



National Educational Technology Solutions LLC  
 1524 Eubank NE, Suite 3  
 Albuquerque, NM 87112  
 Phone: 505/271-1333 Fax: 505/271-1334  
 Alt: 505/350-1433  
 Email: CCallan@netsamerica.com  
 http://www.NETSAmerica.com

Oak Ridge Form 5: Oral History, Deed of Gift Release for Interviewee

DEED OF GIFT RELEASE FOR INTERVIEWEE  
 K-25 ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

I, Don R. Watson (Name of interviewee) residing at 406 Glenwood drive, Morristown TN  
 (Address of interviewee) do hereby permanently give, convey and assign to the United States Department of  
 Energy (DOE) my interviews (or oral memoirs), and the recordings, tapes (audio and or video), and any  
 transcripts of my interviews conducted on 9/23/05 (date) at Pro-2 - Seve  
 (location).

In doing so, I understand that my interviews (or oral memoirs) will be made available to researchers and the public  
 and may be quoted from, published, and broadcast in any medium that DOE shall deem appropriate.

I further acknowledge in making this gift that I am conveying all legal title and literary property rights which I  
 have as well as all rights, title and interest in any copyright which may be secured now or under the laws later in  
 force and effect in the United States of America.

My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, preparation of  
 derivative works, public performance, public display, as well as all renewals and extensions.

I, Bart Callan, (Name of interviewer or agent for or duly  
 appointed representative of DOE), accept the interview (or oral memoir) with  
Don R. Watson (Name of interviewee) for inclusion into the DOE Oral History Program.

Signature of DOE or its Representative: [Signature]  
 Date: 9/23/05

X Signature of Interviewee: [Signature]  
 Date: 9/23/05

Signature of Interviewer: [Signature]  
 Date: 9/23/05

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC



**K-25 Oral History Interview**

**Date: 9/23/05**

**Interviewee: Don Watson**

**Interviewer: Bart Callan**

DOES NOT CONTAIN  
OFFICIAL USE ONLY INFORMATION

Name/Org: [Signature] ERP/ Date: 4 Nov 15  
CISCO

As a BJC ETP Classification Office  
Unclassified-Sensitive (U-S) Information  
Reviewer, I have reviewed this document and  
determined the document does not contain  
U-S information (i.e. no UCNI, ECH, or OUD  
information).

BJC ETP CO U-S Reviewer/Date: [Signature]  
12 June 07

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

May be exempt from public release under the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552)  
Exemption number and category: #2 Circumvention of a Statute  
Department of Energy Review required before public release.  
Name/Org: Gary W. Snyder 721567 Pro2Serve Date: November 18, 2005  
Guidance (if applicable): CG-SS-4 September, 2000

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Watson, Don

Callan, B.: -- (Indiscernible).

[crew talk]

Callan, B.: Ready to go?

Male: Ready to go.

Callan, B.: Okay. So let's start out with the hard questions. And go ahead and state your name and spell your name out for me.

Watson, D.: Don, D-O-N R. Watson, W-A-T-S-O-N.

Callan, B.: Thank you Mr. Watson. And why don't you go ahead and tell me where you're living right now and how old you are.

Watson, D.: I'm living now at 406 Sherwood Drive in Maryville, Tennessee. And I'm 87 hitting 88, close.

Callan, B.: Okay. Tell me where you were born at and expand upon that. Give me your childhood background and leading up to the background of what we're talking about with K-25 in the Wheat community.

Watson, D.: I was born in Wheat, Tennessee, which was taken over by Oak Ridge, the government, in 1942. My parents on the Watson side came from England in 18 and 90 and moved into the Wheat area about 18 and 20 to 25. And I am the fourth generation. I was the fourth generation to have lived in this same house, which was a pre-war, nine room, five fireplaces, with 450 some acres farm. And that's where I grew up until I was 18 years old.

[02:33]

Callan, B.: What sort of stuff did you farm out there?

Watson, D.: Again please.

Callan, B.: What sort of stuff did you do out there on the farm?

Watson, D.: Well, general farming. We had – Always had from ten to twelve cows to milk. We had eight mules and two mares for the work. We didn't have a tractor, and we had raised cattle and sheep at one time and always had the hogs for our food. And we raised wheat, corn, oats, potatoes, and then we always had a garden. Two

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

gardens and raised all of our vegetables.

**[03:14]**

Callan, B.:

Okay. And do you know why it was that your parents chose to come out here to Tennessee and start up a farm?

Watson, D.:

Yes. They lived in South Carolina; my great-great-grandfather did for about 12 years. And they moved into the Wheat area and bought property there, approximately 12, 15 hundred to two thousand acres. And of course as the families divided out, my dad ended up with the home place and 478 acres.

Male:

Mr. Watson, do you mind if I place your piece of paper over here just a little bit, because I'm getting a little sound there a bit.

Callan, B.:

Well, we can set it down there (Indiscernible).

Male:

Whenever you need that.

Watson, D.:

Okay. That's fine. I'm sorry.

Male:

You're doing great.

Watson, D.:

I don't hear too well sometimes. You might have to speak up.

**[04:01]**

Callan, B.:

Okay. No problem. I can do that.

Watson, D.:

I'm not real bad, but a little bit.

