Coal Talk:
Dialogs with people from Western Maryland Coal Communities

Interview with
GEORGE BRADY
P.O. Box 428 (Shallmar)
Kitzmiller, MD 21538

on June 8, 1991

Interviewed by
Gail Herman
Route 2, Lodge Circle
Swanton, Maryland 21561

Transcribed by
Theresa M. Helbig
Route 3, Box 6270
Oakland, Maryland 21550

Oral History Workshop
Sponsored by Garrett Recreation, Parks, and Tourism
with partial funding from Garrett County Development Corporation and
Maryland Humanities Council with a grant from the
National Endowment for the Humanities
George Brady, Interview, June 1992

Introduction and background details

GAIL HERMAN: This is Gail Herman, and I'm in the home of Mr. George Brady and his wife, Jackie. Jackie is going to leave to go work at the school, she said, but she is sitting here with us now and maybe she'll chime in. It's June 8, 1992. We're having strawberry shortcake and good conversation. It's very good. George, you were talking about your Mother and what she did in the mornings, can you describe what a typical day might have been in your home in Kitzmiller or Shallmar that you used to live in?

GEORGE BRADY: We lived in Shallmar. Well, there was eleven of us at the house. We had Mother's Mother and my Father's Father and my aunt, and usually an uncle or two, and usually a border or two. There were four of us children in our family, plus a cousin was raised with us. I know my Mother baked bread twice a week, fourteen loaves. She did the wash, and we had no electrically part of the time. Most of the washing was done by hand. We did get a gasoline driven motor for the washing machine, which didn't work very well. She'd wash clothes part of the day, and we'd work on the motor for a week. It was a kick start. You'd just throw your leg out. You couldn't wash the carpets, and she had all sorts of throw rugs all over the house. We'd use what you called a "dolly". You'd put the water in a number 3 washtub and then this dolly was a wooden device with legs on it you put in there and thrashed the carpets around to clean them. You had to ring them out. Those ladies, the ones that kept house well worked like animals. It was from 5:00 in the morning until you fell in bed at night just to keep the house up and cook meals. We had four meals a day. Some of our neighbors said they never saw people that ate like we did. We didn't have big meals. My Dad said that we never missed any meals but it was a damn long time between some of them though.

GAIL: Why were there four meals? You said you had four.

GEORGE: We always had breakfast and then lunch, and particularly when the men were working in the mines, we always had a meal in the evening. Then when they'd come home about 4 or 4:30, at our house, they were right on the dot, ready every day. Then we always ate before we went to bed at night.

GAIL: What were some of the typical things that you remember eating?

GEORGE: As I got older, I realized why we ate or had some of the meals we had. We had a lot of beans and potatoes and meat. We raised a lot. Everybody had a garden. You worked a garden as if you were going to work. We canned beans and stuff in half gallon jars. We'd can 100 half gallon jars of green beans. We raised a lot of Kentucky Wonder whole beans. We'd raise our own tomatoes and potatoes. We'd can a lot of berries. I used to get so upset, we'd have to go way over the mountain to pick berries, blackberries when they were ripe real early, just at day light and the fields would be wet and the dew would cover you to your waist. We'd dry off. We made jelly. We raised a lot of strawberries.

We ate bread pudding. Had a lot of bread pudding. We had tomatoes and bread. I realize now why they did that. They made the homemade bread, some got stale and was left over. That was the cheap thing, you had your own canned tomatoes and you'd mix the bread in with it, and butter, and you made bread pudding which was out of the stale bread. Everybody made homemade bread pudding. My Dad told me one time that when he was a boy, his Dad was working away, and he told them when he'd be gone for the week if they were good for their Mom, he would bring them something special back. He would bring them a sack of white flour, and they got white flour to make nice white bread instead of the old dark bread that everybody likes to eat today because it's good for you. My one brother still won't eat green beans because we lived on them. We had green beans every meal. He still doesn't like green beans.

GAIL: That's interesting. So you remember a lot about the food. That's very helpful to us.

GEORGE: We had steak when we could afford it. One of the things was steak on Sunday morning for breakfast. You know, that's when usually the one meal when the whole family was together because if they worked, they had to go to work real early, and that was common with us to have steak and gravy for breakfast on Sunday morning. They usually tried to have a beef roast on Sunday evening or afternoon meal. Our house was known for all kinds of company. Everyone came to our house and the first thing when you came in was you had to have something for everyone to eat. And the relatives from all over the country, why I can remember as many as 50 people at our house for dinner on Sunday.

GAIL: Regularly?

GEORGE: Not regularly, but there was usually a crowd. They knew there was going to be a good meal, so they always came at mealtime. Dad and I, when you were a kid, you didn't realize you were happy and you didn't realize how tough apparently it was. I know that my Mother would hang paper and wash clothes. She'd hang paper at 50 cents a roll, and we'd have to help her. She had her special board that she would take with her on the ladder to hang the papers. People that ran the mines that lived next to us, they were nice people and really helped us out. She washed clothes for them. They would bring a basket of clothes every Sunday evening for her to wash. It really didn't amount to much, because she had so many others so when you put that in, it didn't make much more anyway. And ironing, she ironed everything. She ironed every piece of clothing. She never let me go without being ironed first. She starched them and ironed them and everything. Your handkerchiefs and everything.

GAIL: What kind of iron did she use?

GEORGE: When we didn't have electricity, she used one that you heat on the stove with the handle. You
would heat one while you used another. We didn't have electricity to use electric irons. We didn't have electricity until 1951. They used the old flat irons. We have some here some place, back in the cellar. You know what I'm talking about.

GAIL: They use them for doorstops.

JACKIE: They're so odd. This was just the iron part, and you had a thing that would flip down over it. You could flip it over and put your iron on the stove and heat it.

GAIL: That might be helpful to have.

GEORGE: I don't know if we have a handle or not. I know we have several irons, but the handles were wood and had a little catch on them. You snapped them down over the iron so you could use it.

GAIL: Well, if you don't, maybe Mr. Brown has a handle. I remember somebody does in Lonaconing. That's good to remember is the ironing of every scrap.

