

**Interview with
Wesley Lynch
by Joe Nilles,
June 20, 1997**

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Released Form signed by Wesley Lynch
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Transcriber not identified
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Wesley Lynch Interview

Joe Nilles: This is Joe Nilles, I'll be interviewing Wesley Lynch for the Marshall University Department of Oral History in regard to his experience as director of Camp George Washington Carver, between 1955 and 1961. We will start with the basic information; can I have you say your name and hometown and tell us a little bit about yourself.

Wesley Lynch: Wesley Lynch and I was born in Fayette County, Harewood, West Virginia and of course after the coal mine strike of 1928 and 29 my dad moved to, all of his ten children, to Boone County, over in High Coal near Whitesville, West Virginia. There we did not have a black high school in Boone County at that time but we finished the ninth grade at the mouth of the hollow in a ninth grade school. I was the youngest in the family and only four of us went to college which was something they did not have for blacks in Boone County at the time. When I was thirty..., well in 1936, I finished ninth grade and the next year I went over to Simmons High School in Montgomery to live with close family friends and after that I went to Garnet in Charleston and lived with Coach G. Moore, William G. Moore because I had pretty good athletic capabilities, they decided some of the blacks in Charleston, as well as the coach, Bob Harris of Simmons High School, and of course they are having their reunion coming up in August for Simmons High School. Then later the next year I was persuaded to come to Charleston to Garnet High School basically to take advantage of a high school education that was good also as well as Simmons High School. That gave me a better permanence in being with a couple that really wanted me and Marvin Richardson, who we called one another brothers. He was a teacher and coach at South Charleston High School who passed away. Well, I guess Marvin passed about three years ago. He was likewise myself, sort of, with no mother and no father and no family so he was brought from Lexington four years ahead of me. I went over to William G. Moore's. So Marvin also stayed with William G. Moore and Garnet in Charleston so we two boys who came from areas, Marvin from Lexington, Virginia and myself from Boone County where there was no black high school for us. We happen to come to Charleston to go and learn and also to go up to Simmons for one year because there was no black high school in Boone County for myself and Marvin. So I am having him in this because we came up in the same household. That is under the coach and his wife who... and his wife who... went to Garnet high school in Charleston. And of course, we have a very active alumni program now at Vernon? High School. It was on Shrewsbury Street, 413 Shrewsbury Street, and of course his widow is

Wesley Lynch Interview

still living and of course coach has since passed in 1976. When I went to Africa I was fortunate that I brought my family back from Africa at the end of my tour of duty in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda as the director of Peace Corps in Arusha Tanzania. My daughter went to school with Joe Mokinyeta's daughter at the University College of Nairobi. My young daughter went to school in Arusha local school where the British type, everybody had the same kind of dress on. The children...

WL: Uniforms?

WL: Uniforms, yeah, and you can change a lot of this, I'm sure, take some of it out, right?

WL: If I need to, I'll just...

WL: Anyway, when we came back from Tanzania, of course, I rejoined West Virginia University for a while. Then the offer came to have a group of us from the university to do an agricultural program in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. So, I went into that for awhile and later on that was a part of the original and I came back and joined the extension service, rejoined the extension service at West Virginia University before I retired.

JN: That is how you got into 4-H?

WL: Yeah, I was a 4-H club agent and, of course, director of the Negro, at that time, 4-H extension program in agriculture. We worked and did judging at the state fair and put up state exhibits at the state fair as Negro workers, or black as you might call them now. Later, I got an offer to go to Vietnam and I went to Vietnam, for two years, a little over two years. After Vietnam I came back to West Virginia University and rejoined, living in Morgantown, as a member of the resource conservation department. Later on, coming back, I'm telling a lot of this but I think it's not much connection with the camp, same time it is a relation of my connection of moving from place to place.

Wesley Lynch Interview

JN: We want to know a little about how you came to the camp.

WL: I came to the camp after I came back from the trip that the university, from Africa, and I became the director of the extension program for Negro workers. I was coming around campus one day and the director said, agriculture, Madison Broadnecks, told me that Dr. Wallace wanted to talk with me later on, concerning coming up here to direct the 4-H camp. So that's what I did and discussing it with him there were certain things I would have to get involved with, making the budgets, planning the activities, and doing the work of the camp, and taking care of the staff, and things of this sort. And Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds here, Thomas Banks, who had been here for a long time, under the previous director, Carl Harriston who resigned. Elderly gentleman, originally principal of the high school over in Williamson, which was a black high school, but then he left there to come here. I came back here to be, he left, and then President Wallace wanted me here as the director of the camp. As being director of the camp, I left here later on to go back to the university and then, of course, the opportunity to go to Vietnam for two years. Go to Vietnam, the programs, agriculture? Went to Vietnam to teach the Vietnamese how to raise rice. I get a discussion, I get a laugh out of that, you know, because, you know. I was in two providences, Kim-phong and Can-Tho with headquarters Can Tho down in the Mekong Delta. I went through that after training in Washington and Hawaii and we all, about eighty to a hundred of us, and I worked in the providences of Kim-phong and Can-Tho. Then after my tour was over, I came back to rejoin the university and the program extension. That is when we went into offices down at West Virginia State College. And later on, that was when Woodard was the chancellor, you ever hear of him?

JN: Vaguely. I've heard him mentioned.

WL: Yeah, he took over for another fellow... but Woodard was the chancellor of the, head of the board, and he came down to the office one day and saw Eugene Carter, mining extension director for West Virginia State College Extension Service and he mentioned that he was looking for space and we would have to move and this was, of course, '74 or '75, I can get those figures from there. But anyway, he mentioned we would have to move from the library of West Virginia State College because the university was planning to take over some of the

Wesley Lynch Interview

space. At that time, we were just lost- where we'd going to go- so we wound up at the present university area, in the, where the hospital is up there, you know where it is now? In Kanawha City? Well, they have a graduate program up there, upstairs, on the third floor- second floor.