Callan, B.:

Let's see. Where were we at? So the Wheat community. Tell me a little bit more about the Wheat community and where it was located and what – how many people lived there? What was the culture like there? What was your memory of the way the Wheat community was?

Watson, D.:

Originally?

Callan, B.:

Yes.

Watson, D.:

Well, it was a community that was really founded way back I'd say around 18 and 25 to 30, but they had various schools in various locations just in log has one teacher schools or something like that.

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

But the community of Wheat was really formed whenever they had what they called a college came there by the name of Roan State. Not Roan State but Roan College. And it came from Poplar Creek Seminary. And it survived there through about 18 and 86 to about 19 and 09. And the county, Roan County took over the school, and they changed it to Wheat High School. And the students still went to the Roan College building until they got the Wheat High School built, which was the three-story brick building right on what is now Blair Road just off of 58.

[05:33]

Callan, B.:

Okay. And let's see. You said – We were talking a little bit on the way up, and we were standing by the elevator. And you said that you had gone, you know. You were hear up until about 1942 or 43 and then you went away for a while and then came back.

Watson, D.:

Yes. When I left home – When I got out of high school in 1936 times were bad. Depression. Farming was not good. My father was getting up in the years, and his health wasn't too good. And I didn't want to become a farmer. And he was trying to sell the farm. So I tried to get in the Navy. Unfortunately, I was turned down because of a football injury and had an operation to remove a blood clot in my head.

Then I left home and went to Knoxville and worked at J.C. Penney Company and went to UT. Then after that I went to Tennessee Wesley down in Athens. And I graduated there in 1938. It was just a two-year college at the time.

[06:41]

Callan, B.:

What did you get your degree in?

Watson, D.:

I had business administration, accounting, and business law and economics and things of that nature. Then I obtained a job in Harriman in a hardware store. I could have gone on with Penney's, but with my dad's health I didn't want to leave home and be too far away. And I worked at Penney's, I mean at McKinney hardware. And in 1941, they were drafting people for one year that were in the age group. And I fitted right in. And I tried to volunteer again for the Air Force, and I was turned down because I was color blind. Well, I left the job in Harriman and went back and worked with Penney's for about a year.

And then I was reclassified, and I went into the service and was called in in 1942. And my mother was still living up in Wheat in the home that we'd built down across from where K-25 now is. And I brought – She rented the house out, and I brought her into Harriman. And I bought a home there, and she and my sister and nephew lived there while my dad had died in '39. And then I went into the service, and I was gone until '46. And I came back and relocated in Knoxville. I had a job with Hotpoint traveling all of east Tennessee, and I sold my home in Harriman. And my mother went with my brother that lived in Harriman. And my sister had gone to Washington State to teach school. So I moved in Fountain City and traveled all of east Tennessee with Hotpoint until I bought a store in Maryville – Opened up a store in Maryville, a Western Auto. And I retired there in '88. Sold the store and retired.

**[08:43]**

Callan, B.: Okay. Backing up a little bit about what you were talking about. And you were talking about the, I guess the farms at a homestead that your mother was staying in was overlooking where they build K-25 basically.

Watson, D.: Yes.

Callan, B.: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about that home and –

**[09:04]**

Watson, D.: Well, I have a picture of it. And I never did live there but for six weeks when my dad had a stroke and he died in '39. But I never did personally really live there. But it was a nice little home. Had spectus (phonetic sp.) siding and had three bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, living room, and a front porch. And the house was torn down after the government took it over. And it's moved out here on Edgemoor Road just outside of Oak Ridge on the old Clinton Highway. It's up on the hill. They moved it up there. I don't know just who lived there, but I went by to see it after the war just to see where it was. But it's still standing out there.

Callan, B.: So they tore the house down and then reconstructed it?

Watson, D.: Evidently.

Callan, B.: Okay.

Watson, Don

Watson, D.: I don't know. I was gone.

**[09:57]**

Callan, B.: So when was the last time you've been by to look at it?

Watson, D.: Oh, it's been ten years or more. It was a nice home for the time, at the time.

Callan, B.: So during the time that K-25 was being built, I guess you were off in the service at that point in time.

Watson, D.: Yes.

Callan, B.: Okay. But your mother, was she living there or you said she rented it out?

Watson, D.: She rented it and moved to Harriman before the K-25. And rented the house out. And she lived with me in Harriman because my dad, as I say, died in '39. And I moved her to Harriman with me. And I looked after her, and she didn't die. She came to the Asbury Acres in Maryville later. And she was 98 when she died.

Callan, B.: Okay. What about the other property that you guys had. You said your dad sold the farm. Was it sold to the government?

**[10:56]**

Watson, D.: No. He sold it to Arial Golher (phonetic sp.). And then the government took it from Arial Golher. And then he bought this 35 acres right across from K-25 on Blair Road and built the home from the money he got from the house.

Callan, B.: Okay. So that 35 acres and the homestead, was that something that the government got from you when they started doing the K-25?

Watson, D.: They bought it from my mother. Yes. Of course, I wasn't there when it happened, but –

Callan, B.: Did your mother want to sell the house at the time?

Watson, D.: Well, my mother was a very quiet person, and she was very concerned about the people in the service. And she just made the remark, "If it'll get the boys home, they can take the home. I will not complain."

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

Callan, B.:

Was that pretty much the biggest attitude or sentiment among the people of the Wheat community? I can imagine there was this entire community out there. And the government needed to come out here and construct this facility.