GEORGE: Shallmar was kind of noted for its being a clean mining town. A lot of little mining towns; people didn't keep things up very well, they were kind of dirty. But Shallmar, except for a couple families when I was a kid, had a good reputation for being that way. It was a neat town, in fact, I was told that when the mines first started and were first built, you had to have a reference to get a house out on the front street. They just didn't let anybody move in. It was beautiful. It really was. They kept it up. The company had people that all they did was that. They trimmed the hedges and whitewashed the trees and kept things cut. From the railroad over to where the company store was, which you seen, there was a wall there and a lawn that went down to the River and it had Shallmar written, put in stone and they kept those whitewashed and the name of the town was against that bank. You could see it.

GAIL: What year was this?

GEORGE: It was back in, after the First World War, in 1918 and up through the 30's. After the 30's, it started to deteriorate. In the 40s, they let things go when they weren't working and the mines shut down when they didn't have coal. The Union, that's another whole story about the Union. Has anybody talked to you much about the Union?

Wolf Den Coal Company

GAIL: No, we haven't done that at all. I'd like to in just a minute. I'd like to just go back and talk about. You mentioned something about roses, when I took the picture of some of the houses up there. You mentioned that this use to have hedges and there were roses?

GEORGE: There were hedges through the whole length of town that they kept trimmed, and I can remember as they would trim them over to where the entrance to the house was, they'd leave them grow up maybe three feet, the hedge would be higher at the entrance than the rest. Not in front, but on the ends of each house. They had an arbor, a thing that was, I don't know what you'd call it, it was about that wide and they sawed it and spread it out like a fan and it was sitting there and it had red rambling roses at each porch. Every house had one.

GAIL: And that was?

GEORGE: The company did that.

GAIL: What company? What was the name of the company?


GAIL: What were the years that they were in operation?

GEORGE: I honestly don't know. That album that Kenny Bray had, he said in one of those statements, that the mine was shut down and Wolf Den went out of business in 1949. That's probably about right, because they really didn't work a whole lot after World War II as the company. A couple of other people took over the mines, some of the people from Wolf Den ran the mine on a small scale after that.

GAIL: When do you think it started?

GEORGE: Probably during and right after World War I. 1918 or 1919.

GAIL: You don't think before that, they were mining there?

GEORGE: No. They mined just up the river from Shallmar, at Dodson. Up the river from that, it was Gleason. Then up the river from there, it was Hubbard.

GAIL: Now you said Dodson?

GEORGE: Yes. That's DODSON.

GAIL: That's helpful because I thought they had said before Dobson. But it's Dodson. That's right up the
road from Shallmar?

GEORGE: Yes. There is one house remaining there. It had a power house and a company store and double rows of houses. Churches. In fact, we used to go to the Methodist church in that district in Dodson. They had a big church there. It's tore down now. A little side line about that. One of my Dad's brothers had a very good friend who was from Cumberland who worked in the mines and boarded with them at Dodson years ago. He got religion and into the ministry and became a minister. He became a missionary to India and was in India for 20 or 30 years. He told us when he came back that the place they were in India was on a river. When the people on tour would come by on the boat trip, they would always go greet them to see if they were English or white people. This one time they went down and met this man and wife on a around the world cruise. They were visiting in this area of India, and they invited them to their house and they began talking. This man's name was Mr. Dodson. He said that was strange because he used to work in the mines in a town called Dodson in Maryland. Mr. Dodson said that was his family's coal company that was named after his family. He said you had to go half way across the country to meet a founder of a coal mine. The workers would never meet the people that owned the mines in those days.

GAIL: My, my what a story.

GEORGE: Mr. Barrack died a couple years ago, they lived in Cumberland. He just passed away.

GAIL: Was Dodson a Maryland address?

GEORGE: Yes.

GAIL: This is a Kitzmiller store?

GEORGE: That building is still there. There are people living in it.

GAIL: Where is it?

JACKIE: It's where McIntyre's had it at one time.

GEORGE: Vindex Company. Johnstown Coal Company had a store there. Then Schwabart's had a store there.

GAIL: So it's in Kitzmiller on Main Street.

JACKIE: On Main Street.

GAIL: Would I see it if a drove by?

JACKIE: Well, they have a Laundromat there and an arcade now. It's the last building on the right before you hit the main road.

GAIL: It would be on Main Street near the Laundromat.

GEORGE: It is a Laundromat there; people live in it.

GAIL: So, you were just going to say something, George, when we were looking at these pictures and I said let's turn the tape recorder on, and now I don't remember what it was.

GEORGE: Is it on now?

GAIL: Yes.

GEORGE: I was talking about my Dad's older sister during World War I in Dodson when all the men in the mines were gone and they needed help in the mines. They hired women to work on the picking table to pick the rock out of the coal as it came out of the mines and the tipple before they loaded it in the cars. This was kind of unheard of; no women worked in coal mines. She, they got teased a lot, with cat calls, when miners would come out of work out of the mines. They got so they had to make a big detour around the mines because it got so the women would throw rocks at them.

GAIL: What was the name of the woman that you mentioned?

GEORGE: Molly Harvey. It was Molly Brady, then Molly Parrish, then Molly Harvey. She lived at Eagle Rock. Her daughter still lives at Eagle Rock. Becky, by herself, lives up on the old place.

GAIL: Her daughter still lives there? Would she know any stories?

GEORGE: About her Mom, she may very well. Becky, you'd have to call to find out if she would, but she might. I'm sure she would remember something. Of course, I think Aunt Molly delivered one of her own children up there. She was a midwife and delivered lots of babies around. They used to come around for information when a baby was born since there was no birth certificate and they needed Social Security numbers. I think Dad told me that she delivered one of her own children.
GAIL: You talked a little bit about the home. Can we put this in terms of dates now when you were describing your home in town? What were the dates that you remember? You were born in?

GEORGE: I was born in 1930, and what we were discussing was probably between 1930 and 1940s.

GAIL: Where did the name Marshall come in and Shallmar? Wolf Den Coal Company, but did Mr. Marshall own it?

GEORGE: Mr. W.A. Marshall started the mines, and he was from New York. That was where his business was from. Then the man that you saw when we were looking at the articles in the paper that Marshall reopened, you know, he was a nephew of Mr. W.A. Marshall who started the mine and for whom Shallmar was named for. They just switched the syllables in the name. I don't remember the other Howard Marshall. In fact, he lived next door to us in Shallmar. I was a kid then. That was the first house in Shallmar we lived in; they were in the next house. That was the superintendent's house.

Elijah Spiker

GAIL: You wanted to chat a little. Let's talk first about what you would do in the mines? What was your job?