JN: College of Graduate Studies?

WL: No, on the second floor, the university had this part of the hospital for extension work and under this program was, well, Roland Manthey, who is no longer with the West Virginia program, I think he's out in Oregon. Roland Manthey was the director of the extension program. Of course, Ed Collins was my direct boss and we were all in the extension program together, overall extension. After that I continued to work over the state on behalf of all programs, such as housing and community development, and I was a very active member of the housing development fund, on the board at that time. But, when my term was over, I didn't get reappointed by Caperton but I did for sixteen years by Rockefeller and Governor Arch Moore and this is after I'd retired.

JN: How old were you when you started at the camp?

WL: 1954, born in 1920.

JN: I can do the math later.

WL: Let's do it now, OK- born in 1920, but I became the director in '55. That's 35, right? 35? Yeah, that's right. I looked at the figure before. So I was 35 years old. And it's interesting how a lot of people said, "He's mighty young to take that camp at thirty-five years of age" and that's what a lot of our people used to say, you know. And I think that's why some of the problems, I had a few problems, but I worked them out. Especially around the camp here with people in this community of Clifftop and Babcock State Park and perhaps they wouldn't want this in the record but under Carl Harriston, when he was the first director, the camp was dynamited. You might not want to put that in there, but people were afraid to even come up here and Carl Harriston had to jump up at night and and take off and run down to Winona, to some black man. Now, I

Wesley Lynch Interview

don't know if you're going to put that in there or not.

JN: I think it's important to get all of it.

WL: But at the same time, after Carl Harriston, he stayed there several years longer and after that things got settled. You know there's something else, as soon as I got here, we didn't know the camp boundaries. But then again, I had a very close friend down in Clifftop, his name was Johnny Smith and we developed a very good relationship, he and his family and myself and my family. Johnny allowed me to use his tractor and his equipment from his farm to help with ground and putting in seeding and grass and things of this sort.

JN: Johnny Harrison, is that what you said?

WL: No, Carl Harriston was the director before that, but Johnny down in Clifftop. You know, I got distracted, it'll come to me. Later on, we were close together and he got some assistance from me for his tractor. Johnny and Madeline, Madeline comes up now to the big program, what do you call it, the DoWop? You heard of the DoWop?

JN: I haven't...

WL: They have five thousand...

JN: Didn't they just have...

WL: No, a group of people come here when there is no camping session and this DoWop that George has on up here, George Jordan. Well he, this DoWop is coming up here in June, July, August, or sometime. And they have five thousand people out here.

JN: Wow.

WL: Yeah, but that wasn't part of the camp program and I brought my granddaughter and

Wesley Lynch Interview

myself, I've been here during the time that they've had it, there's country music and lots of barbecuing and things of this sort.

JN: Sounds nice.

WL: Yeah, ask about the DoWop. Johnny Smith...

JN: Johnny Smith.

WL: ...was the fellow that befriended me and his wife, and Joanne and Madeline, are down there in the house where Johnny died and I came over to the funeral, about three years ago. Of course, they're down there still with their farm out at Landisburg, but they live in Clifftop and have become very adept in taking care of those cattle, Joanne notified me not long ago that they had fifty cattle. Their daughter and her mother are taking care of them, she has even managed that farm and of course, at times got some help from the veterinarian, because she said, they're saying she's doing wonderful with fifty cows and she's taking care of them. But anyway, the father who died, he's buried over there in that cemetery on the other side of Lewisburg, and he was my good friend and my leader up here on behalf of myself and friendly. So anyway, that was ... in ... where was I?

JN: You were talking about Johnny Smith and the tractor.

WL: Yeah, and he did work around the camp. The keeping up of the camp, like the plumbing, I told you that Tom Banks, originally from Ansted, was Mr. Harriston's, the first camp director, as well as mine, the superintendent of the grounds. So, he did all the work- he went down to Mann's Creek on the river, worked on the pump house, got the water coming up in the two-inch pipe, and we operated the swimming pool, and sometimes we had two hundred young people here at this camp, because the black children came from Fairmont, Bluefield, Logan, Williamson, all over. At that time, we could not go to Jackson's Mill, that was before integration. So, we later stayed in our...? up here. Like I said, after I came back from Africa, I went back down to State College as the housing specialist that worked with Housing Development Fund

Wesley Lynch Interview

under Rockefeller and Arch Moore.

JN: Integration was in..?

WL: `64 or `63? Well, integration was in 1954. That's when the law was passed, 1954. And then, I was up here at that time and I had mixed camps. I made an effort to get some mixed camps, such as the Scouts and Eugene Carter, I mentioned with the mining extension program, his family is still down in Institute there. We were under West Virginia University but stationed down in Institute and until I moved over to the place in Kanawha City with the hospital. You know the hospital has a section there for the university extension, in Kanawha City. We all moved up there after State College and, what was his name, he was the director, head of education, Prince Woodard. You ever hear that name?

JN: I've heard the name.

WL: Prince Woodard came in, I told you he was in the office one day. He was saying we would have to make some arrangements because they were looking for a place for the library expansion and all that, so I was able to say well I'm not in control but we have to do what we have to do. So later on, he left and went down in Virginia to this big Virginia school and later died from what I understand. But we stayed there in the extension program and Carter finally retired when they moved his unit back, totally all over to Morgantown and they used... moved mine, the extension service, to, that's the homemakers as well as agriculture, to C.N. Hospital down in Kanawha City. They gave us a space in the education program upstairs on the second floor.

JN: So, you had more campers here than just 4-H campers, you had scouts...

WL: Yes, we had scouts and we had mining extensions who used to come up and study in that house across the street, over there. And then Eugene Carter would have them study following up on some of their studies during the year and then take the test over there and pass their mining extension tests and become coal mining...