[12:02]

Watson, D.:

It was very hard. Some resented it very much. And frankly, there were some problems. One family I know of was only given ten days to move out. He had his crops. He said, "I need that." No, they said. They don't belong to you anymore. They belong to the government. And some people had – couldn't even take some of the these things that they'd like to take out for souvenirs or something like that.

Now as I say, I was gone during the time. I was overseas for over two years. So I missed out on that. But there was some resentment. But as a whole, it being for bringing the boys back home, some were very favorable of it.

Callan, B.:

I can imagine though when you returned back from the service, and you know, the whole community's gone you heard quite a few stories from people about what was going on out there.

[13:00]

Watson, D.:

Well, it took me a long time to find out where a lot of them were. However, Wheat was a very close community. It was really a thriving rural community as far as rural communities concerned all through the years. And they were much like families. And they were very close. And it was hard to relocate a lot of them. And out of our community, there were approximately a thousand people moved out you see. And we had 159 who were veterans, went into service. And nine of them didn't return. And that was quite a tragedy, too.

Callan, B.:

So where did most of the people that were displaced that were part of the Wheat community, where did they end up going?

Watson, D.:

Well, various places. Linor (phonetic sp.) City, Harriman, Oliver Springs, and various places. Some I don't know. I don't know where some of them – They had grown up, you know and moved out. Maybe married outside of the community. But those three places, maybe Kingston, too. But most of them is in Roan County



Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

and Lowden County.

[14:21]

Callan, B.:

Do you know how people were compensated for the loss of their land? And did people feel that it was fair compensation?

Watson, D.:

Well, it depends on what you're basing it on. Back then, land was pretty scarce, I mean pretty cheap. But overall, they didn't – were not compensated enough for their buildings and everything. As I understand it, I don't know positive. But as I understand it, it on averaged about 65 to 70 dollars an acre, which included all the buildings.

In our old home, for instance, we had as I say a nine-room house, which was one of the – not the nicest but was one of the better homes in the community. And we had three barns. We had a tool shed. We had a shop. We had a granary and chicken houses and things of that nature. And all of those other things, they're really not compensated for those as I understand.

Callan, B.:

Did your mother feel that she was adequately compensated?

[15:32]

Watson, D.:

Well, she never complained. My mother was – She taught school in Roan College. She was a school teacher. She came from Knox County in 1894, and she had gone to a Holsten (phonetic sp.) College in Blut (phonetic sp.) County and was a qualified teacher. And she came to Roan College and taught in 1894 and married my dad in 1897. But she was a very quiet, low-keyed person. And she accepted it as it was.

Callan, B.:

What about you were telling me earlier. You were talking about how I guess the church is the only building that's left out of the entire Wheat community.

Watson, D.:

Yes.

Callan, B.:

Okay. Tell me a little bit about that and why did they – why was all the property and all the houses – I mean why were all the houses torn down, and why did they leave that one particular building?

Watson, D.:

Well, I guess it's the nucleus of the area. It was a church. And

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

this church was founded by George Jones, who donated 250 acres of land back in about 18 – I have that information here. About 1870 something for educational and religious purposes. Now he was a Baptist, but we had Presbyterian Methodists there. And that was the three denominations that's predominant. But we met at different times. We had circuit right of preachers back in my time. And one Sunday we'd meet at the Methodist church, the next one at the Baptist church, the next one at the Cumberland Presbyterian church.

[17:20]

And it happened though that the Methodist church was the oldest and founded by this George Jones. And that's why, I think, kept it. Now Oak Ridge has been very nice; DOE has to cooperate with the existing people and having a home coming there and looking after the building.

Callan, B.:

Okay. You said also, you said that DOE has allowed you to go up there recently, I guess in recent years and go and look at the site where the old homestead was. Did you want to tell me about going out there and looking at where your property was and how that made you feel?

[18:07]

Watson, D.:

Yes. Well, when I came back from the Army, I got married. I didn't get married until I got out of the service. I was 28 years old then. And my children had grown up a bit. I have three boys and a girl. And they had never been over there, because the area where our home was is still in the security area. It's just a short distance – Actually it joins right where 58 and 95 intersect at Bear Creek. And the new road of 95 is built through approximately the middle of our farm.

Well, there was an old cemetery back in the woods near our home, which I remember back years when I was just a kid that has a metal fence around it. And it has about 25 graves in it with two or three that have inscriptions on them. One of them is John Smith, 17 something. The other is Alexander Smith. And that's who my great-grandfather or great-great-grandfather bought the farm from. And I wanted them to see that and where our old home was. And I called Oak Ridge, and I – Bill Thompson I believe. Bill was very nice, and he arranged that – He furnished us a four-wheel drive, and they drove us through there and took us up to the old cemetery

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

and around the home. And the foundation was still there. And we were one of the few families that had indoor plumbing. But it wasn't sufficient for – It just stayed there. We didn't get enough water power for it to work good. And I found the old commode was still living out – laying out in the back of where the house was. And I found where the garden was. And I found where the outdoor toilets were because of the sink holes. And the fences around the garden were still there.