GEORGE: When I worked, I really didn't work a lot in the mines. Now all of my people did. My Dad's family and my Mother's family all worked in the mines. In fact, my Grandfather Spiker was killed in the Shallmar Mines.

GAIL: Could you tell us about that?

GEORGE: I was not very old, but I remember it very well. He was working in an area where there was to be two people working at all times, and his buddy didn't come to work that day so they allowed him, he said I'll just go ahead and work it on my own. He didn't come home that evening for supper and everyone was worried. Like I said, the Superintendent lived right next door to us. My Grandfather lived in the first house as you go into Shallmar. We lived next to where Mr. Bray lived, where Kenny Bray's house was. They came up and ask my Dad about him not coming home from work. He went right down and asked the Superintendent. They went back to the mines, and my Dad started up over the hill to the mines, and the Superintendent had already gone in and found that a rock had fallen on him and crushed him to death. The thing that I can remember and always will remember is my aunt lived there, my Mother, and my Grandmother were all there screaming. I remember them all crying when they were told of the accident and that he'd been killed.

That was a memory that I have too of the mining working days. They didn't have rescue squads and things like that. All they had was the man with a hearse. Whenever anybody was hurt bad, you'd see the hearse going up through town and up to the mines. Everybody always really was hysterical until they found out who had been hurt. Usually when they came in, somebody had been killed by a rock slide or something. It was really sad. I remember my Mother, she'd almost go crazy when she saw a hearse go up through town. It was really sad.

GAIL: What was his name?

GEORGE: His name was Elijah. How do you spell Elijah? That's a Bible name.

GAIL: Elijah what?

GEORGE: Elijah Spiker. I think he was killed in 1936 or 1937. Social Security had just started, and he had contributed like a dollar and something to it and they refunded my Grandmother what he had contributed to Social Security. She didn't get any Social Security from him. Never. That was something else too. There was workmen's comp., and she got workmen's comp for so many years. Then, the rest of her life, she had no income at all. She stayed with us and did a little crocheting and knitting and housework for people. It was kind of sad. She got nothing.

GAIL: What year was this you said?

GEORGE: I think it was 1936 that he was killed.

GAIL: And, she just missed out?

GEORGE: Just missed it, yes. She said they had refunded the $1 or 2.50 Social Security that they had deducted from him in taxes. Mr. Bray was telling me one time that when they passed that law, he worked in the mines. In Elk Garden at the mines he worked at, the man that ran the mines just ranted and raved about it being the ruination of the country and they wouldn't pay in to something like that. It was just ridiculous forcing people to pay that in. Kenny said he was the first person in this whole area to receive a check from Social Security. He became disabled and he got a disability check. The first one in the country to receive one and he had raised so much Cain about it when it first started.

GAIL: Mr. Bray told you this?

JACKIE: He wasn't the one to raise the Cain.
GEORGE: Yes, the boss was the first one to complain but also the first to draw on it.

Other mining accidents
GAIL: That's amazing. Were there any other accidents or things that you remember and want to share?

GEORGE: There were several accidents at Shallmar. My Dad had several close calls when I was a kid. I remember him coming home and remember the hardhat we saw at Mr. Bray's. He had a hat, we had that for years and years and his carbide light. He came so close to getting killed one time by a rock fell and pinched his head that it squeezed his head right out of his hardhat and mashed his carbide light as flat as your hand. I mean he brought it home and it was as flat as your hand, by a big rock. Jackie's Dad, not at Shallmar, was working in the mines and was covered up one time. He was crushed a couple times and his ribs all broken up. I don't think he ever stopped working, did he?

JACKIE: No. His knee impression was right in here. He said he could just feel it when it went out. But whenever they was running in he was just thinking "Don't let them leave me."

GEORGE: He was running out of the place and the guys were working with him.

JACKIE: He was at the mines off of Route 38, and I don't remember the year.

GEORGE: I was there when his accident happened when her Dad was hurt.

GAIL: You were?

GEORGE: Yes. We were both working on the outside of the mines at the tipple. He said there was no point in both of us standing out here and said he would go in and help the guy on the cutting machine. They called it scraping on the cutting machine. As the machine drilled under the coal it drilled out fine cuttings and someone would be there with a shovel kind of keeping it shoveled back. That's what he was doing, and a big rock fell on him. He was on his hands and knees. It crushed him right down. It was so heavy that it crushed the breath out of him, and he couldn't breathe back in. Before he became unconscious, he could hear the footsteps of the guy running the machine, or his footsteps running out of the place, and he kept thinking please don't leave me, come get this rock off of me 'cause I'm not dead. They came back and got him out from under it. He wasn't breathing. They did, in those days, not like artificial respiration, they did chest compression and got him breathing again. He had, his back was broken, and where his knee came up it broke his ribs and ankle or leg. We took him to the hospital, and Dr. Alvarez was the surgeon. He told Dr. Alvarez what kind of cast he wanted on it so he could be able to walk. I remember Dr. Alvarez saying Mr. Burrell, you maybe not have to worry about a cast you may not be able to walk again. Before we came home that night, he was in his bed doing exercises. He got healed up and came back to work in the mines loading coal. The toughest man I've ever known in my life. No one can believe how hard these guys worked. I seen him shovel coal under the rock low like this, this high and double shovel it and double shovel it to get it to that trailer down there. Just so he could get it to where he could load it in the car. Unbelievable. I can't express how they worked. I've seen him sit here at the table in this room, and be eating, and just go to sleep. Or stand up and go to sleep. Physically, no one could comprehend how those people worked.

JACKIE: This was the last mine to come east in the area. Wasn't it?

GEORGE: Uh huh. This was the mine I worked at.

GAIL: Could you describe the location of the mine?

GEORGE: We had two mines. He had one that a…

GAIL: First, his name.

JACKIE: Fitzhugh Burrell

GAIL: You were describing the location.

GEORGE: This mine that he was injured in, and the one that I worked at, was off Route 38. The further mine they had was down the river from Kitzmiller. What they called Pee Wee. They had no electricity there. Everything they did was by hand or had gasoline motors. In fact, right before he took this mine over and operating it, there were five men killed there. They had a gasoline motor operating the fan that caught on fire one night. It blew bad air back in and the carbon monoxide killed five. A few fellows here from town. Then they took over and did some work on it. They dug a ditch through solid rock 400 or 600 feet by hand up to drain the water out and operated it that way for several years.

