. You say there were lots more doing the same thing?

HR: Yes.

RR: Did you ever get thrown off a train?

HR: Yes.

RR: Tell me about it.

HR: Well, El Reno [?]. I think it was the army . . .

RR: El Reno, Oklahoma?

HR: Yes. . . . the army deal there and they let us ride out of there three mornings straight. Old [Denver Bob?] wouldn't let us on. . . .

RR: [Denver Bob?]

HR: [Denver Bob?] was a cop there and so we finally had to walk out of there. I do

remember one hobo [called each other?] - old Bob was waving his pistol around and he said, "Sir, be careful of that damned thing. It's liable to go off and shoot somebody."

[Laughter]

RR: His name was [Dender?], huh?

HR: Denver.

RR: Oh, Denver. Denver Bob.

HR: Denver Bob, some railroad talk there. And I caught the train again. Why, there's that one time, there's seven families on there. Men and wife with their children. And it got . . . we had . . . I had a loaf of bread under my shirt, and a number of others, and we'd give the kids a slice of bread. But we never would give the folks any, just the kids.

RR: Hmm. Yes. You say there were seven families. Do you mean one family with seven people?

HR: Seven different families.

RR: Seven different families.

HR: Yes.

RR: Boy.

HR: Riding the freight train, going to Denver.

RR: Hmm. Yes. How did you . . .

HR: . . . it's out of Pueblo to Denver.

RR: I guess you had a little money to buy food?

HR: Just a few now and then.

RR: Did you go hungry some?

HR: Yes, sure did. We'd sleep where we could.

RR: Yes. Pretty tough times, huh?

HR: Yes.

RR: How do you feel about that, looking back on it?

HR: I hope I never see it again.

RR: Yes. Well, you've had a good life.

HR: I've had a good life.

RR: You've got two fine daughters, Karen and Kristine.

HR: And . . .

RR: How many grandkids?

HR: Three boys. Four great grandkids, one boy and three girls.

RR: Yes. Your wife, Ethel, was a teacher.

HR: Yes.

RR: How many years, do you remember?

HR: Thirty-some years.

RR: Your daughter Karen is also a teacher.

HR: Thirty-seven years.

RR: . . . teaching in the same school, right?

HR: Yes.

RR: And Kristine has worked in Denver and now Tucson.

HR: Yes. For a number of places. Now she is in Tucson.

RR: Wasn't she in the appraisal business?

HR: Yes.

RR: Real estate?

HR: Worked for Xerox Corporation . . .

RR: Xerox.

HR: . . . for a number of years.

RR: Yes. Yes.

HR: and . . .

RR: Can you think of anything else that comes to mind that ought to be told about your life and the people you've known?

HR: Well . . . I enjoyed barbering for fifty years.

RR: Let me ask a personal question, how did you get along with my dad, your older brother?

HR: Perfect. If that could be believed. I had six brothers and never had a fight with one of them. Four sisters; never had a fight with one of them. We loved each other and got along good.

RR: How'd you take it when Dad got married?

HR: Pretty hard. [Laughs] We were so close.

RR: Yes.

HR: But I learned in a short time to love her . . . Ella, his wife.

RR: Yes.

HR: It was a big family, and we all got along good.

RR: Well, let's just end it there, what do you say?

HR: Yes.

[End of Interview]