Wesley Lynch Interview

JN: Inspectors?

WL: Inspectors. He did a lot of that and joined with him was Bennett Ferguson, whose family is still now down in Hansford, West Virginia, but Benny died a few years back. And Eugene Carter died a few years back, but all of that was part of this transition from here down to Institute at the college but after that we didn't have any reason to hold on to the program here, the mining extension, and it was done through Morgantown. Carter died and then Ferguson died and that just phased everything out practically.

JN: How was the camp received by the outsiders, people...

WL: Well, that's what I mentioned to you... Yeah, you mentioned that...

JN: That, see the WPA built this camp and it started in the early 30's and they had hogs up here as big as this desk. WPA men working and lived here and way down in the bottom where it's so flat, chickens, hogs, and gardens, and there was a big cesspool and one the boys was driving the other day and I told him where one of the cesspools was and it was right over the hill down there, but I understand but it's been a different connection now, that that's not needed. They used to have to get a sanitary board person to come up here and it would cost \$800.00 or \$1000.00, to get the cesspool cleaned out, there was damage to the bottom, behind the barracks, down over the hill. Anyway, we stuck it out. My daughters still with us and I went over to Fayetteville and talked to the superintendent at that time, Mr. Walker, and I was determined I was going to put my children into school there at Clifftop. He said we would work it out, in spite of the fact we had no blacks in the area to go there, my only two daughters would be in school by themselves, alone as far as race was concerned, minorities, being the only two. Well no, the older one went out to Nutall? and the younger one went down to Clifftop to the local school. What did you ask me a while ago?

JN: I was asking how people received the camp...

WL: Oh yeah.

Wesley Lynch Interview

JN: And you mentioned Johnny Smith and how he helped you out a lot.

WL: Very much.

JN: Did most people help you?

WL: There was a Mrs. Knight, I believe, she and my wife became very close friends, and the postmaster, and a few of the people. There hadn't been too many blacks. You know the last blacks were here, came around the early part of the 20's and they were out here in Landisburg at a saw mill, out of North Carolina and I got that history from some of my friends coming up after the, say a depression. They came from North Carolina and came in here and worked in the saw mills down at Babcock Park and helped build those cabins down there. But, another thing that happened with me when I was here, I was determined to make a survey of the camp grounds. Now I had a map of it and there was five hundred and twenty nine acres listed at this campground but I understand that in the last, President Carter, I don't know whether he knows it or not, but I understand that this ground now has been reduced to only the entrance coming in
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WL: and the ground around it. Well, we have access to camping and outside and marching and taking tours, and things that sort. The rest of it, I understand, ought to be good to be checked, to be turned over to Babcock State Park. But in 1958, I had Mr. Walker to come, and got approval through the office of West Virginia State College to do a survey of the camp and boundaries and that's, and I walked with him completely around the campground because it was winter and there's some rattlesnakes down there. You know in the woods, in the hot summertime you couldn't pay me to go down there now, but in the wintertime we did the survey on this campground and walked around this campground and I marked and had an axe, a hatchet, and marked and painted a yellow line around each tree when I got a certain distance. And Mr. Walker would say, "Well, I'll take this boundary and you can put that in..."

Wesley Lynch Interview

END TAPE ONE- SIDE A.

WL: BEGINNING TAPE ONE- SIDE B.

WL: ...the surveyor got finished at this point and marked and those yellow lines stayed. I saw some of them a few years back but they had just about worn off the trees now. Those yellow lines marked the camp boundary. They started as we came in there, and go on around and down through here, then zag and come across and then on around and down, back next to border of Babcock State Park. And then on around to different places in the back and that yellow line is how I determined the camp boundaries. But eventually, it naturally, will have gone away about this time because that was in 1958. That was almost thirty years ago. So anyway, when I left John Jones became the director of the camp, I left in 61, I think. Did I say 61?

JN: It said out on a picture of you in front of the camp, it says 55 thru 61.

WL: O.K. that's what it was, cause that's when I went back to State College as the, Mr. J.O. Knapp, West Virginia University Extension appointed me as the director of the extension service after Carl Harriston left, I told you he left here, and I went back to Institute.

JN: You mentioned in the reporters' office something about other church groups and kids coming up.

WL: Oh yeah, church groups from Beckley area, Oak Hill, and Minden area and out of Montgomery area and other church groups from different areas over in the other side of White Sulfur Springs.

JN: This was a real resource for the black community.

WL: Yeah, and they would come over and be filled up down there in the camp in the tree territories where there was nice shade and they would come up and play ball and different things of that sort. And on church Sundays or whatever their day was going to be. In addition,

Wesley Lynch Interview

the swimming pool's working and I hope that they will be able to do something about it. George, I think, said he's going to get to work on it. All these different groups came in here, but at the same time they started using it, as soon as the weather got, was broken, like now and go through the summer and along through to October, for picnic groups or churches.

JN: Did this go along at the same time as the other campers were here?

WL: No, the campers leave, see, on Saturday morning.

JN: I see, so they were just here Monday through Friday.

WL: So, they were here than by themselves, the church groups and the picnic groups, and that's when we would have picnic groups in here and go back to their communities and towns and like I said, White Sulfur and different places. There's a place over here that's very active, this is in the big group, and a couple of young black boys in their early years, say eight to ten years old, was drowned in Big Car, no Big Stone, and it was in the Gazette Paper about them getting drowned just on the other side of Rainelle. I think they were in a creek or something of that sort but it's those type that came over and we welcomed them and they registered and there were several hundreds and hundreds of people who came in here. Now for the camp attendance, there was Geraldine Bellmere who lived in Fairmont, who would bring a busload of people here- 4-Hers, 4H club under her jurisdiction `cause she was under the university and she was the extension home-demonstration and 4-H club agent. So, she would bring some of them, sometimes out of Philippi. You know, there's a group of people in Philippi called, what do you call them, they are not black and they're not white, but...