George in the mines
When I first started working there, I was going to college. One year, I worked outside. They were hauling the coal so far inside and drove an opening out to the outside way out around the hill from where the tipple was. We laid, put a tram road they called it, put track and hauled the coal out. The first summer I worked on that and helped them put that in. The next summer, I built mining cars by hand. And there was no electricity. I think there were160 some holes you had to drill by hand through those oak board on every mining car. It was crazy. After I got out of school, I worked about three years in the mines. I worked on the
outside and helped sell the coal. I then went inside and helped drive the ponies to help drag the coal outside.

GAIL: How old were you when you first started in the mines?

GEORGE: I was out of the service. I had been in the Army. I was in my late 20's. See, I didn't work in the mines at first. It was just after I got out of school. I went to college on a GI bill after I got out. Two summers when I got out of the Army in the Korean War, I worked at the mines and then again after I graduated for about three years. In the 50's and 60's.

GAIL: You had quite a variety of experiences working in the mines. With the ponies, and loading the coal.

GEORGE: I didn't really load the coal; I worked in more like day work. I worked on the tipple screening the coal. I sold coal and took care of the money bringing it back and forth. A lot of coal was sold and loaded out onto trucks. I hauled coal too, I had a couple trucks. When they would screen the coal and get the dust out of it, which you couldn't sell, they had an order that went to the State where they would use it at some of the state institutions. I would haul it out to the railroad and dump it in the cars and also on the weekends after I got through working.

GAIL: Now, you said you worked in your father-in-law's mine? Which of these two, or both of them?

GEORGE: I worked at both mines. An interesting thing about the mine down river from Kitzmiller, near Pee Wee, one of the old guys that worked on the tipple there for years and years, when he decided to close that mine and start a new opening here on Route 38, this fellow and one of his nephew's and a friend of his they decided they were going to try to get some coal out that they had left. There was not much, but it would give the three of them some work. They were killed. They were trying to start the opening and it rained and was muddy and the whole bank slid in on them.

At that time, I was on the fire department. We worked at the mines up on the hill. With Jackie's Dad being the worker he was, he would say we only work a half day on Saturdays. We would go up and do some things and it always turned out you work the whole day and didn't have much to eat. I had just gotten home from the mines, and the fire whistle blew. I hurried and went down to the fire hall, and a young boy was there and it was raining causing the fire alarm to go off and said that his Dad and somebody was hurt at the mine. Of course, I knew what it was. I jumped in the car and went out to the mine. The one boy was right near the outside, and the one boy had not made it. He almost made it outside but he was there with his head and chest was exposed, but the big timbers had hit him across the back and he was dead. You couldn't even see the other two. By that time, a lot of people had gotten there and rescue teams. They worked there for several hours getting the rock off of them. It was really dangerous because of the big high wall and stuff was dribbling down all the time on the outside. Maybe I shouldn't be talking like this about the people, but I knew this old man real well. I had worked with him, played ball with the other fellow that was under the rock. When they finally got them and got the rock off of them, you kind of, oh I don't know, like when someone dies and you don't believe they are dead. These people, when the last rock was taken off them where you know they had been crushed and the air crushed out of them and the air rushed back into their lungs if they took a breath and I thought they're not dead. How could they be not dead? But they were dead you know. There had been 50 ton of rock on them.

To continue on with this day, a real interesting day, I got back and didn't feel much like eating that night. Jackie has a sister that lives in Washington and she and her husband came to visit us that night. We sat and talked until twelve, one o'clock in the morning because they didn't get up to visit very often. We had just got in bed and to sleep when someone knocked at our door. It was the neighbor. The neighbor says George could you take a certain person to the hospital. And I said Art, I haven't had much sleep and I'm tired and I haven't had any coffee, could I drink a cup of coffee first? He said yes, just come out to the house when you get ready and since I was working in the mines I had a little Rambler station wagon with plastic seat covers on it that were very cold. It had snowed that night and I had already taken my winter treads off because it was late in April. Jackie made coffee, and I went out to this house that's torn down now. I went in the back door, and I could hear someone in there arguing, a man and a woman. The woman was saying you go, and he said no you go and she said no you go and I'll stay here with the kids. I finally went in and here come the girl I had to take to the hospital, come out of the next room. Then I knew why I had to take her to the hospital because she looked like she was ready to have a baby. We got her in my car, and she had the baby in the back seat of my car before I got to the hospital. Jackie had told me to take a blanket or something with you because those plastic seats are cold. I'm glad I took a blanket for her to sit on.

GAIL: The baby was born in the back seat. Did the woman deliver the baby herself or did you help her?

GEORGE: No, I drove. The mother kept telling the daughter to shut up because she was embarrassing her. She was crying and having a problem. The baby was not injured but it could have been. The girl wouldn't lay back or sit down. It was not a very good scene. The nurse at the hospital, in the emergency room, the nurse said you just keep the motor running, and keep it warm and we'll take care of this back here and they got the baby and the girl and took them into the emergency room.

GAIL: That was quite an exciting day. You're full of exciting stories. Who were the three men who died? Do you remember their names or would you rather not say?

GEORGE: Pete Paugh, Allen Harvey, and Pete's nephew. I don't know what, there was another Paugh.
that was a nephew to this Pete. He was Sam's boy, I don't know what his name was, I cant remember his name.

GAIL: That's okay. These are....

JACKIE: You don't mind me leaving?

GAIL: Not at all, but I'm coming back to get you. We remember different things, Jackie, men and women.

GEORGE: When Jackie's Dad had the mine, he had a sister that lived next door to us. She was a real nice lady, maybe a bit eccentric. He gave her, he let her keep the books, you know, to make money. She had an old crank adding machine. She'd add up the payroll and everything. Then, she would do it by hand to make sure the dang gone machine was right. She used a roll of adding machine tape four times. She would do it on one side and turn it over and do it on the other side. Then re-roll it, and do it twice on the back. She got four uses out of one roll of adding machine tape.

GAIL: That's a savings.

GEORGE: She had a beautiful, she raised such beautiful flowers. When she'd go to the post office, she'd always take a big bouquet of flowers to someone downtown.

GAIL: This is the lady you lived next to?

GEORGE: Yes. Her people were from, this Mr. Burrell, was from North Georgia. Jackie's people were from North Georgia. They came up here before World War I. One of the older brothers married a lady from up here, then the whole family moved up here. They were born, in fact, we visited their old home place. Their home place was right on the river that "Deliverance" was filmed on and about. It's Federal or State property now. In the film, they talk about building this big dam. They never built it, but they bought up all the property. Maybe it's even National Forest. Mr. Burrell was born and raised and knew a lot of the people that were in the first "Foxfire" books. That was in their hometown. In the mountains of North Georgia, Rabun county.

