

**Interview with
Mary Crozier Snow
by Connie Jean Zirkle,
June 21, 1997**

**Oral History Interview MS 64-0562
Special Collections
Marshall University Libraries
Huntington, West Virginia**

**Oral History of Appalachia,
Marshall University
Huntington, West Virginia**

Released Form signed by Mary Crozier Snow
June 21, 1997, at Camp Washington Carver, West Virginia

Transcriber not identified
PDF prepared by Lisle G Brown

© Marshall University, 2003
All Rights Reserved

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

Connie Zirkle: This is Connie Zirkle and we are conducting an Oral History Interview, this is June 21, 1997, and I am interviewing Mary Snow. Mary you saw the release form and signed it for me. Is that correct?

Mary Snow: That's true.

CZ: And you said you that you were a staff member here.

MS: Yes I was.

CZ: And you started telling me it was ...

MS: It was the first established camp for Negro girl scouts.

CZ: And that was the year? ...

MS: 1941. I was here two and one half sessions. We came-two weeks - and we would have two sessions. A week for each session and other camps you know came in like the 4-H and other groups.

CZ: So you were with the Girl Scouts?

MS: Yes. From Kanawha County.

CZ: Mary I am going to ask you just some background information, for the Oral History part ... You said your name. When were you born?

MS: September 15, 1913, 1 am 83.

CZ: You are 83! Oh you are so wonderful!

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

MS: Laughs. I'll be 84 September 15.

CZ: OK. Were you born and raised here in West Virginia?

MS: I was born in - just four blocks from where I am living now in Charleston West Virginia. On the West side of town.

CZ: And you lived there your whole life?

MS: My whole life. With of the exception of one year, I was an exchange teacher to Cardiff, Wales and I went there and taught for one year.

CZ: So did you say you got your teaching certificate from Marshall?

MS: No, I got a Principal's certificate from Marshall. I did my undergraduate work at West Virginia State College with a major in English and a minor in French and then I went to the University of Cincinnati where I received my Master's degree in child psychology and elementary education.

CZ: I work in the Psychology Department at Marshall. I'm a secretary there. You lived your whole life in Charleston. Did you work there too?

MS: Yes. I was with the Kanawha County School System for 52 years. I retired June 1989 as an elementary principle. I was principle for 35 years and the other 12 years I was a teacher and the one year as an exchange teacher in Cardiff Wales.

CZ: Did you marry and have a family?

MS: Yes. I was married in 1942 and I had one son who also went to camp up here with the 4-H camp or the Y - I believe it was.

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

CZ: So when you came here your were a staffer sponsored by the girl scouts?

MS: Yes

CZ: And you brought a group of girls ...

MS: For two sessions - Yes.

CZ: For two sessions.

MS: Yes a different group of girls came for each session.

CZ: Did you teach while you were here also?

MS: No.

CZ: Or did you just a ...

MS: I was just the overseer. Director.

CZ: So you are the one who got all the problems.

MS: Yes.

CZ: And ... the girls that you brought, are you still in contact with any of them?

MS: Some of them. I am. And they ... interesting enough, still call me Wahoo, because my name was Big Chief Wahoo. Because I was over the group.

CZ: And some of them still call you that? That is so wonderful!

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

MS: Laughs. Of course they are not little girl scouts any more. They are grown with their own families and everything, but I do see them.

CZ: Have some of them had their children come here too? I know you said your son came here.

MS: Yes. I really don't know about that. Some of my friends had girls to come. But I don't know of any particular ones.

CZ: When you came here in 1941. I know it was a unique experience and the first black camp. Established in West Virginia.

MS: Established ... Yes.

CZ: What was the importance of the camp when you came here? Was it because it was a facility where you could actually bring the girls and camp.

MS: Well, we felt that our girls, the Negro girls, were short changed as far as the established camp experience was concerned. We had day camps for the girls. You know they went just one day and would come home and they had that kind of experience. I was the director of the day camp down at Institute. It was called camp Green Hill. And then the camp committee decided that since we could not go to camp Ann Bailey, which was the camp for white girls, that my girls did need that kind of experience and I was sent to a place in Morrow New York. A city called Morrow Town or something and that's where I got my training and then after the training, I was appointed.