JN: Mulatto?

WL: They were always around the courthouse, similar at the end of it, but they always sat around the courthouse. I know the principle of Washington High School, black high school, down at, not Cedar Grove, but London, West Virginia, I think his wife was one of the members of this group from Philippi. They were under segregation too, so they'd just hang around the

Wesley Lynch Interview

courthouse and I guess sometimes in Philippi they would be forced to go to some kind of school.

JN: Well, let's talk about the coal miners...

WL: Yeah, the coal miners had this camp and they studied and at the end they had representatives from the miner's headquarters, extension, miner's state program to go over there and they would take their mine exam test, and pass or fail or whatever, they would, based on that fact, be declared if they were successful as mine inspectors and Eugene Carter did that right out from the house over there.

JN: Was that just black mine inspectors?

WL: Well, it was mostly black because I think the white mining inspectors had other white groups to train and other white staff to train them. A lot of them volunteered to come over with Eugene Carter because they was very good instructors and some of the miners wanted to come here if it involved in Eugene Carters' mining programs, so he used to carry these programs all the way over to McDowell County and Mercer County in mining and then come here and get their final exams to get their mine papers, become mine inspectors. Carter was the director of the mining extension program but it was under West Virginia State College but financed by West Virginia University budget. It's just like our extension program, financed through West Virginia State College's budget . The history of the college was, you know, everything came through this, usually my budget was around \$20,000. When that was sent in, the legislature would approve it or cut whatever out or add to it, along with West Virginia State College's budget and that's what there was some question of the other day. President Carter had several people who called, as to who was in charge of my budget and where did I submit it. So I submitted directly to the business office of West Virginia State College and than they would present it along with theirs to the legislature and they approved it, they approved my \$20,000 and they would approve, I guess, theirs too, have theirs up for approval.

JN: Among the 4-Hers that came here were, actually from all the camps. Did people, as a

Wesley Lynch Interview

resource, did they use it, was it an opportunity for blacks and special 4-H campers from different parts of the state to meet?

WL: Morgantown and Fairmont, I had sometimes as many as two hundred and from Williamson and Logan come in on, I think it was Sunday, no they would come in on Monday. Some had school buses at their disposal, like Fairmont and Mercer county I know. Miss Amanda Anderson, I think I saw her here today, was one of the homemakers under the Homemakers teacher, was under the jurisdiction of West Virginia State College's group of Homemakers, home economists.

JN: Home economists would come up and do something with the camp?

WL: Yeah, they would bring children in here and they would also do camps sometimes on the campus at State College, also up here for the women and women's group and have workshops on vegetable gardening and vegetable, you know, preservation, food preservation, classes on things of that sort. That was about the gist of it, and then in 19.., well the end of it was, is when I left to go to State College and John Jones took over and I went down to State College as Mr. Knapp, who headed the whole program, appointed me as director of Negro extension work. That was around 19.., I don't know, I said it a while ago, my wife knows, and we didn't stay very long 'cause we went back to the university and went to Vietnam.

JN: Well, I guess you kind of covered quite a bit, can you remember any stories about the camp, you know any interesting instances that happened or anything like that, just amusing? The interesting part about it for me ...?

WL: I know of one time when a WPA was here, there was some misunderstanding, concern that the whites did not want the blacks in the area. Now do you want me to add that?

JN: That's fine. Anything that's interesting, just for the history of the camp and all of it's important.

Wesley Lynch Interview

WL: Well, I told you about the survey I had for, by this Walker, whose family was in Meadowbridge. He did a beautiful job, Walker, elderly fellow, and I walked around with him and painted those trees, the lines. Then there was, before I got here, the original director, Carl Harriston, left the high school in Williamson to come up here as the first director and he's on the page at the end of the light, as well as myself and my wife and when Carl left...

JN: You mentioned something about the WPA built the camp? Yeah.

WL: As I recall, I mean I wasn't alive, I heard there was different groups, there was black WPA and that was segregated as well. Was it built by black WPA or white WPA?

WL: As far as I know, and I know I would have heard, the WPA built the camp, the crew of the WPA, as far as I know, there was no, well, there had to be segregation because they wouldn't have stayed on, and what I've talked with, down at Winona, were old blacks involved, I know I brought them up here to work in the camp program, in the kitchen and cleaning up and things of this sort. Many blacks down in Winona, they were tickled to death to be able to come up here and work.

JN: But when it was built it was built by...

WL: Totally built by whites. I would garner that's what it was, I never saw any blacks involved, and pictures involved, the only ones was President John W. Davis, he was on the program, board out there, and members of the State Board of Education, and officials, and Matthew Neeley who was the governor, couple of times, for, were brought up here and pictures taken of the camp's construction and I didn't see any blacks working except President Davis, as president of the college. Mr. Rutherford, who somebody asked me about it last week, Mr. Rutherford was the business manager of the college, well, they just took over. They ran the business part and that's why I say, I did my budget here and the college approved it and sent it with West Virginia State College's budget to the legislative approval.

JN: You also mentioned that when Carl Harriston?... Yeah, he was the first director. ...there

Wesley Lynch Interview

was an incident with dynamiting...

WL: I hated to say that, you know, because things have gone so well, I wouldn't want to offend a lot of my white friends around here.

JN: I don't think anybody's offended. I mean history is history...

WL: Yeah, but he was sitting out here one day, one night, in his way?, he drove a black Lincoln, four door sedan, and I guess this was when it was just beginning and out on that end, he had come back and he was sitting, he lived here, in this enclave. They did their cooking in here, and slept upstairs, had a place for visitors upstairs, their personal friends, and they was sitting and all at once the place went up in a shot, in a bomb, dynamite and he jumped up and jumped in his car.