GAIL: So much history here.

GEORGE: No, you don't realize it until you start remembering and talking about it.

GAIL: So the mines that Mr. Fitzhugh.

GEORGE: That was Burrell Brothers Corporation. That was the name of that company.

GAIL: Burrell Brothers?

GEORGE: Yes.

GAIL: They closed down when would you say?

GEORGE: Mr. Burrell had a heart attack and got out of the mines. Chester Evans and my brother operated it for some time after that. I don't remember what the dates were. They were the last ones to operate it. What happened, and I don't know what year this was either, I'm just not that good with dates, was when they passed, one of the bad mine explosions, in West Virginia, prompted the enactment of some real strict safety regulations. It just put thousands of operations, little mines, out of business. They, in fact, even when I was still there, they were requiring you to have certain pieces of equipment. Like I know, there was one drill that it was mandatory to carry. Which wasn't even manufactured. It had to be an explosion proof thing that they weren't even making yet. No one manufactured it. They just wrote all of these laws up and put all of these little groundhog holes out of business. I guess there were thousands of them in West Virginia, Kentucky, and all over. They were just all put out of business.

United Mine Workers

GAIL: That explains that. So you wanted to tell me a little bit about the hard times and about the unions and some of the things that might, the events, that might have happened regarding those issues?

GEORGE: My Dad joined the United Mine Workers, and told me that when he was working at Shallmar when he joined, he joined in the woods back way off the highway because they had their meetings there in secret because if the company found out they belonged to the Union, they would be fired. They were very big Union people. I remember when they would have the strikes, I guess it would have been in the 40's, it really upset me because my Dad would go with the groups when they would go out to try to picket and close the mines that were operating non-Union to stop the flow of coal. I can remember being really upset. He would argue with me, not argue, but he'd tell me I didn't know what I was talking about, you don't know what you're doing boy. I know they had a lot of violence, there were shootings, I don't know if they were involved in any shootings but there were a lot of beatings, and rock throwing and clubbing at people. I was a youngster and it bothered me very much. My Dad, whether he was doing it or not, but he would go with the groups.

It was ironic because my Dad died when he was about 60, and he had a lung operation sometimes in the 50's. Because of that lung operation, my Mother got Black Lung pension after she had applied for it. She
George Brady, Interview, June 1992

developed cancer in her spine and suffered, and she would have had tremendous hospital bills, but she had a United Mine Worker's card, and I think I remembered thinking to myself if my Dad could be looking down, he would be saying to me "Son, see, I knew what I was talking about." Otherwise, we would have been paying for this the rest of our lives. It was all paid for because she had the United Mine Worker's 'Health/Welfare Card'. It paid everything. It even bought her equipment and stuff.

There were some bad times. I remember one time over in Shallmar, they had machine guns set up over there. This kept people from coming up to the mines. It was some kind of a deal that the company was involved in, I'm not sure if the Union was involved in that or not. They were always trying to take over the mines, and they had armed people there to try and prevent it. There was one incident down here where the lady was a really good friend of my Mother's. She used to come to the house all the time.

One of the coal strikes that occurred here, there was a mine up in Kitzmiller that was stripping, and they were hauling coal. They'd come down in a convoy, you know, several trucks, and they were picketing. There was a one way bridge in Kitzmiller that crossed over into West Virginia; there was just room for one vehicle to go across. A couple fellows, who I won't name, they called down and watched to catch the trucks. Then when they finally came down, there was a big convoy of trucks all loaded with coal. Right before they got to the bridge, well, we knew they were coming, so these two guys pulled their cars different ways to try to block the bridge. They were arguing about which one of them was going to back off the bridge. They were just doing that to make the trucks stop so they couldn't get across. As soon as the trucks stopped, there were men there with boards with nails in them. As soon as the trucks stopped, they jammed these into the front and back of the trucks so they couldn't move to go forward or backward. Then the two fellows pulled their vehicles off the bridge, and then they were gone.

I was not there to witness this, but some fellows told me that one of the truck drivers pulled a shotgun and got out of the truck with it. It was a sawed off, double barrel shotgun. She just ran up to the man, opened her jacket up and threw her breast right up against the shotgun and told them if they wanted to shoot someone, shoot her. So what was the man going to do, you know? He wasn't going to shoot a woman. So he hesitated and didn't do anything. The next thing you knew, you saw this shotgun going up through the air then into the river. They drug this man out of the truck, and beat him unmercifully. Incidents like those were what occurred when they had these strikes.

GAIL: Who was the woman that ran up? You didn't want to mention her name, that's right. I had forgotten.

GEORGE: She lived at Shallmar. She was a good friend of ours. Another incident at that time, there was an old gentleman that was from Elk Garden and was elderly. He came down and picketed everyday. He had this little brown sack, and everybody thought he had his lunch in it. The day they had a big fuss, someone said they saw him take that sack and hit a guy right in the face with it. It had a big rock in it. He'd been carrying a rock in that sack all the time.

GAIL: This was in the 40's and 50's, you said.

GEORGE: Do you remember when they would strike, and the government took the mines over in World War II? They had put an American Flag up there. There was one at Shallmar. They said you weren’t going to be able to dig coal with bayonets. There were soldiers sent over.

GAIL: So the government..?

GEORGE: During World War II, the government sent over soldiers. If there was any way that you could ever get a hold of some of the speeches that were given by John L. Lewis, there were some classic speeches. He gave speeches in Congress about the striking miners that were just unbelievable. At that time, there were more miners killed that year than there were soldiers killed during war. Have you ever heard him speak? If you can imagine a bigger voice more intelligent Richard Burton, he was it. He could quote the Bible, Shakespeare, and use all of these things in it. The book that we saw at Kenny Bray's would be an interesting book for you to read. That one by Saul Alinsky of John L. Lewis’ biography.

GAIL: Would that have the speech?

GEORGE: It would have some quotes from some of his speeches, and some of the things that he quoted.

GAIL: Although many people interviewed, many of them did not say that the unions had an important part in their daily work or their lives. I haven't really found anyone, except for one other person, who was from Allegany County, who really talks about the Union as if they were a part of the daily lives and the culture.