CZ: So you were at the camp when it was segregated? Do you think that ... I mean you just expressed that it was a unique experience and a necessary experience for the girls. Why do you think that was so? I mean what did you do here at the camp that you think that helped them? You know the difference you said between the day camp and the night camp.

MS: Well, I a ... See the day camp they just went during the day and we had small kinds of

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

experiences, crafts, we had, some kinds of experiences in the cultural arts, music and that sort of thing and we always had a program. In the established camp see here, they did have the swimming pool. Our children didn't have the opportunity, I mean the girls, didn't have the opportunity for that kind of experience. And it gave the children, the students, the girls, a wider experience with other girl scouts because they came from other counties. Although the majority of them were from Kanawha County, but some were from Greenbrier county and other counties. That gave them a sense of belonging to the big, you know, a big ...

CZ: region, instead of just their community.

MS: Yes, and we had new kinds of experiences, see, we were able to camp over night and staying out over night. We learned much more about nature and that sort of thing. Because this was mostly forest, mostly trees and there was only one, well one building and then one smaller building. We lived and ate and well and had our crafts in this one building that was under the construction using prisoners from Moundsville. I guess was where they were from. And that gave me a good chance to show my managerial skills to keep the older girls, from you know ... from mingling. But there was a beautiful kind of association. We never had one problem as far as that was concerned and a ... because of the kinds of programs that you can give them when they stay overnight, the girls had a chance to bond. When we went to day camp, they went home and that sort of thing. And it wasn't a true, real bonding, like here, where we had these nice big bond fires and we would go out and sing camp songs and they had a beautiful chance of using their creative skills with the different skills with the different kinds of programs that we had for them. And we used counselors from all walks of life, not all walks of life, but our counselors gave our girls a new perspective in that not all of them were teachers and some of them had never had experience with girl scouting and that was a good experience for them also. For the girls and for the counselors.

CZ: We talked a little bit about the activities. Do you have a ... people that stand out in you mind during the time that you in the camps? Other staffers, or perhaps students that you can remember that were exceptional for some reason. You mentioned that some of them ... that you

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

see them occasionally.

MS: Yes. Well ... two of them of course I have to see occasionally because they were my sisters. Two of my sisters were here. One was an assistant leader and the other was a camper and she was the editor of the "Camperette." We put out a newsletter that was called the "Camperette." Which is being run off now. I hope it doesn't fall to pieces because ... what - 1941, that's how many years? 50? 56 years ago and ...

CZ: and you still have an original copy of that?

MS: Original copy. And many of the girls and staffers who are mentioned there I still have some kind of contact with them. Some have passed and that sort of thing but I remember distinctly one girl from Institute kept us moving because she loved all of these beautiful worms and that creepy crawly things that we had up here and she has become and maybe she is retired now, I haven't seen her for two years now, Margaret James and she has her Ph.D. in some form of the sciences, biology and that sort.

CZ: She went on to study insects or something. That's strange.

MS: Yes, that's interesting isn't it.

CZ: So she had an interest in that when she was that young.

MS: Yes and we captivated, captured that kind of interest among the girls. I think of another girl that we had who was very creative in dancing and that sort of thing and she ended up being a dance instructor in Louisiana. I think it was Louisiana. Thelma Smith was her name when she was here and they had chances to really develop, well maybe latent talents that they had and several of those girls, including my sister, one of my sisters who keeps close in touch with two of the girls and they still communicate and they talk about camp all the time.

CZ: So it is still a topic of discussion all of these years later.

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

MS: Yes. And I hear from them, indirectly sometimes, because one of them lives near this one particular sister who lives in Newark, New Jersey, and her friend lives in New York somewhere and they talk and everything and they see me and some of them perhaps don't even remember my name as Mary. I was Mary Crosier, no Mary Young then, that was my married name then and we keep in touch that way so they have developed friendships that really lasted or have lasted.

CZ: and you think that had something to do ...

