

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project  
 John Lee Mitchael Interview Abstract  
 July 11, 2018

Interviewee	John Lee Mitchael
Year of birth	1933
Place of birth	Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas
Interviewer	Connie Fetters
Interview date	2018-07-11
Interview location	Kindley House; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas
Keywords	<p>Mitchael, John Lee          Mitchael, Ruth          Hutchinson, William Asa          Fetters, Connie          Benton County Water District; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Boeing; Wichita, Sedgwick County, Kansas          Gravette Historical Museum; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Hillcrest Cemetery; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Pet Milk Company; Benton County, Arkansas          Kindley House; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Beaty, Benton County, Arkansas          Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Bushwackers          Cemeteries          Charcoal kilns          Depressions, economic          Education          Farming          Holidays          McAllisters Grocery          Railroads          Recreation          Schools          Shelling plants          Shiverrees          Small town living          Sorghum          Volunteerism</p>
Description	<p>John Lee Mitchael's personal and family stories describe living in Northwest Arkansas long, and not so long, ago. Hear about living in the Georgia Flats, Beaty, and Gravette. Experience farm life in the 1930s, a 40-year career with Boeing, and Mitchael's contributions to the growth and culture of today's Gravette.</p> <p>Mitchael's family has farmed in the Gravette area for generations. His grandparents' farm included everything they needed: acreage, house, cellar, well, animals, barn, chicken</p>

	<p>houses, and blacksmith shop. Mitchael tells of mules helping process the sorghum cane into molasses, family members making shingles, the blacksmith shop with horseshoes and bullets, and the cellar cooled in summer with water to keep the cream and milk from spoiling.</p> <p>Mitchael, born during the Depression (1933), spent his early childhood in the Georgia Flats area west of Gravette. In 1939, Mitchael's father moved the family to the Beaty area when he bought the local store. Beaty at that time had a school, businesses, surrounding farms, and the railroad. At one time Beaty's charcoal kilns made gun powder. But times would change: 1940 saw the last run of a train; 1948 the school closed; 1958 the store closed.</p> <p>One room schools were not unusual when Mitchael began first grade in 1939; most towns had their own. He remembers the desks, blackboard, stove, pump, and outhouse. His school even had a merry-go-round. Kids swam in the Honey Creek; neighbors looked out for all the kids.</p> <p>Mitchael shared stories of adults playing cards at each other's homes, pie suppers at the school, Christmas plays that ended with candy and oranges, and several shiverrees. One summer Pet Milk sponsored a free movie. By the time Mitchael went to high school the schools were consolidated. The family moved to the Gravette area so he could attend high school for free. He describes Gravette in those days as a busy place. McAllisters Grocery, he calls it 'the Walmart of its day', had everything. That included an ingenious credit system. The black walnut shelling plant employed locals and developed a process for more efficient shelling and new uses for the shells.</p> <p>After graduating from Gravette high school in 1951, Mitchael got a job with Boeing in Wichita, Kansas. Here he furthered his education and married Ruth, Together they raised their daughter and two sons. But, in 1990s it was time to return home to the Gravette area.</p> <p>Today's Gravette has benefitted from Mitchael's return home. He worked with the Hillcrest Cemetery to get a columbarium constructed. He's spent time getting the local rural water system district running and funded. Likely most Gravette residents know him for the role he's played in the creation and growth of the Gravette Historical Museum and acquisition of the Kindley House. In the interview, Mitchael provides details of what it took to make these events happen, including the role of the Museum Commission, Gravette Mayor, Gravette city officials and residents, and the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Mitchael believes Gravette will grow as long as the economy is good and people continue to move in.</p>
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Interview sidebar	Before there were credit cards, Gravette's McAllisters Grocery had a credit system. It allowed Mitchael's, and other local families, to buy goods until they sold their crops or livestock. Mitchael tells that 'A few years ago the Governor [Asa Hutchinson who grew up on a farm near Gravette] came through. I had the pleasure of giving him a tour of the [Gravette Historical Museum] and I was able to show him his father's account number in the system'.