GEORGE: A lot of the people who worked in the very small mines said they were not Union. It was just the larger mines who were Union. That's the little places when they had the strikes that the Union people would try to shut down. I have, I didn't look for that today, or know whether I could put my hands on it right now, a really good description of the Strike in the 1920's that broke the United Mine Workers in this area. Apparently, there was a reporter from Cumberland that might have been hired by the coal companies to record and keep track of all this stuff. The gentleman that gave me a copy of this thing would not let anybody have it until all the people that were mentioned in it were deceased. In fact, my mother and one of my uncles is mentioned in it. That was one of the reasons why. It has descriptions like when they marched in Kitzmiller and Elk Garden to Dodson, the Union people, they describe how many people were in the parade, how many women had babies in their arms, how many kids were there. It was a really
detailed study of it. It told about people that were moved right out of their houses. The company houses, they just moved their furniture right out in the street.

GAIL: You mean if they were part of the Union?

GEORGE: Yes, if they could accuse them of something they were doing against the company.

GAIL: What ever happened to those people that were fired and had to leave?

GEORGE: I don't know. I know that people... We never had anything much, but I guess now I realize how tough it was for parents to keep us. I had sense enough to know when I was a kid, especially in the winter time, it would be nice and warm in the house. A lot of people came to our house, my Dad was a real likeable fellow, people came to play cards and it was enjoyable. When I was a kid, I wondered if when I grew up and had a home, if it would be like that. It's not. I don't have the kind of personality to have people in like that. Maybe it's a different lifestyle and people have got too much to do, but in those days they really came and it was enjoyable.

It was tough for them, to get along. I don't really know how they did it. There was no money. I always wanted and never had a BB gun. I never had a bicycle or a cap gun. I almost got a bicycle, a used one, one time. They wanted $7 for it, and I thought we were going to get it, but they just couldn't handle it. So I didn't have one. That's bad too, because then you try to give your kids the things you didn't have.

Mining today

In those days, the big thing was you got an education so you wouldn't have to go work in the coal mine. They preached over and over to go to school so you didn't have to go to the mine. Now, it's kind of ironic, that's where the big money is. It's the truth. People work at Mettiki and make $17 to $18 an hour. Other places around here you get minimum wage.

GAIL: The tables have turned a little bit?

GEORGE: Yes, they have. There's not near as many miners, though. My son-in-law told me yesterday, he works on the long wall at Mettiki, that they worked yesterday loading 6,100 tons of coal that shift. It took seven people to work in the long wall. That's more coal than they put out in six months when I worked at the mines.

GAIL: How long did it take them to do that?

GEORGE: An eight hour shift, but actually they were not working the full eight hours. Unbelievable, isn't it? They probably load more coal than any other mine in the world. They have probably broken world records several times.

GAIL: Right here in Western Maryland, we have one of the most productive mines in the world?

GEORGE: Maybe a few places out West have a lot more coal. I don't know what they load there. But they are not deep mines like Mettiki. He told me they just ordered a new long wall machine that cost $12 million. I'm just saying what I've been told; I don't know how accurate it is.

GAIL: Well, it's certainly gone a long way, and that's what you are bringing up, is that whereas before, the men were doing it, now the machines are doing it.

GEORGE: When we interviewed the other gentleman, we were talking about sprags in the car and I think if you had a little background of the way it operated, maybe you would understand a little better. When you hand loaded, they always drove the headings then the rooms where they loaded the coal -- each individual people or buddies worked. They drove uphill because the ponies could take the empty car uphill and then when it was loaded, they would take the chuck out of the car so it could drop out. See, you could run it down hill loaded. Then haul it uphill empty. That's why they laid the mines out the way they did. The water in those days would run out, now they have to design the mines to where the water will stay inside. They don't let the water out unless it's pumped out and treated. That was the reason he was talking about the sprag and wheel chucking it and all that.

GAIL: Those are very good words to remember .The words you are using. That's very helpful that you are recalling them.

GEORGE: I had an older friend that I deer hunted with that was telling me about one time when he worked over in the mines in West Virginia. His buddy went to take the chuck out of the wheel to drop it out and got his hand caught. When they loaded the cars, they would load them up, the coal was low. They loaded the cars up with as much coal as they could so that the coal was right up against the roof. He was telling me about how he got under there and was trying to lift the car up to get his hand out. He really didn't realize what he was doing, and he could not do it, and he had to get some help from other people there. I think that they pushed it back and got it off of his hand. The point I'm trying to make is that he had strained so much that he had ruptured blood vessels. He was in the hospital for a good while. He said he went home and turned all purple. They had to cut some of the vessels and let the blood drain out of him from him straining so hard.
GEORGE: They were not mules; they were ponies. I had one that was a gentle thing: you never had to tell it anything, it just always did what you wanted it to do. When you unhooked the tail chain from the car, it knew just to automatically stay there. When you hooked the tail chain up, it knew what to do. When you pulled the car up in the rooms, the pony would pull the car up into the room. When you would unhook to break off another room, and when they lay a switch, there is a part of the switch called a frog that's a string team and I was driving with several cars out of the mine. They had laid a switch from the main line could be. His leg healed, and we put him back to work again. He got mean again. That pony was in a what happens. That was a mean pony. All the time he was injured, sick or hurt, he was as gentle as he could be. His leg healed, and we put him back to work again. He got mean again. That pony was in a string team and I was driving with several cars out of the mine. They had laid a switch from the main line to break off another room, and when they lay a switch, there is a part of the switch called a frog that's a "V" shaped thing, and the people who had done that over the weekend, they hadn't filled that in real good where that "V" was, and as we were coming down the hill, the pony got his foot caught in there, and the car of coal ran over him. It didn't kill him, but it banged him up really bad. He broke both his legs and run right up over him. It was sad. We had nothing to shoot him in there. My father-in-law came in and killed him with a hammer. He didn't want to look at him when he did it so he laid a sack over his head and hit him in the head with a hammer. It was sad, but it happens.

Ken Bray
Mr. Bray could tell, he's told me often, of some accidents with the ponies that he's had. He was close to getting electrocuted in the trolley line. They would get in the water and run through it and some ponies would get electrocuted. I don't have the information about it. He told me about driving ponies in West Virginia and for the money that you got, you had to get your pony, take it down and water it, and then bring it back and feed it cornstalks and stuff, and it was for some really low prices. They didn't pay much.