WL: and took off and went down to Winona to get some help and ran to where the nearest black folks were and they were all over Winona. You been to Winona?

JN: I've never been down there.

WL: Well, you need to go down there because there are not any blacks down there now, but we kept going to church down there 'til we left. We had a big, pretty good size, church community because they came from over in Edmund, and they came from some of the other little communities, Ansted and Victor, you know Victor is on down below where you turn off to go across the big bridge. That's where blacks worked and farmed but...

JN: But when you needed supplies...

WL: I went to Rainelle and ordered it. Now sometimes after I got in here, I started a feeding program which is what the college wanted me to do and make it on the basis of West Virginia State, or say West Virginia Tech, and the students come in and they sit down and eat, the 4-Hers, like that and they would sit down and eat. And I had my own cooks that I hired out of

Wesley Lynch Interview

Winona, and they would come here and they stayed upstairs, also I said they stayed upstairs but during the summer Carl Harriston earlier had stayed upstairs, he and wife until they built this house over here. A staff from West Virginia State College, in the carpentry shop and so forth, and then Carl moved over there in that house, that's director's house, which is where I lived. Then this other house over there was the mining extension and guest house. Mining extension was downstairs in that basement over there, I slept there the other night. That's where they're making some additional room for people who come in here to be in the program or participating in the program, so that was the training house and guest house and the director lived in that house. I began to put things together, and organize, and went to Jackson Mills and saw how they did their feeding program and then I would go to some of the camps and see how they organized, so Dr. Wallace told me, "Now you gonna have to start a feeding program. Those women can't continue to bring food here in baskets to feed these children."

JN: So, when you got here they were bringing baskets of food up?

WL: Well, everybody got together and said, "Gotta go to Clifftop, the camp starts Monday, the camp starts Monday." Therefore, the homemakers, there was three or four of them in charge, and they made arrangements to go to Rainelle and buy food.

JN: O.K., so the same homemakers that where up here doing the, were in charge of the feeding...

WL: Providing the feeding, and I had already hired staff of women from Winona and they would come and sell something, and anytime, or at least anytime, usually it was pretty full during the summer. So, they would stay all summer long 'til the end of camp. They'd go back to their homes in Winona.

JN: How did the kids react when they first came to camp, did they...?

WL: Black kids under the black women homemakers, and that's who it was and than sometimes we got a guest speaker, like John W. Davis was a guest speaker at times, who was

Wesley Lynch Interview

president of West Virginia State College. Sometimes it was black educators and Dr. Hopkins who was the head of the Bureau of Negro Welfare, everything was still segregated and I arranged segregated, knowledgeable people to be here, to speak a lot when something was going on.

JN: So, you were very interested in the education of the children?

WL: Yeah, well that's right. So, most of the other women were too because they were here and those kids had a good time. They had balls and bats and recreation and they learned homemaking and canning and cooking, and while, then they had their meals just like they're having out there now. People in the kitchen prepare the meals, but that was my staff and there was a picnic, they, nobody was here, they'd leave on Saturday and nobody was here on Sunday. On Monday, a new group would come in.

JN: O.K., so every week it was another group?

WL: Yeah, another group coming in, up through October, and sometimes if they wanted to come I'd let them come in October if the weather seemed to be doing alright- so, O.K. you're welcome to come. I'd have the maintenance man to fix things up, technically with the water system and all that and then I'd have the cooks from down at Winona, up here to cook their food, if they wanted. Otherwise, they might bring their own.

JN: Did anything happen, did you do anything during the off season? Were there any special duties up here during the...

WL: No, but what I did I traveled the state as the extension representative and the director of, work for the extension service, black, and I would go from county to county doing gardening programs and then doing other types of community development programs. They'd call me in from Mercer County and then call me in from Marion County, I'd go back to the State College, Institute, and I'd make a schedule and I go up to Mercer County and maybe to McDowell County and Logan County during the week and map my schedule. Until the next spring and

Wesley Lynch Interview

we'd go through the same pattern again and have, getting the camp started for the new camping season. Can you see that?

JN: I was just looking to see if I had another tape and making sure I...

WL: Do you have it?

JN: Oh yeah, we've still got a little bit and I've got plenty more so ... How did most people get up here?

WL: They drove. In the wintertime, you know, I was here by myself and I did have some showing the snow that was here. So, when I came here too, that's another thing, Carl Harriston, sometimes, the elderly man would get snow bound and he couldn't get out. He'd have to wait here. There was a state road commission out here, you might have seen it coming by, but what I had to do, I had to go over to Rainelle, not Rainelle, but to Lewisburg which is where they have the largest coal operation in this section 'cause out here they had to get approval from Lewisburg and I went to Lewisburg and got approval to get this road paved.

JN: So, it wasn't paved when you...

WL: No.

WL: JN:...got here?

WL: No, just rock and like coal, builders of the camp, put red dog, you know what red dog is?

JN: It's...

WL: Burned coal, all that type of thing and that's what it was until we got it surfaced and than I was able to go to Lewisburg and to get that done and put this road in here and than later on made a little better road by, you know, riding the headquarters over at Lewisburg to come over

Wesley Lynch Interview

here and lay this road all the way up to the camp. And later on, that was after we've gotten around, all the way into Clifftop. There's a big company store down there, have you ever been by there?

JN: No.

WL: You see this great big building, the company store, right in the middle of town. You know where company stores are? It's where the coal miners shop.

JN: Yeah.

WL: Their records are kept there when they go in the mines...

JN: Script...