MS: With the bonding and with the camp. I'm certain it was. Because some of the girls that I had in the, who were from Kanawha county, never really saw each other much because we lived on the west side. My troop, I had a girl scout troop, and it was on the west side and there wasn't too much interaction. Maybe when we went to day camp, Camp Green Hill, but they still remember and they still call me Wahoo. Those (Laughs!) I haven't lived that down.

CZ: So you have been Wahoo all this time?

MS: Uh huh.

CZ: You said that you dealt with the girls. I know that the boys camped up here at the same time as the girls did? At that time of the camp?

MS: No. They would come a different session.

CZ: They would come at a completely different session?

MS: Uh huh.

CZ: So it was totally girls. There wasn't that interaction with boys like we have now.

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

MS: Sometimes I invited, or sometimes the boys that lived at Clifftop would come around and everything. But sometimes we would even invite them to a cook out or a camp fire. But it was under the direction of ... I forget the man's name. There was a lady who lived in Winnona who was one of the assistants in the cookie jar, that's the cooking place and it was under supervision that they would come. But there wasn't any very close interaction, that I know of.

CZ: And you had mentioned ... This is something that we can talk about if you want to, or we don't have to if you don't want to. But you had mentioned that the girls didn't have the opportunity to go to the swimming pool. You know my generation, I'm 42, but there's of course racism that still goes on, but, ... not the separation.

MS: It wasn't to that point.

CZ: Yeah.

MS: Well, we couldn't go to the swimming pools. I think that some of them ... I don't know if the state college had it's then. I think some of them from Institute could go, but I mean, ordinarily we couldn't go. No even to the Y. (Laughs) And a....

CZ: So you've lived through all these changes.

MS: Yes.

CZ: and I know you think we've come a long way. How do you feel about all of the, you know changes, that ybu've seen in your life as far as being an African American woman?

MS: Well, as I tell lots of people, and some of my own friends don't agree with me, too much. I mean, I don't have that, I guess bitterness, or that kind of thing towards people, but one thing, with the experience with girl scouts and with and other things. I happen to be on 8 volunteer boards now and that kind of stuff and one thing I have done that I think is the better direction, is one direction maybe I should say to make things better. I have in my association on these

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

boards and as an elementary principle. For years I was the only black principle in Kanawha county and I gradually just had conversations with them and some of them I became friends with and I would tell them the kinds of things that needed to be addressed and on the same level I had talked with some of the blacks about some things that weren't quite true. And some of the whites who have had no idea that these kinds of things were going on. I'll give you two examples. I was on the reading committee in Kanawha county. We were helping to develop a reading program for all the children. The schools were segregated and I remember we were working on a committee down at a school that was close to Capitol Street where there was a fountain. A soda fountain. You know a drug store. And we would work after school, this committee. I was the only black on the committee. And they just said, "Come on Mary we're going to go down and get a Coke down at the drug store on the corner." And I said, "I don't think I'm going." And they said, "Aren't you tired?" And I said, "Yes, but I can't go with you." Because at that time they wouldn't serve me. I mean, wouldn't serve Blacks at the counter at the soda fountain. Well, they were appalled.

CZ: They hadn't thought about that.

MS: No, they hadn't thought about it at all. Another thing that happened during this same period. Blacks could not go to graduate schools and I decided to. We couldn't go to graduate school in West Virginia. West Virginia University didn't take blacks or Negroes or whatever. And I decided that this particular summer that I was going to go and start on my master's degree and the only way that I could get my master's degree was to go out of the state, but West Virginia had to pay my tuition. That was kind of (laughs) different. That's the way that I got my degree. I just went over to the University of Cincinnati and gott it and there were some other secondary blacks who had got theirs, maybe some of them before they had came to Charleston or something like that. I remember I was the first elementary school person to get a master's degree. It was just out of pure meanness. The way I became an exchange teacher was because of segregation and everything. I tried to do it subtly, but I think much of the, well, not much, some, can be dispelled by just little steps with conversations and having lunch with someone or being on a board and just casually talking about things makes it right. I mean it won't make it, not right, but makes it better. When I was an exchange teacher it was difficult. I

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

knew and I hadn't told my parents, my mother was the only one living, then that I was even applying to be an exchange teacher, but I was upset about something in the school system concerning black and white. I just happened to look at the superintendent's bulletin that said, "Anyone interested in becoming an exchange teacher may..." Am I taking up too much of your time?