And they wouldn't allow us to take anything out. And we had water, as I say, in the house from a riferam (phonetic sp.). I don't know whether you know what that is. It's operated not electrically but by the flow of the water from a spring. And it pumped the water up to our house about 300 yards. And we had a 500-gallon tank up to furnish the water in the house. But we never did get enough pressure to work a commode and stuff like that. So we did have a limited supply of water in the house. But it was good for my children to see in that area.

[20:52]

And there's a road in there called Watson Road. I have a picture of that somewhere. It has the sign on it. But I never did know of that road when I grew up. They've possibly put that in since Oak Ridge because it led up to that cemetery.

Callan, B.:

Okay. Talk a little bit about K-25 specifically. And you didn't see any of the construction going on at K-25.

Watson, D.:

No, sir.

Callan, B.:

But I mean you came back here after it had been constructed and they had done what they were doing with it there. When you were in the service, I mean did you hear any messages back from home or anything about what was going on here or about the construction of this building? What were people in the community thinking about all this going on? I'm sure you had to have heard stories when you came back. You know, wondered where the whole town was and there was this building on there. What sort of things did you hear when you were in the service by messages or when you came back?

[21:54]

Watson, D.:

Well, I was stationed up in Massachusetts. I was with amphibious

engineers. And I got one leave. And they had already started Oak Ridge. And my brother, old brother had a grocery store, a tent in Oak Ridge down at the intersection of the old Robertsville Road where Jayenish (phonetic sp.) Copeland, close to where he is. If you're familiar with that place. And he got me a pass that he took me through Oak Ridge on that one pass. But they didn't have much going on. And I just had to stay on the main road.

But my information that I got, I went overseas in the first of '44, and it was very limited. But my brother did work up here, one of them. Had two grocery stores eventually. And then one worked in this hospital over here and drove an ambulance. So I didn't get too much information from them. I couldn't even tell them where I was overseas you see.

To give an example, when I first went over there I was in Plymouth, England. That's right across from Cherbourg on the English Channel. And I got there in March of '44. And I tried to tell them how everything was censored. My brother had bought a new Plymouth car, and I said, "This place is very much like your old car – that new car you got." But they never did determine that I was in Plymouth England. And of course then I went over on D-Day, or shortly after D-Day. Worked in the – or participated in deesee (phonetic sp.) and went on into France and through. But I didn't get much information back.

[23:45]

Callan, B.:

So when was the first time that you had heard of the K-25?

Watson, D.:

I guess basically when I came home.

Callan, B.:

And when you came home, were you aware that the facilities that were out here were what contributed to the –

Watson, D.:

Oh, yes. Whenever they had the atomic bomb, I was aware of that. We got that through our Stars and Stripes paper gave a lot of that information.

Callan, B.:

Okay. Let's talk about that particularly. I mean, what were you doing or where were you at on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945? That was the day that they dropped the bomb. Do you remember that day?

[24:31]

Watson, Don

Watson, D.: Ah, It was August the 8<sup>th</sup> wasn't it?

Callan, B.: It's the 6<sup>th</sup>. I believe it was the 6<sup>th</sup>.

Watson, D.: Well, of course then I had already been up through Cherbourg around through Brist (phonetic sp.) and back into – started to Antwerp, Belgium, and we got stopped off in the Battle of the Bulge. And our headquarters were brought back to Rulon (phonetic sp.), France or Petite Coron (phonetic sp.). Then we sent some of our amphibious boat outfits on into Antwerp and Bremenhaven (phonetic sp.), Germany. But were in actually in what we call Rulon, France at that time.

Well, of course we were enthused, hoping that we'd come home. Well, that's after VE-Day first. But they said, "No. You're going straight to the Pacific." And then when they dropped this bomb, they changed it. And we did not go onto the Pacific. And of course, that was quite a relief for us.

[25:37]

Callan, B.: Okay. And you said that the news came out of this – Oh, we've got a few more minutes. Okay. The tapes only run 30 minutes, so I've got to kind of check and make sure I don't ask you something where you go on a roll and we have to change right in the middle of your thought.

Watson, D.: Okay.

Callan, B.: But you said that the news came out of K-25 and everything in the Stars and Stripes?

Watson, D.: Not K-25.

Callan, B.: What did it read after --?

Watson, D.: You mean like when I was overseas?

Callan, B.: Yes.

Watson, D.: The news?

Callan, B.: Yes.

Watson, D.: Well, we'd get just little briefs in our Stars and Stripes. In fact, Dennis I should have brought them. But I've got every copy of the

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

Stars and Stripes from VE-Day through the VJ-Day. I have all those. I sent those home.

**[26:25]**

Callan, B.:

So at the time that you were in the service, did you find out that there was this big uranium enrichment project going up here.

Watson, D.:

Well, it just said it was a huge government project that was pertaining to defense. It was pretty quiet. Even the soldiers, when I first went in up at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. I don't know why they picked me, but I was called into the office and said, "I want you to report at the end of each week under a number to Errors, Massachusetts if there's any discontent or any rumors going on. Of course, I never did run into any. Why I was picked, I don't know. But I had to swear that I wouldn't reveal that while I was in service. But I think they had several maybe doing that. Because some people might have been resentful or might have been given, you know, discouraging the people to stand up for their country.

Callan, B.:

What was your – On August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945, I mean what was your reaction to the news? And what the reaction of everybody around you?