Another thing he told about was wages. I don't know if I can get this straight or not, but they made something like 25 cents an hour and they were striking for 30 cents. They were on strike for a good while, and he said the boss came up to them, he and his stepfather and said if you all went back to work for the same price, we'll let you work 10 hours a day, at 25 cents and hour and make $2.50, but if I give you 30 cents an hour, you can only work 8 hours so that will only be $2.40, so if you go back to work for 10 hours you'll make 10 cents more a day. So they went back to work.

GAIL: Given an option.

GEORGE: Did you have that on tape, when he told about getting hurt? His back was broken at the mines. There was a good friend of mine that is dead now. He was injured in a mine in West Virginia. He worked in the mine, and the boss came in. They finally got him outside and his back was hurting really badly, and the boss went up against the bank and cut a pole with a forked stick in the end of it, and used it as a crutch so he could help himself get home, so between where the mine is and his home, was a guy who sold moonshine liquor. The boss told him to stop in there to pick up a pint that might help the pain. The company paid for it. He went on home and laid for three days. The pain kept getting worse and worse. He hired someone to take him to the hospital in Keyser, and they x-rayed it and his back was broken. He was in a cast for almost a year. It bothered him because his stomach kind of protruded, and that caused that.

GAIL: This was Mr. Ken Bray that you just spoke of?

GEORGE: Yes.

GAIL: Now you have spoken a lot about Mr. Bray.

GEORGE: He is my dear friend. Maybe I could find something. I had someone write a little thing that I spoke at his funeral. I will get a copy. I will look upstairs to find it.

GAIL: That would be very nice. What was your relationship to Mr. Bray? How did you meet him? Was he a mentor or anything?

GEORGE: A lot of people around here do not read a lot. Kenny and I both read. When the people from the library would come over here with the Bookmobile, they would look through it and see if his number was in there, so they could bring something he hadn't read. He probably averaged reading 20 books a week for the last twenty years. He is the most intelligent man that I've ever met that didn't have a formal education. He had, in one of the papers here, he had a stroke 12 to 15 years ago. It affected his speech and also the way he wrote. He took them to the hospital, and he made motions to the nurse that he wanted something to write with. He told me that he wished he would have had a tape recorder because his speech was the same way his writing was. He tried to write his grandchildren's names, but would leave out certain letters. He would misspell the names. When he would try to talk he would do that too. He couldn't sleep all that night. He sat up and he wrote and wrote. By morning, he said, now Kenny was not, he did nothing where there was any competition, he wouldn't even play a game of checkers, and
because he was afraid he wouldn't want to beat you. He was just a gentle person. He was interested in politics. He never was involved in politics, but the history of this country, he could tell you any thing about it. He thought that he would be all right when he could write all of the presidents' and vice presidents' or political parties that they belonged to.

I've got a little bit of some of the writings that he gave me a copy of here. I miss him. I would go every, usually twice a week in the mornings like on the weekends to have coffee and talk. You never knew what you would talk about. Sometimes we talked about hardly anything, but other times we would go on and on talking for hours. I felt inadequate around him sometimes because he was a brilliant man. He worked in the coal mines all of his life, and it makes you wonder what he could have done if he would have had a formal education. He would have really been able to influence people. They say you wonder how many Sir Isaac Newton’s there are running around Africa, running around in the bush.

GAIL: When did you meet Mr. Bray?

GEORGE: I think they moved over in the upper end of Shalimar before I really got to know him. When they moved to the house in Shalimar, where they live now, we began to trade books and stop and talk about, mostly trading reading material is how we got acquainted. We got to be real close. He did a lot of things for my Dad, and he was mechanically inclined. If you had a motor or plumbing that needed repaired or a clock worked on, you just asked Kenny. He'd work on anything. He could really take care of it and do it too.

They lost a little girl, a child that died, just and infant when they lived at Shalimar. They had two boys. At that time in Shalimar, there were only about two telephones. The people that lived next door to the company store had one that managed the company store at the office. They had a lady work for him, and his son Robert, Bob, was sick and needed to be taken to Cumberland to the hospital. I think he had pneumonia. They called this phone number, and they said for them to come down and pick up Bob. The lady that got the message assumed that Bob had died. So, when the message gets back to Kenny and them, they were to come down and pick up Bob's body. Bob had died, that's their son, their little boy. And they had already lost one girl. Kenny came home from the mines, and called down it the funeral director in Blaine, Mr. Sharpless. They said that Bob had died. They knew how tough times were, and they said that it was no point in running the hearse down there to pick him up, why not just bring him back up in the car because of his size. It would save him a good bit of money, because I'd have to charge you for running down there. His step-father had a car over in Elk Garden, so somehow they got a message to him and he came over and picked them up and they started to Cumberland. They got up to Elk Garden and he said we ought to call down there and let them know we're on our way down to pick up the body. They were just crushed, you know. When they stopped in Elk Garden at Norman’s store to call down at the hospital to let them know, and they said well, we’ll let you talk to the people down on the ward and they said we’re on our way down to pick Bob, the nurse said, “Well, you better hurry up, he’s just sitting here on the bed and can’t wait for you to come get him”. He said they went from one extreme of emotion to another just within a couple of hours.

GAIL: Trials and tribulations... Is Mr. Bray your father's contemporary? How much older are they?

GEORGE: My father-in-law was a few years older than Kenny.

GAIL: But, Mr. Bray is older than you?

GEORGE: Yes.

GAIL: Sounds like you folks had a special relationship.

GEORGE: Yes, it really was. I don't have very many close friends that I am that close- to. It seems like you just don't have time to get close anymore. My wife and I were real close to a couple one time, and we had some problems with them, and I never wanted to get that close again. That’s not talking about mining.

GAIL: I want to thank you very much for sharing, and I know we’ve got more to talk about, but I feel like this is probably more than enough for tonight. You wanted to show me something?

GEORGE: I wanted to show you some of those books.

GAIL: So these are "Remembrances Gleaned From the Recess of A Convoluted Intellect" and he has indexed it through pages 45 and 46. He has indexed some writings. Can you tell me about these?

GEORGE: It's just a variety of things that he wrote about that he thought were important. His grandson that attends Frostburg College asked him to write about something dealing with coal mines, and he started this. It must be at least 160 pages. He would write all different times. It's not all about mining. It's about family and incidents too.