CZ: No! No! No! This is what we are supposed to be doing.

MS: "... to apply up at the board." I went up, Dr. Perry was his name, he was the personnel director. He said, "Oh, how are you!" and he was just so glad to see me and everything. "What can I do for you?" and I said, "Well," and I just made this up after school. "I said I have come to get an application to become an exchange teacher to Great Britain." He said, "I beg your pardon?" (Laughs) He didn't know ... and I said ... (I was just doing it for meanness) "I saw in the bulletin where those who were interested in becoming exchange teachers could get an application from you." He looked down in his drawer and he said, "I'm so sorry, I don't have any more applications and I don't think that you would like Great Britain. It rains there a lot you know." I said, "I'll take my chances." So then he said, "And I believe you are too late." because they had to be in at a certain time. "I'll take my chances." So he gave me the address, Health Education and Welfare in Washington and on my way home I said, "That man thinks that I'm not going to go through with this."

CZ: He's trying to, he's discouraging you.

MS: So I mailed it. I mailed the application. Filled it out. Mailed it and he was about right. I only had three days to get references. And then I had to think carefully and get the right references. I got the references and then I got a letter from Washington saying, not to make this public but I had been temporarily selected out of the twenty four hundred and some applicants see that go from all over the country, but I ... you know, temporarily. So then I got another letter saying that I had been chosen out of the 100, but I needed to get approval from Kanawha county. (Laughs!) And I didn't hear anything from the Superintendent and I wondered. So I went to him and I said, "Did you not get a letter from Washington saying that I had been approved to be an

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

exchange teacher next year?" and he said, "Yes, but it is a problem." see schools had not been integrated and the teacher coming over would be white and he said, "We do have a problem." and I said, "Yes, you do, but you wouldn't want Washington to approve me and London had approved me (that's where it was central) and Kanawha county not approve me?" And he said, "Well, we are going to have a meeting." They had to have a meeting, the board or somebody, to approve it because, see they didn't know what they were going to do with the white teacher coming over.

CZ: So it wasn't so much you, it was the teacher coming back that was the problem.

MS: Yes, the white teacher in exchange. See they exchanged and they couldn't place her in a black school. Well, anyway to make a long story short. I was finally approved and I went over and taught for a year. I was the first black teacher in the whole country of Wales. I was a novelty to them, but they were beautiful, just beautiful to me and I'm still corresponding with a little girl. One of the girls that I taught. I taught the seven year olds, they were called the standard 1-A. They were the smarties group. I took my son he was small, and we just had a beautiful experience and out of that experience they choose, at that time they would choose ten of the most outstanding exchange teachers to have tea with the Queen and I had tea with the Queen. I was chosen for it. It was the queen mother, Mary. But things like ... and I did the same way over there. I was put on the spot. Not by the English so much but my own Black people, you know Africans, who were British subjects. I had to make a lot of speeches and they would put me on the spot a lot, but it was really a memorable experience. I haven't had any just drastic kinds of things with blacks and whites and I think it is partly because of the kind of background I come from and my home with my mother. It was unusual in that my father was murdered and she had these seven little children that she had to educate, had to take care of. The only skill had was knowing how to wash and iron because she did laundry for white people and she put every one of us through high school and all the girls through college.

CZ: That is a great accomplishment!

MS: Isn't that something!

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

CZ: Yes! In fact back then as a single mother, I mean that is just ...

MS: Oh yes, be we lived in a house, there were twenty four of us relatives. (Laughs!)

CZ: Well, good, so there was kind of like an extended family type thing?

MS: So we had ...

CZ: So you mother had other people to help her?

MS: Yes. Her sisters and her brother but and my Grandparents. They instilled something in us that, you know, you are as good as anyone and you can do what you want to do.

CZ: Wonderful! And you think that was what helped you to ...