**[27:48]**

Watson, D.:

Well of course I was happy, because it kept me from going to the Pacific. And it could have saved my life. I guess I'm selfish, but that was part of it. And I will say this, that I think it saved more lives of the Japanese as well as the Americans by this happening. Cause they would never have given up, in my opinion, over there, the way they were, if there hadn't have been something like that. Now that's my opinion.

Callan, B.:

But there's a lot of people that share your opinion. I would say probably 90 percent of everybody I've interviewed has said that really it's been something that – You really saved lives if you really think about it.

Watson, D.:

Absolutely. On both sides.

Callan, B.:

If you think about the logistics of it. What about your views – What about any other views now about the Manhattan project and about that particular day. Is there any views that you have now about it?

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

[28:44]

Watson, D.: You mean what's my opinion of it now?

Callan, B.: Yeah. What's your opinion? Yeah.

Watson, D.: Well, I have no qualms about it. I have a nephew that was retired from Oak Ridge as an engineer here. He worked there. And I've had a lot of friends that's worked here. I do feel like that they should – So far they've been good to my community. I do think that the Wheat area has a lot of history. And I think they should maintain that. I don't know just what all they should do. But they've been good to give us our church and to maintain it. But our cemeteries I think should be kept up. I've had to make a few times some calls when they didn't back in the past. I would come over to my cemetery where I'm going to be buried there, and my first wife was buried there. And I found that the cemeteries were not what they should.

Well, I called over here to the proper place, and this is back now three or four years ago. And I didn't get too much results. Well, I called a gentleman, John Duncan, Jimmy Duncan. Within an hour they called me from here and said, "We'll get it tomorrow." But now since then they've been real good. Occasionally, it will grow up a little bit because of circumstances, but as long as they keep it fairly good. I think they should maintain the cemeteries, and I would hope that they would maintain that church and actually make the little area of Wheat a historical place. It could be, because it has more history than any other sections that there were.

Callan, B.: Hold that thought. I'm going to have him go ahead and change tapes out.

[End of Tape 1]

[crew talk]

Callan, B.: Okay. So you were saying that the Wheat community, it has a rich history. And you actually, you've written a couple of books. Why don't you give me a background on what sort of things you wrote in your books and what sort of – Tell me more about the history of the Wheat community and what should be preserved.

Watson, D.: Well, of course the first book that I know was put out about Wheat

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

was by Dorothy Moneymaker. I have a copy of it in there. And she wrote more of the history going way back and everything about it. And it's very informative. And it has the names and kind of a summary of all the families that lives there and what they did and everything.

**[01:35]**

Now the book that I wrote is strictly for my family. I didn't sell it. It's not for sale. I gave a lot of copies away. I'm giving one to the Oak Ridge library. And mine was mainly my growing up on the farm, this history and genealogy of my families, and then growing up on the farm up until '42 and then my life afterwards. And it was not a fancy book. It's just very plain. And it's mainly all from my son-in-law is a pretty good computer man. And he used to be with AT&T before he retired. And he just ran it off on the computer. It doesn't have the distinct pictures like it should have, but it does have the history of my family and my growing up there. I brought a copy along if somebody would like to just glance through it.

Callan, B.:

Okay. Well, what I'm trying to get to is you feel that the history of the Wheat community that it is important. There's things there that need to be preserved. What is – You know, tell me about some of the things about the Wheat community that history should remember.

**[02:50]**

Watson, D.:

Well, the nucleus of the Wheat community was the school. And it was right on Blair Road, which is right off of 58 and the circle there. The school, and they had a grocery store and a service station. And then upstairs of the store was the Masonic Lodge. And then right on out they had the post office. And then they had another – She had a lady post master, mistress at that time had a grocery store there too. And then they had another. Three grocery stores total. And then they had three churches; the Methodists, the Presbyterian, and the Baptist. The Methodist church burned several years ago, before my time really. So they meet with the Presbyterian church. We all would rotate until finally they grew, you know, and they started meeting separately.

But Wheat always had a thriving community with the four-year state accredited college back in the early times. It was state accredited. And then from that grew the Wheat High School. And



they had two dormitories; a boy's dormitory and a girl's dormitory. All this property was donated by this George Jones, and that's why the church was named after him, and it's included.

[04:17]

And people would come from out of state to the school. The dormitory would hold about 25 girls, and the boy's dormitory would hold possibly eight to ten. At one time, they had a pretty good football team. And then when I first remember, we didn't have a gymnasium. We played outside. Then they built a gymnasium for several years, and they had a pretty good team. And then it burned. Then in about 19, oh I guess 27, we made an addition to the school and got a Delcol (phonetic sp.) system and we had electricity. And we played basketball inside. And we – For a time we dropped football, and then about 1933 we resumed it, but we didn't have enough players to do very good. We only had about 15 to 20 to go out for the team.

And then of course back then you didn't have face masks and your helmet was just leather. And unfortunately, my dad opposed to me playing, but I was kind of sneaky and I played. And I got hit in the head and got a skull fracture and had to have an operation and remove a blood clot. And he never did approve of it, but he finally gave in and I played two years later and then played basketball. But we had a good team.

[05:53]

And the community always had a fair. And we'd have people come in from around bringing in their produce and being judged, you know, as to which is the best and the worst in the cattle. And it was a very thriving community.

Callan, B.:

Okay. And you were talking about the surrounding communities. You said the Wheat community. You were also talking about, you said Wheat. There's also Bethel Valley, Scarborough, and Robertsville.