GAIL: He starts it out by telling where and when he was born, April 2, 1913, in Chaffee, West Virginia, small mining town between Blaine, West Virginia and Shaw, West Virginia [now beneath the Bloomington Dam, Jennings Randolph Lake]. Elk Garden, West Virginia was one of the places that you went to if you lived in Kitzmiller or Shalimar. It was a nearby town. Was this in the 30's?
George Brady, Interview, June 1992

GEORGE: It was in the 30’s and 40’s. I helped tear down the theater in Kitzmiller when they built the levee. I’ve seen Roy Rogers and Gene Autry in person. All those country western people came here live on stage. It was a big theater.

GAIL: Who got them to come down here?

GEORGE: The people that ran the movie. You couldn’t get a seat some nights if you didn’t go early to the movie. Particularly on the weekend. They had two shows and I stood up more than one night. They have a lot of people around here.

GAIL: So, was this in the 40’s or 50’s?

GEORGE: About 30’s and 40’s. I don’t know when they closed the theater. When I was in school in Shallmar we got to go down there and see Gone With the Wind. You packed your lunch. During intermission we got to eat our lunch.

GEORGE: There’s one here that there used to be a cow jail in Elk Garden.

GAIL: “It was a parcel of land about 50 feet and 50 feet fenced with a woven wire. One day three cows were locked up for being out on the common, and that night someone cut the wire and let the cows out.”

GEORGE: “The town officials could not tell who cut the wire because the cows belonged to different people.”

GAIL: This is great. So this is a diary almost in retrospect.

GEORGE: Yes. (Reading from diary) “Store bought toys were scarce for the ordinary miners’ children such as a coloring book or a doll for girls was something inexpensive and this made Christmas time. I don’t remember ever having a toy bought for me. I once saw an ad in a paper, that one could get 1,000 shot Daisy air rifle for selling a certain amount of Cloverine Salve. I always wanted a BB gun so I ordered it. I received the salve and started selling it door to door. I met mostly with contempt and indifference. Sometimes I would do some small jobs such as yard or garden work, which in turn they would buy a box of salve. After several days of humiliating work, I managed to sell the salve. I sent the money in and waited for the BB gun. Days went by, and then weeks and finally after a couple months went by and no gun I wrote the company and finally received a package in the mail. I knew it was my gun. The package was about 14 inches long. I thought it maybe came in pieces and I’d have to put it together. I opened the package and there was my gun. Instead of a thousand shot air rifle, I received a pop gun about 12 inches long. The only way you could shoot a BB in it would be to put the BB in the end of the barrel and hold the gun so it would not fall back out. It would shoot about 10 feet. Needless to say, I was very disappointed.”

GAIL: These are wonderful remembrances. You’ve probably read this whole thing. Are there any particular parts that you want to share with us of Mr. Bray’s diary? Mr. Bray has a page here where it looks as if he is defining terms. All different kinds of terms. Can we borrow it so that I can type it up and include with that piece you wrote about Mr. Bray? Maybe this could be a part of it. To have someone that looks as if he is defining terms. All different kinds of terms. Can we borrow it so that I can type it up and include with that piece you wrote about Mr. Bray? Maybe this could be a part of it. To have someone that active in the mines doing this would be so helpful.

GEORGE: He describes the town the town of Nethkin, the mining towns, the mining equipment, and the mines themselves. It outlines the safety laws, physicals, ages of workers, foremen, injuries and diseases of employees, acts performed by people who had injuries or diseases sustained and such.

(Continuing from the diary.) “There were no physical examinations before going to work. Boys of employees, acts performed by people who had injuries or diseases sustained and such. Mine owners did not consider handicapped now worked along the able bodied. A few handicapped that worked in my area were, Noah Warnick, he only had one arm, this guy William Simons only had one leg, this guy had a good hand and arm, the other cripple, John Schoolie had been crippled by polio, he walked with crutches. He used normal size crutches to walk to work and he had a pair he had made about 3 feet long that he kept up against the bumper of the car and hold onto the track rail and push the car to the face hand over hand. Mr. Krause, nearly blind, would have to hold the squid in his fist with about a half inch exposed to light. He would do this to make sure the squid was lit on the end so it wouldn’t blow himself up.”

GEORGE: I think that was interesting. He said there was no welfare then.

GAIL: So he describes the diet of an average coal miner. Beans, potatoes, gravy made from lard and flour, bread or biscuits, cornbread, mush made by boiling corn meal, fried mush, griddle cakes, buck wheat, corn cakes, pancakes, and this diet was supplemented by rabbit, and squirrel meat in the fall and winter and groundhog in the summer. Wood chucks. Some of the miners kept one or two pigs and every miner’s family had a garden. They would plant the backyard at their house, dig up a patch of ground in the nearby woods. Most miners’ wives kept a few chickens for eggs and meat.

GEORGE: That was something I forgotten about. On Saturdays at our house, everything was spic and span. By Saturday afternoon, everything would be clean. You had to polish all the shoes, shine all the shoes that were out, the kerosene lamps were set out and you had to trim the wicks, and shine the globes.
George Brady, Interview, June 1992

up, and the last thing she would do before she would clean up and take a bath she had to kill the chickens for Sunday dinner. And she’d kill 3 or 4 depending on how many were coming to dinner. Then she’d pick the chickens and get them ready and then get her bath and clean up. I had forgotten about that.

GAIL: That was a ritual in your home?

GEORGE: Yes, it really was. Here, he names some of the weeds they ate.

GAIL: Some of the weeds! Poke, wunsley, rock lettuce, nettles, lambs quarters, milkweed, plantain. Plantain? Plantain, is that like bananas?

GEORGE: No, there’s another thing in the tropics. No it’s a big leaved thing, Dandelion and many others, corn, beets...

GAIL: What did you eat that you told me about?

GEORGE: Rattlesnake. In fact, the church my wife went to several years ago, in the winter they would have a hunt dinner and all the members would bring something different that they had killed. Some brought bear, some raccoon, groundhog. All different animals. We took rattlesnake out to Mt Storm to the church and the preacher said that so and so brought this and that and we had our rattlesnake we fried up and had on the plate. We sat a table next to an older lady who apparently brought her grandson with her to the dinner and the boy wanted some of the rattlesnake and she kept saying shut up and sit down, you’re not eating any snake. I think the boy finally got some snake.

GAIL: So this is a recipe for cooking rattlesnake?

GEORGE: Rattlesnakes. Cooking robins. Did you know my son Mike worked over at the Wisp with some people and the old man that worked with him said there was always a family tradition in his family that every spring they had robin potpie.