MS: I think that helped. It really has a kind of background that I had and of course I have some unpleasant kinds of things, but like taking my little brownie scouts to Cincinnati on the train and stopping to get sodas and ice cream cones and things like that and I wasn't served. The waitress told me she couldn't serve. Here were little my precious little brownies and the were giving me their orders and I was going to make it easy for her to tell how many vanilla cones and you how many... and she was embarrassed and she said, "I'm sorry, I can't serve you. I could give them to you and you could take them out." That really broke my heart, but I didn't cry or anything like that, but that kind of experience just ... I mean if you want to be bitter or something like that then it would eat away, but I ...

CZ: But you are a positive person so you don't feel bitter.

MS: Yes, I guess I forget and forgive. I don't know what I do, but I try not to make myself erode, or be corrupted, rather is the word I want by ... I think of another path and I ... so far it's been very rewarding.

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

CZ: Very fruitful for you.

MS: Uh huh.

CZ: It sounds like you have just lived a wonderful life.

MS: Well, I tried to do the right thing by people. You don't know who you touch or how you touch them and I've touched both white and black so far as I can tell later on and some I'll never know. I just got a most gorgeous card the day before yesterday from a one of my students who I was his principle, Oh at [blank space] school, I don't know how many years ago. It must have been the early 80's he's in prison now. He had seen my picture in the paper. I was reading to some kids or something and he addressed a letter, Mrs. Mary Snow, Glenwood school, that's the school from which I retired, Charleston West Virginia, no substitute teacher. I still substitute and he got that and the most beautiful letter, it wasn't well written, it didn't have two many periods or anything like that and the card I got from him the other day was just beautiful to think something about God cares and I'm so glad to have a friend like you or something. But, early, the very first

letter was just something. He even remembered my paddling him in the hallway. (Laughs!) I said, "I don't remember that." and I've been corresponding ... but I said that to say this, I could of just, well I didn't even know that the boy remembered me or so far as even saying that. That is really something and I must have given him something that he is holding on to and he's hoping he's try to convert some of the other, other, I started to say patients, prisoners and all that kind of stuff and the day before yesterday, I stepped out of my car in Kanawha City. I was going into the Rite Aid there, and a lady came up and she said, "Mrs. Snow, I am waiting until you get out of your car. I wan to hug you." and I looked and said (to myself) oh Lord, who is this? and she said, "I decided that the very next time I saw you I was going to hug you and kiss you and thank you for all you did for me." And it came to me that her last name was, and I said to her, "You are Linda Jackson." She said, "No Judy." She said, "You know I was just talking about you the other day and I will never forget the kinds of things that you did for us." I was teaching up the hollow. I was principal up the hollow at River View School. She said, "People don't thank people enough and people are dying so fast." At that time two or three of the

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

teachers had or something and she said, "Whenever I see Mrs. Snow next time ..." She just stood there with tears down and just gave me a hug. Those are the kinds of things ... and I've had the same experience with the little Welch girl. I was there in 1956. I'm still corresponding ...

CZ: She still writes you?

MS: She three sons who are grown now and I'm their Godmother. I've been back once to visit them and everything but, I see ... and that's a long connection and I'm not going ... I talk to much anyway.

CZ: No you don't.

MS: Yes I do.

CZ: You are doing wonderful. I wanted to ask you one more question. If you're not getting tired? Are you tired?

MS: No.

CZ: Ok. You said something that caught my attention because it is a term that I use, that you did something just for meanness. What do you mean by that?

MS: Well, I felt that they shouldn't put things in the Superintendent's bulletin which I was supposed to receive if they didn't mean it. It said ANYBODY who wanted an application ...

CZ: That's right! Anyone and it should mean that.

MS: And I was angry about something, not angry, just upset about something else that had happened. I don't know what it was and I said, "I'll fix them. I'll go up there and get an 11 application."

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

CZ: Because you knew that the wouldn't approve?

MS: Laughs!

CZ: No, I just think ...

MS: Make them suffer.

CZ: Yes. No, that's what I said, just for oneryness. I mean, that's something I do just for plain old meanness sometimes.

MS: Laughs! Yes, but a ...

CZ: And I think that is one of the ways that we perhaps deal with oppression or when someone's ... you know ... without being harmful to them. I think, you know, that's not a bad way to do things.