Watson, D.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Callan, B.:

Do you want to kind of talk about the relationship to those communities as part of the Wheat, overall Wheat community or just overall region?

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

[06:30]

Watson, D.:

Well, Robertsville had a high school, and of course they were – We'd always play them in basketball, but they never did have football to my knowledge. And of course, we had very little concern with Scarborough because they didn't have a high school. But now the students from the Bethel Valley church, you know, they came all the way into Wheat after we got bus service, and that of course enlarged our school. And we had Shurgurl (phonetic sp.) Valley and Dilus and Orchard View and several of the communities that came in, so it's quite a large community as far as students coming into school, even though the enrollment wouldn't be anything compared to what it is today. In fact, in my class we had nine boys and nine girls in our graduating class of 1936.

Now that was one of the larger classes through the years. But I have a copy of the students dating back to 1911. And it started out with just a few in high school, and it seemed to grow up. But I have copies of that in my histories collection of all the students that graduated from Wheat High School.

[07:53]

Callan, B.:

Did a lot of people that lived here as natives or people, Tennesseans (phonetic sp.) that lived in these communities, these surrounding communities, did a lot of them end up getting jobs and working at K-25 where the facility came up here?

Watson, D.:

Oh, yes. Yes. Lots of them did. There's a lot of people that came out of the Wheat community earlier that became doctors and judges and people of that nature. And there's a lot that worked at Oak Ridge. I don't know just how many, but – Of course after I came back from the service in '46, living in Knoxville I lost contact with a lot of them. And then I moved to Maryville, and I run into a lot of people over at Maryville that worked at Oak Ridge you see. And as I said, my nephew worked here, and he retired a few years ago. And my two older brothers did. Of course, they're both dead. They worked here.

[08:51]

But it furnished a lot of – I'd say it boosted the economy a lot.

Callan, B.:

Did you hear a lot of stories from people when you came back about K-25 and about this bit building? I mean I could imagine

Watson, Don

there had to have been something that was said about it.

Watson, D.:

Oh, yeah.

Callan, B.:

What kinds of things did people say about it?

Watson, D.:

I haven't heard too much except for the fact that it was the largest building of the whole group. It took about 35 acres of property, which ran from what is now the old Blair Road all the way down to the 58 all the way across. And there was about three or four farms within that area. The Golhers (phonetic sp.) and the Browders (phonetic sp.) I believe had some and the Arnolds. There was people like that.

But it was more secretive I think and had more hazards than most of the areas as far as I've been told. I'd past there sometimes and see all those barrels out there. You wondered what was in them. But I don't know of any criticism about it.

[10:08]

Callan, B.:

Not so much criticism. Just what sort of things did people say? I would imagine it would have to be some sort of kind of a shocker to live in a small farming community and the next thing you know overnight there's this huge town that just pops out of nowhere. And on top of that their building this facility that's a half a mile long. And it had to be this sort of a strange thing to be out in the middle of the Tennessee hills.

Watson, D.:

Well, that's true.

Callan, B.:

I'm just wondering what people thought about it. You know, it had to be kind of puzzling. There had to be some sort of curiosity about it or comments that were being made about it at the time. And I was wondering how people felt about it at the time.

Watson, D.:

Well, as I said my information is all after I came back in '46. And I never heard too much except the people that were employed there enjoyed their work. I just didn't hear too much about it, you know, except it was large construction and all.

[11:19]

Indecently, the person who helped to determine this location lived in Wheat at one time, or his parents did. His name was Burlin

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

(phonetic sp.) Moneymaker. And he was a TVA geologist. He went with, as I understand, General Groves and they selected two areas. The area of the present location and one in Ray County, down toward Chattanooga. But Wheat, this area was selected because of the electricity, Norris Dam, for the ridges on each side for security, and for the rivers were some of the main things – And the spars population.

Callan, B.:

Why the rivers?

Watson, D.:

For transportation of barges. They used to run barges down Clinch River with logs way back in the early times before transportation was so good. So they had the transportation of the Tennessee River, Clinch River, and the ridges of East Fork Ridge and Black Oak Ridge. That's where the name came from, Oak Ridge. It came from what was known as Black Oak Ridge. And I don't know. I have heard the only reason they left off the black was because of a racial – They didn't want any racial problem, which is nice. It's all right. I have no harm at all. We never had slaves, but we had tenet houses. We had tenet farmers. Even my older brothers were tenet farmers with my dad.

[13:09]

Callan, B.:

Were there different – Like out of the different communities around here, was there a lot of segregation that occurred in between the communities or you know, in between being the Wheat community and –

Watson, D.:

Not to my knowledge.

Callan, B.:

No.

Watson, D.:

We had one family in our area that came to school. There were no problem. And I remember – I don't remember, but I remember my mother. We had a black lady that came in whenever to take care of her mother and help out. But she lived with us. Right in the house with us. We had no problem.

[13:56]

Now when I went to work in Harriman, we had a black fella (phonetic sp.) who was our janitor. He had the key to our store. And my mother was still living at the Wheat house, and I took her an electric range, because we were selling appliances. And he

went with me. And I said, "Lum (phonetic sp.), come in and have lunch." "No. I'll eat out here on the porch." I said, "No. You're going to come in and eat with me." So he did. Now some few have it and they still do. It always will be resentment to certain – Not only – Even certain people will.