WL: Script and the script card and than, of course, there was the mail, it's where I got my mail too. There was an incident that I had too down there. I worked in an Oldsmobile plant in Lansing, Michigan when I was doing my graduate work, at Michigan State. I came back was able to get the job and like I said, Mr. Wallace, President Wallace, Brodnag, Mr. Brodnag, who was head of the ag' department, called me and asked me said, "We want you to go to 4-H camp, Carl Harriston's leaving. He's going to department of education as director of Negro Workers, Negro Sisters." I said, "Ah man, I don't want to go up there in that mountain, you know what's up in those mountains?" He said, "Now, I don't know about that," said, "but give it some thought. You're the most capable of going" and said, "after you get your free food, even after camp was over." I had a budget allotment to go to Rainelle and buy this food anyway for my family and my camp superintendent who took, maintenance man, who took care of it, Tom Banks. So he said, "You think about it," said, "this is something worth while to the area." But everybody that thought of us being here, myself, my wife, Tom Banks, the maintenance man, who lived out here in a hut, beyond the swimming pool. Nice place though, he kept it warm nights though and myself, four of us here: my two girls, and my wife, and myself and Tom, six of us all together, we lived after the camp was gone. Then kids leave and the bus take them

Wesley Lynch Interview

away until next year and then we're faced here lonesome, nobody around. Nobody around.

JN: Must of been very quiet.

WL: Quiet, you know, and sometimes we'd let Tom off, yeah, but he seldom ever wanted to go away, he wanted to stay right in here, his TV and his radio playing and we said, "Tom we're going down to Montgomery and we're going down to Charleston to visit some friends." "Oh yeah, that's alright, I don't mind it." And he was originally from over at Ansted, you know where Ansted is?

JN: No...

WL: You don't know where Ansted is? Just down here thirteen miles.

JN: ...from here.

WL: Oh O.K., how long you been in West Virginia?

JN: I've been in West Virginia since about 1993, my mother grew up in Stubenville, Ohio, right across...

WL: Oh yeah, I know where Stubenville is.

JN: Actually, we have relatives over in Lansing...

WL: Lansing, yeah, I started to buy a house in Lansing, when I came out of Michigan State, had a good job in Oldsmobile. Yeah, but that's not this.

Wesley Lynch Interview

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B.

WL: BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE A.

WL: ...and I used to look at it all the time and I'd go out to, sometimes I'd deal at the Brooks' place out here at the intersection of Route 60 and 21 going over into Beckley and, I think it was 21. Do you know?

JN: 19?

WL: Going over to Beckley.

JN: I don't know the roads around here.

WL: Well, anyway, it won't hurt, and then the other section went on over to Rainelle and then on to Lewisburg and that's when there was no camp and we'd do work on the camp, and Tom was very good at it and made cabinets and did quite a few things around and camp out, we were left alone. My family and I lived over in that house and Tom just liked the place over there and he had a good warm stove and he had a great big truck, 4 wheels in the rear, 4 wheels and two wheels in front, that could just get over all the ground in the big snows and I've got snow, I should have brought those pictures, but I've got snows that high...

JN: About four feet or so.

WL: High as a steering wheel on my blue truck I had and sometimes I had to wait 'til, well that was another thing, I got a plow. I went down to the mining, there was this friend of mine who was down in Clifftop, down in Smith, and I went over and bought a plow from the coal mining company at Ansted and when I got that plow I made a lot of friendships with that too because I went on through Clifftop cleaning the road down there because the... I used to get my gas out there too, and the road commission out here didn't have enough plows to take care of us too so

Wesley Lynch Interview

they'd have to wait, we'd have sometimes wait a week before all this got done.

JN: So, you could really get stranded up here.

WL: Yeah, and we'd get stranded, yeah, until... because I've got to get all these other roads down to Landisburg and on out and Babcock Park and nobody here but us but they didn't necessarily have to, we were no emergency and we had a big truck but I was lucky enough to get a big snow plow and I got it, where was it, down here at Crawford Motors. Gone out of business now, I pointed it to them coming up the hill by the school, Nutall High School, was high school now Nutall Grade School and I pointed it out them coming up that hill where I used to, you know, get a lot of work done, welding and all this, and I brought this big plow up here. At Crawford's Motors down there, at Lookout and I got them to attach it and put a part on there so I could use it, utilize it, and I began to get kind of popular because I worked on Clifftop Road going to the mailbox, and going on out myself and it kinda broke in, you know. You know so many people you meet, you going up there in those mountains and those people up there- I said, "Yeah sure" and I got used to it and made a few friends and Mr. Grite and his granddaughter now, lives in the house right down in Clifftop, of course they're passed and then there was Johnny and his wife and daughter lives in Clifftop, Madeline and Joanne and they're still out at the house but I came up to Johnny's funeral, her mother and Madeline's husband, and that was about three years ago. But there was no blacks and isn't it interesting how things and people changes as the communities changes for during the, the conservation corp back in those days, as I remember it, CCC of Roosevelt they did a lot to build Babcock Park. A lot of the blacks worked in the CCC, but they didn't, they weren't housed with the blacks. There's one in Boone County, down in the Seth area, you know where Seth, you don't know where Seth is either but anyway, Boone County, they paid them 30 dollars a month, CCC workers, Civilian Conservation Corp workers and that's who mostly did a lot of work on this, with the men, WPA, and then down in Babcock Park. Another interesting experience, one route I used to have to take, I just to want and did take, I had the big truck, so we'd go down to New River. We'd go down through Babcock Park, on the side where the people come in and do parking and camping and move tent camps, camp tents and they would go all the way down, rough road that's why we took the big truck, double wheels in the rear and go down. I'd take my family

Wesley Lynch Interview

down to New River and watch the coke ovens. They were burning. Did you ever hear of coke ovens?

JN: Yeah.

WL: Yeah, did you ever see them?

JN: I've been around them but I've never seen them do it.