MS: Yes, that's one thing, I don't like to do anything to anyone that really causes any grief, you know. I try not, but you know you can't go through life not hurting someone, but sometimes it's being misunderstood. If you just have a chance to clear ...

CZ: Yes, I think that's a lot of the problems between different races and different cultures. We just don't understand each other and so we do things that may harm each other without really understanding that.

MS: Meaning too. That's right.

CZ: But I think that a lot of the racism against Blacks has been intentional by some people. Not by everyone, but by some people and its very hurtful not to be able to eat in a public place or something like that. See I take that for granted, that you, that we can all just do what we want

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

to.

MS: Laughs. Uh huh if you have the money, you can set and eat.

CZ: Yes, you know and the same thing with ... I was born here, but my father was in the Air Force and so we traveled.

MS: Oh a lot.

CZ: And we came back here when he retired. In the Air Force there is a different integration that goes on then even right here in our communities. And, so you know, I was just with all different kinds of children in school and I never thought anything about it, I mean it was just how it is, like you said you know you didn't think about the boys and the girls getting along or something, it's just how it happened. You know it's just normal and the first time I became aware of prejudice, we moved from Anchorage Alaska, to Myrtle Beach South Carolina. Talk about a culture change! But, there was that Southern prejudice that I had to deal with and I was not very happy with it but that was the first exposure and I was in 6th grade then. I mean that was the first time that I had even encountered any type of prejudice. So, it's interesting.

MS: It is. I said it, I had to speak down at State once concerning, well they didn't call it, it was something to do with integration of schools and I used a topic. I had interviewed a number of blacks to get their versions of the kinds of things that happened to them immediately after the schools were integrated and some of the things that had happened I didn't even know about or anything like that, but I made this speech that in our, what did I call it, there is an assignment on the black board, on the chalk board, don't erase it and I was saying to the predominately black group, I guess there were whites and blacks there at the college. I told about these kinds of experiences and that what I think that our predecessors, our ancestors, would want and I said, they would leave the message that there are things yet to be done. The assignment is do it and do it something, I don't know now ... I tried to use some kind of word, but don't erase it, leave it there and we have to do something about it. There are a lot of things that African Americans

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

need to do and adjust to and you know, there are two sides to the coin. I won't often say that because some of my friends get after me.

CZ: I understand that, it happens on both sides of the fence.

MS: (Laughs)

CZ: Just to wind up the interview, can you think of any story about the camp while you were here that you would like to tell? That you would like to have, you know on the oral history itself?

MS: I think the bonding, the warmth that was generated from more than just the camp fire. There was something about it, the camp fires that we had. We had some kind of an area called the, oh I forget, the arena or something that we went down to have our nightly camp fire. There was something about that. There was something about a feeling that you got.

CZ: Some kind of spiritual type thing?

MS: Yes. Just something inside that most of the girls and most of the staff - I still see two or three of the staff members, you know, occasionally. (They say,) "Hi Wahoo." And we'd talk about different kinds of experiences. Like - the girl - see we all had to sleep together, I don't mean sleep together, but sleep in the same building, area and the restrooms were just curtain covered toilet. And the girls had told me since they have grown, have grown up that they would wait until they would hear me snore. I do snore. (Laughs) And they knew that was their time to tip out and go over to the cookie jar and get some cookies or whatever they had. Little things like that they remember. But most of all, there was something peaceful, something that is hard to describe that went on among those girls. They would come her, I think they came in on a Sunday and left on a Sunday, I believe it is, was. It was something like that. When they first came, some of them were, well..., kind of doubtful whether they were going to want to even stay up in these woods for the whole time, but by the time we had our last camp fire they just, it was just indescribable the kind of feeling you got and I think that was the greatest thing that got a chance to have a kind of a feeling for someone that you've never known before. You discovered

Mary Crozier Snow Interview

some things about some people, some girls, that you didn't know about them too, but I think that the feeling up here, inspite of the building being under construction and the woods not quite not clear and the roads rough and in spite of those things, there was an inner something that we got in that short time. And I believe that those participants in this camp in ten days, I bet you could see a difference in their relationships with each other.

END OF INTERVIEW