I'm pretty immune to all of that. I was in the service with more Catholics and more Jews and more others, and they were all friends of mine. In fact, I'd say 75 percent of my unit were from the East. They were either Italians or Jewish or that. In fact, my best man was a Catholic Italian. I didn't know. Me being a southerner I didn't know that they were not supposed to perform in another church, you know. But he stood up in my congregation, this church in Road Island and was my best man. So I have no qualms with them.

**[15:32]**

Callan, B.: Okay. That's good. Thinking about K-25, and whose farms was the property that K-25 was built on again?

Watson, D.: Well, mainly Golhers, the Browders. Elzie (phonetic sp.) had a house right across the road from us, and they took his farm. It used to be Roadman, but Elzie was a school teacher, and he had I believe bought the farm. It wasn't large, but the Golhers' was larger. The name Golher Farm was where the Clinch River was, you know. And it was Laurel Dike's farm. And Arnolds had some property that – on the upper end from where Blair Road runs down. They lived on the left. And there might have been somebody else that had a little property in there.

Callan, B.: I was just kind of curious about he lay of the land there. The Oak Ridge area I noticed is very hilly and lots of hills and lots of ridges.

Watson, D.: Right.

**[16:51]**

Callan, B.: Was that area where they built K-25, was it always pretty flat? Was it a pretty large flat area?

Watson, D.: Yes. It was pretty – It was kind of a little valley right through there bound with the Clinch River on one side and then a little ridge. I believe it's called Pine Ridge. But it had quite a bit of, you know, level ground in there.

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

Callan, B.: It was probably one of the areas that had the largest, you know, spread of level ground in this area. Wouldn't you think?

Watson, D.: Well, our farm where it goes through, and they're building something in there now. It'd be on the right going down just before you get to 58. I don't know what's being built in there, but it and the farm joining those had a lot of level ground there. We had a lot of ridge land too.

Callan, B.: I was just wondering if that may have had something to do with why they selected that location was because that was probably one of the biggest spots.

[17:50]

Watson, D.: Well, I'd say it was, and it's convenient to two roads, you see. The old road to Kingston and the old road to Harriman.

Callan, B.: Okay. Oh, I wanted to ask about fruit trees and the fruits out of here. Gary's really into plants and what not and wanted to hear a little bit about – I guess there was – I'm talking about a large pear orchard or something to that extent. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Watson, D.: Well, overall nearly every farmer had a small orchard of either a few peach trees, a few apple trees and pear trees and things like that. But within that area there were two of the largest peach orchards in the state of Tennessee. One of them was Dilus orchard. It was the largest in the state. And then there was Kingston, which was not in the area, but it had the next largest. And then the Halin Orchard Company, which my brother and one of the Golhers own was the third largest in the state.

Now he lived – He was my oldest brother, Lyle. My first oldest brother died in World War I. But this was my second oldest brother. And he lived over there and had about four or five people working for him year round, because it's a year round job to prune them, to spray them, and to take care of them. But when it became harvest time in August, they would usually have to hire about 100 to 150 people.

[19:41]

Now peaches was a losing proposition over the years, because the

Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

climate about every third year you'd get a crop. You'd either have a bumper crop or you wouldn't have any.

Callan, B.:

Because of the freeze.

Watson, D.:

Because of the freezing of the buds. And he subsidized that by putting out strawberries a lot. And if they had a peach failure, they'd have strawberries. But I'll give you the example of my junior year in high school. I had just learned to drive, and he had a large packing shed on top of his peach orchard, which the government took over. And we didn't have electricity, but he had generators. And he had big conveyer belts. And he had an upstairs. And this packing shed, I'd say it was 100 to 150 feet by 75. Something like that. And they would have some of the ladies mainly that worked would stand up where – They had these rollers that would sort the sizes, you see. And then they'd pick out the coals, and then they'd go on down the conveyer belt into the bins where they'd be packed in baskets. And then they'd be shipped.

[21:08]

Now my brother had a contract with Jenteli (phonetic sp.) Brothers in Cincinnati, Ohio to take their peaches, the number ones. And they would have inspectors to come in. And maybe what we'd have stacked out in the bushel baskets, they would open up three or four here and there just to check them, you see. Well, in my senior year I was driving the truck to haul them to the Dilus railroad station to put them in refrigerated cars. And you had to go down a steep hill, and it was about five miles to the station.

And it happened that Bonita's brother and I did the hauling. We'd haul about ten loads a day of 100 bushel. We have 20 thousand bushel that year, and the peaches would bring about – Oh, the number ones would bring a dollar, a dollar and a quarter a bushel shipped. And they'd be shipped all over the country. To give you an example, I put a note in one one time. And I said, "Would you please tell me what you paid for these peaches, when you bought them, and how good they were?" Believe it or not, I got a letter back from Slades (phonetic sp.) Corner Wisconsin. Said, "We paid three-fifty a bushel." Said, "They were good, but they would rotten pretty quick." And anything – A peach taken out of refrigeration will rot after so long time.