WL: Yeah well, I used to carry my lunch and we... coke ovens were all up and down the highway down there at Cowenting, Carbondale, and Harewood, Longacre and they're just down there before you get to Smithers, incidently don't you ever go through Smithers.

JN: O.K.

WL: Over 45 miles an hour.

JN: Are they going to catch me?

WL: They'll getcha. They caught me, one night down there I was coming, I was coming from somewhere up around Gauley Bridge and this cop, I came on down to Smithers, just coming on through, 52 miles an hour, and this cop got to the filling station there at Mt. Olive turnoff, pulled me down, got me for 52 miles an hour in a 25, no 45 miles zone. Cost me \$82.00.

JN: Oh man.

WL: \$82.00 and when you see that sign, 45 miles an hour at Smithers, you better ... they hide. I was coming up here last week and one of them came, now the first black cop there, but evidently that town is hurting for money. That's what happens when they put you out and trick and they hide and than come and get you, put the radar on you. So, I was coming in and coming down, but they got me on that one- \$82.00 went back to Charleston.

Wesley Lynch Interview

JN: When was that?

WL: About, it's been awhile, been awhile, three months, four but last week when I was coming up here to the camp to plan and help with this program, to get it set up, I passed the same area through this town of Smithers and they are putting in a new filling station, did you see it?

JN: No, I didn't see it.

WL: Well, it's right in the middle of Smithers, did you know where the stop light is? The... and I'm telling you when you see that stop light at Smithers and that Exxon Station, the left sign says Mt. Olive which is the penitentiary but there's an Exxon Station right there. Did you come that way?

JN: I came up 60.

WL: Yeah well, you passed right by it and that night, that guy was hiding someplace, black guy, black cop, and he got me and it cost me \$82.00. Well, the day when I came up here...

JN: He was waiting there again?

WL: ... last Thursday, he got in behind me, not the same one, and I watched him and I was looking at my milage, 45 miles an hour, and he got in behind me and he was just riding behind me, about four car lengths back, maybe a little more, maybe six car lengths back, and I'm coming up here last week and he got behind me and he followed me from Smithers all to way up to Kanawha Falls of Gauley Bridge, not Gauley Bridge but, yeah it was Gauley Bridge because, what was the name of that place, but he followed me, Glen Ferris where that wide river is...

JN: Yeah.

WL: He followed me up there and that's completely out of his jurisdiction. There's Glenn Ferris,

Wesley Lynch Interview

there's another one, there's Alloy, there's Boomer, there's Harwood and then Smithers, about seven towns but he went through those towns clocking me. I started to stop once, but he, I guess he got disgusted and decided, "I better not try `cause I'm out of my jurisdiction." He, I crossed the railroad tracks at this bridge down there, they run across the New River, and I crossed the railroad tracks and a lot of people fishing down there and when I crossed the tracks I saw him turn on in there and decided, "I'd better turn right, get back in my jurisdiction." That's ... if I ever see him ... I'm going by to see the mayor one of these days and tell him that.

JN: Let me get back to the 4-Her's. Did, after you stopped being director of the camp did you happen to run into any of the ex-campers and what do they have to say about..

WL: Oh, I've seen lots of them and they've said, "Oh, Mr. Lynch," said Al always think about it. We had such a good time." And a couple of young girls, 18, 19, going to the Capital High School, beyond the golf course, Coonskin, and they'd just, I've gotten any number who's saying, "We had the best time." You know, they are away now and when they come back they often repeat too, what a good time they had and what they've learned and friendships that were made and things. They'd just never had an opportunity to be together, and have the activities that they had and I guess wherever they are, some of them have gone overseas, and I guess wherever they are they talk about us, good or bad, and I hope that it's been good, that "...we had the best time when we were at that camp." Some of them never been to a camp before but they would look at the experience they had coming up here and it was fantastic and we enjoyed it. My two daughters talk about it all the time, still, and they're in late 30's and one's the early 40's.

JN: That must have been a very unique experience for them because they were here all summer.

WL: All summer and made all these friends, back and forth, back and forth, some of these friends now in Washington D.C., grown up like they are, and Detroit, and in New York and other different places and it was a tremendous experience for them and other than that ... when I was a kid, used to be up to the hollow in Boone County, I didn't know what camp was, you know,

Wesley Lynch Interview

and just didn't even garner the idea of going to camp. Nothing thought of taking off my shoes and going barefooted and playing baseball, and running barefooted and getting stone bruised under my toes. Did you ever hear of stone bruises?

JN: I've had them.

WL: And that's all we did and dam the pond up coming out of the cupboard, and dam it up and it'd be about deep as this, about five feet deep, four feet deep, three or four, and we'd lay in the pond in the water and get cool and had dammed it up and that was our extent of swimming and activities. And then make a little baseball group out of us and we'd play through the cupboard, go up and play the white boys, they'd come from Whitetown and we'd be from Blacktown and we would get together and go and play ball and that's the extent of our integration. Of course we did that because I had real experience with a fellow by name of John Haig Day whose grandfather owned the coal company and finally I told him one day, I said, oh well he had quit school, and I said, "John why did you quit school?" He said, "Well, my mother bought me a new car and," you know his granddaddy owned the coal mine, we had coal mining company, said Al just thought I'd, you know, just go to work. He put me in the company store." And all they did then was take a sheet of paper and, not a sheet of paper, but a brown paper bag and say, "You want a box of sugar, O.K." and he'd write it down, "You want a pound of bacon, might have been \$0.20." This is during the depression, the hard time, back in the 30's and so they'd write it down on the bag- you want a bottle of milk, it was \$0.15 back in those days and then they'd turn it over, "That all you want?" and then they'd add it up with a pencil and Lord knows how many mistakes they made with that pencil `cause they didn't use, you know, adding machines and they'd just do it in their heads, "O.K." I'm sure they put it their behalf, in their interest, and I asked John up there one day, "John," I said, "you know that we went to a black school down in the hollow while they went to Seth High School" and so I said, I said, "John," he told me he wasn't going to play ball anymore so I said, "Well why?" He said, "Well, my mother got me a job in the company store." And I said, "She did?" and I said "Yeah, yeah, you quitting school?" Said, "Yeah, she bought me a new car." 1935, I was fifteen years old and John started clerking in the store, now he was doing all this tabulating, couldn't hardly read or write and he said, "Yeah, my mother bought me this new car and I just decided I'd take this job in the company store." Now,