[22:37]

But we would haul the number ones to that station and pack them into the refrigerated cars four high, one basket up and one basket down so they'd – because they were kind of tapered on and fit in good. And my dad then had a booth over in Knoxville to take care of the overripes. And we'd haul those over at night. And he would stay in the market, and he stayed at a boarding house during that time. And of course, the merchants would come around four o'clock in the morning and start buying for their grocery stores. And then about eight or ten here would come the housewives in buying for their own use.

[30:54]

And I'd say we hauled approximately, we figured a thousand bushel over there. So the whole year, we shipped about 20 thousand bushel and took about a thousand up there. Then another thing that is kind of funny, you'd see some fella come in kind of quiet like, you know, and we'd have a bunch of these old overripes that was rotten and the juice was coming out of them. He'd call my brother over. He was making brandy. And he'd sell those to fellas making brandy. I'm sure that's what he made. I don't have the proof, but that's what we thought. He'd sell those for ten cents a bushel if they didn't take the baskets. But it was quite a project.

Callan, B.:

Were there a lot of distillation and bootlegging going on in this area?

Watson, D.:

Oh, it was some. Yes. In fact, the business – We were sitting out in my front yard when I was small. I guess ten or twelve years old. And it had rained and was waiting for the hay field to dry off. And the sheriff drives up in front of my house. He's a big fella by the name of Roberts. Of course, my dad knew him. And he had one of these twisted mustaches. He said, "George, I guess I'll have to take you in." My dad said, "Well, if you feed good I'll go, but what's the charges?" He said, "I found a whiskey still on your farm." And he did. We didn't know about it, but it was on the far end you see. And a big farm like that – There was a stream coming down through there, and somebody had put a whiskey still on our farm. And he had it in the back of his car. Of course, he knew my dad didn't do it. My dad never drank. That's one thing he didn't do.

[25:10]

Callan, B.:

I would imagine that probably that business probably improved. I



Watson, Don

2005 NETS, LLC

mean the bootlegging business after all these people from Oak Ridge came in. Or was there -- ?

Watson, D.: Well, I don't know.

Callan, B.: Don't know. I was just wondering. Just curious.

[25:27]

Watson, D.: That's just a few of the little things that happened. And I never will forget that of the sheriff. And of course his name was W.W. Roberts, and he was one of the early sheriffs. But to find it on our farm, and I had squirrel hunted back in that area a lot of times. But I didn't see it. Somebody lived back in the hallows that because there's running water there had taken advantage of the water.

Callan, B.: Well, just to kind of -- Was there any topics that I really didn't cover, or is there any other thing that you wanted to bring up?

Watson, D.: Any what?

Callan, B.: Was there any topics that you wanted to talk about or things that you wanted to talk about that I didn't ask you about? Did you want to --

Watson, D.: Not particularly except I am very interested in them preserving that, cause I'm not going to be around here a lot of years. And I'd like to see them preserve that area. I do think it's got more history to it than any one of the other areas that were pre-Oak Ridge. Now that's my theory on it. Because we had a college. We had a post office. And we had a high school. And we had a thriving community as far as the people's concern. I know Robertsville had a thriving community, but they didn't have a post office. And Scarborough was a nice community. But my grandfather on the Montgomery side, which lived in the Bethel Valley way, because my great-grandfather's buried in the Bethel Valley cemetery over there where it is. And then he moved to Knox County.

Callan, B.: Great. So what do you think that future generations should remember about the Wheat community or about this area?

Watson, D.: Well, I personally think that the schools, the college, and just the history of it. And that church and the George Jones Memorial Church, the man having given 250 acres of property for religious and educational purposes. I think that should be well-remembered. That's why I think they should preserve -- I know they have a

problem. We had a break-in not too long ago down there. And at one time, they destroyed a lot of the tombstones. I think they should give it quite a bit of security. But I would like to see them clear the area between 58 and up to the church so it can be a little more accessible. And I understand they have a walking trail around through there now, which is good as long as they kind of police it.

[28:38]

But I would like to see some monuments put up at the school where the church building that's not there anymore and maybe at one or two of the places. And I don't know who Gary Hartman is. Do you?

Callan, B.: He's with the –

Watson, D.: Resources something.

Callan, B.: Yes.

Watson, D.: I wrote him a letter suggesting that. I was told that he would be – And I hope that he would do it. I complimented them on the care they've given, but I said I would like to see that area made – And I'd like to see the area cleared out around where the school was with either a marker or something.

[29:22]

Now we have a bell that was found here in Oak Ridge at one of the schools in the basement. Now we have it back at our school, and they were supposed to put a monument up there. And we already had started on it, Oak Ridge had, and somebody has cut it off. Who, I don't know. I'm going to find out if I can.

Callan, B.: I certainly hope that –

Watson, D.: We were making a monument. I have a copy of it and a diagram of it. It was to be ten feet high. We were going to mount the bell on top of it. Four sides, which were going to have a brief history of the post office, the college, the church, and the school. Little plaque in there. And it was just suddenly stopped recently.

Callan, B.: Well, I hope you're able to get that realized.

Watson, Don

Watson, D.:

I'm trying to find out who stopped it. I haven't found out yet. I have a name of a lot of people here who have been awfully good. I don't know what – I've got them here somewhere. But they've been awfully good to us.

Callan, B.:

Before we leave the interview, was there anything else that you wanted to add to –

Watson, D.:

Not particularly.

Callan, B.:

Okay. I think we can wrap this. We'll go ahead and wrap it up at this point.

**[End of Interview]**