Wesley Lynch Interview

sometimes after the miners come from work, we used to go down there and when the mine powder house opened and had orders to get boxes of powder, so the coal miners in our community would use it to blow down the coal when they'd go back to work the next day. So, what we would do, get orders \$0.25, they had wagons that we made, \$0.25 to get a box of powder to take it to this community man's, this black guy's house on the wagon and it weighed twenty pounds, it wasn't much and that's what we did and then payday, he would pay us. You know, maybe for different community men, maybe six or seven boxes of powder and \$0.25 a box. But I said John, "What's, my goodness, why'd you quit school?" And he said, "Well," and he could have gone to Harvard if he wanted to, been interested, and he said, "Well, my mother bought me this car and got me this job at the company store." You heard the old song "Sixteen Tons"?

JN: Yeah. My father sings it.

WL: What?

JN: My father sings that song.

WL: Does he sing it? Is that right? Sixteen tons and what do you get another day older and deeper in debt and of course we all had gardens in the 30's when Roosevelt came into office and eight, all eight boys of us worked that garden with my dad at the head of it and he'd tell us what to do and how we had to do this and that and had to put, set the tomato plants in and get bean poles, and those string beans that grow up on the four poles like my fingers and my dad ran that rip shod and we had to be there to help him. So anyway, that was my good experience back in the 30's with the, and my mother died. I was 18 months old and left my daddy with eight boys and two girls and my dad never married again, kept us all in one house, big coal field house after we moved from over on the river near Smithers, Mt. Olive, over after the strike to High Coal, over in Boone County to this four room school and either you want to go school and leave, the way my brother and I did, or you go to out of county to one of the other high schools. So, Boone County, my brother John and I, John decided to go to Mt. Hope to Dubois High School and I decided first, one year Simmons and than another year `till I graduated, three

Wesley Lynch Interview

years down to Garnet in Charleston and that's where I got my certificate of high school. And I was a good athlete and played football at State College and did my work and went into first class at ROTC at West Virginia State College, that was in 1942 and I had a football injury that kept me from going to Fort Sill, Oklahoma with the rest of the ROTC fellows and I had to wait awhile, but waiting I had to change over and they sent me to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Fort Thomas first for implementing my procedures, my processing and than on to Fort Knox, Kentucky with the tank program. I was in tanks all the way to within twenty five miles of Berlin

JN: In World War II??

WL: Yeah, World War II, and World War III, and World War, Vietnam War and I was fortunate, I had two tanks knocked out in combat during World War II and the gunner killed and the driver. I almost got it, if I hadn't been under the tur...under the back of the tank, I had bailed out when that German 88 station sent up a flare, just as bright as daylight out here, and this was just about eight o'clock at night and they zeroed on my tank and went right up into the stick part of it, thick iron metal and that just rocked like, I don't know, a rocking chair and I was back around behind the end of it and there was another one. I had a close call a couple of times and I should have been gone, good Lord looked out for me. I had two tanks knocked out and down the intersection the Germans had us pinned in like coming in the end of that road. As soon as my tank got around there, they hit me. BAM! Got me. And other groups came in and the planes came in all of them destroyed right quick. I was twenty five and Ammerwald and twenty five miles out of Berlin and that was, I was born in 1920 so...

JN: You were with Patton's tank group?

WL: No, I was with Simpson.

JN: Simpson.

WL: Simpson was in the middle part of Germany around Reinburgh, Patton was down in the south. We had the same tanks, caliber, 75 millimeter, and than later on we the 90 millimeter

Wesley Lynch Interview

guns and five men to a crew on the tank.

JN: So what kinds of tanks were they? M41 Shermans.

JN: O.K., Shermans.

WL: Yeah, and man those big Tiger tanks, we went down to Koblenz once, we went on down to run to Germany and man, I'm telling you those big Tiger tanks used to scare us 'cause we didn't see them until we got to...

JN: Had those big 88's, uh?

WL: Oh yeah, and we found out they had a concrete? in between, the space in between us, and wheels and tracks was concrete. Man, those Germans had that war mapped out. You know the Remagan Bridge, I was there and Ken Heckler talks about it all the time.

JN: What was the town on the other side of the Remagen?, on the other side of the bridge?

WL: I've got an article on it.

JN: See, I've got an uncle that was killed.

WL: Yeah, well I had two or three people write me because because I asked for a reunion of the 784 Tank Battalion, it was my outfit and I got several, I couldn't get too much response from it ... some of them died, some of them, you know, incapacitated in some other way, and I just never get through with it, but I hear once in a while from one who had seen my request for a reunion in the place but never did gather it enough. I've written and told them just couldn't get enough together.

JN: Well, I want to thank you for this interview... Yeah.

Wesley Lynch Interview

WL: ...very much. It's been... What's your name?

JN: Joe Nilles.

WL: O.K.

JN: Very pleased to meet you.

WL: How do you spell that: N-I-L...

JN: N-I-L-L-E-S, it's the exact opposite of Nellis Air Force Base in California. A lot of people see that it N-E, but it's N-I.

WL: Nilles, Joe Nilles.

JN: Nilles, yeah, with a ...

WL: Well, I hope this can do you some good.

JN: I think you did very well.

END OF INTERVIEW