Narr: Hello, and welcome to "Tennessee's Mountain Heritage." This program is one in a series dealing with the history and cultural heritage of Tennessee's mountain people. In this series, we will be listening to the memories and recollections of men and women who have spent their lives in the Tennessee mountains and seen the region grow and change. For the most part, we will be drawing upon taped interviews deposited in the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University. These first-hand accounts are at least as informative to us as written records because of their personal flavor and the insights they give us into details of everyday life which don't always make their way into history books.

Today, Johnson City, Tennessee, is part of an industrial metropolitan region including nearly half a million people. Major corporations have located here, and their products are shipped all over the country, and even around the world. From the first, Johnson City's growth has been tied to this industrial development, yet there are still Johnson Citians who can recall a time when fields, woods, and meadows were just beginning to be replaced by streets, stores, and factories. Indeed, there was a time when there was little here except a general store, then a rail line and a water tank for the first steam locomotives that helped to open the Tennessee mountains to the industrial world. Here's a glimpse of how things used to be and how times have changed "Down in Johnson City."

(excerpt of "Johnson City Blues," recorded in 1928 by Clarence Green; see appendix for transcript)

JAG: There was nothing there in the way of development when the railroad arrived in 1856. A man by the name of Henry Johnson built a general store and later there was a post office included in the store; and the railroad had a water tank there and the railroad named the spot "Johnson's Tank," named for, of course, Henry Johnson being the local resident there. The tank and Henry Johnson's store was located on Brush Creek in about the vicinity of the Fountain Square area of Johnson City now.

The next rail line to enter Johnson City was the ET & WNC, East Tennessee and Western North Carolina, that built out of Johnson City going into Elizabethton and on across the mountains into Cranberry and later into Newland and Boone, North Carolina. That line was completed back in the early-to-middle 1880's. It was said at that time, until the ET & WNC railroad reached Boone, the only way you could get to Boone was to be born there. But it did open up a vast area of minerals and timber, and the ET & WNC had a great impact upon the industrial development in Johnson City as it gave an outlet to the vast virgin timber areas of Western North Carolina. The iron ore deposits in the Cranberry area were opened to mining and the ET & WNC railroad was used to transport the ore down to Johnson City where a huge furnace was constructed in the Carnegie area out just off of Broadway, out in the vicinity of Broadway and Fairview.

When the 3C railroad was being constructed out of Johnson City to the north, the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia (which is now

the Southern), and the ET & WNC--their lines ran very close together out in the eastern part of the city there in the vicinity of Broadway and the present-day General Shale plant. So the plans were made: all three railroads joined on a unified plan to build a Union Station just off of Broadway about where the present-day Marflow, or Tennessee Tank plant, is located.

It was in the depression of 1893, which the historians call "Cleveland's Panic"--Cleveland was president at the time, whoever was President when a depression came along, he got the credit or the honor for it, just as Hoover got the credit for the Great Depression of 1929. The foundations of the Union Station were actually built and the wall construction got up several feet off of the foundations when the crash of 1893 occurred and the 3C railroad abandoned their plans to construct in that area. Had it not been for the crash of 1893, the Union Station would have been completed, and in that day and age the railroad being your only means of transportation--both for freight coming in and out of the area, travellers coming in and out of the area, the mail, express and, uh, that was prior to the coming of commercial telephones--any communiqués sent out went out over the railroad telegraph lines--so the railroad depot was the hub of the community.

But after the crash of 1893, the bankruptcy of the 3C railroad--then the ET & WNC railroad and the Southern railroad built their stations down in the Fountain Square area. The Clinchfield,

coming in in 1906, they also built their station there very close to the ET & WNC station. Each of the railroads then had their separate depots all within about a block of each other, and consequently then Johnson City, the main business district in the hub of Johnson City, grew in the Fountain Square area rather than down in the Broadway area.

Well, naturally, the city grew as a result of the coming of the railroad, because it gave them the element of transportation that was needed for industrial development. So the coming of the railroads really were responsible for the early growth and development of Johnson City.

(excerpt of "Johnson City Blues"--see appendix for transcript)

WBM: My name is W.B. Miller. I was born in Johnson City on September the 8th, 1880. If I live until next September, I'll be one hundred years old. I started in the banking business in nineteen-and-eight. The name of the bank was the Bank of Commerce. I was cashier of the bank and I served over fifty years in the banking business. I'm now retired and I live with my daughter Micki here at 713 West Pine Street.

I'm living now in the center of my grandfather's farm. His farm was bought by Mr. George L. Carter and was developed--streets were run through here and this part of town was developed. Further east here was what was known as the Lyle

farm. There was only one house on that farm, it was owned by Mr. Raymond Lyle, lived there. Mr. George L. Carter, who promoted the Clinchfield railroad bought the Lyle farm and donated it to the state of Tennessee if they would establish a normal school here, which they did. I grew up just across the railroad track there on Tennessee Street. The house has been torn down now and occupied by the Gordon Furniture Company as a parking lot. That was about a mile from the main street down in Johnson City. Well, there's been a lot of change down on Main Street, down in town.

Jobe's Opera House was where the Jones-Vance Drug Store is now, but it was on the second floor. I went there, one of my first times to hear a lecture, by ex-Governor Bob Taylor. His lecture was on the fiddle and the bow. The opera house was crowded with people.

(Excerpt of Gov. Taylor's lecture--see appendix for transcript)

WBM: I've seen the time when we didn't have any North Johnson City. That was nothing but farmland out there. There wasn't a building out there except two residences. I've seen a lot of changes in Johnson City, and I know there are going to be more.

(excerpt of "Johnson City Rag," recorded in 1928 by the Roane County Ramblers; "Alright, Jimmy, let's have a little of that "Johnson City Rag!")

MRM: I am May Ross McDowell, and I came to Johnson City in August, 1911. I entered the Normal School in October, 1911. The school was late in opening as they were building a street car from the middle of town out to the school. And I remember quite well that my family went with me. I was a freshman in high school,

and there were more high school students than normal school students. There were less than a hundred normal school students and about 250 high school students. The reason we went out there: the old high school in Johnson City had been condemned, and they were building a new--to build a new school, up on what is known as Science Hill above our library.

We had a great time the first year because the street car would break down and we'd sit on it, just a few blocks from school because we didn't seem to care whether we were late or not. Sidney G. Gilbreath was the president, and he was rough on us. We had wonderful faculty as we had the same teachers that were teaching the Normal School students. At the time we went to the normal school, there was one dormitory, and that was for the girls--Carter Hall. And the boys were scattered all over town in different homes.

One thing I remember quite will, that we were not permitted to have any parties during...on school nights, and I had a group in my sister's home. She lived near the Normal School, and I had a group on a school night and we actually pulled taffy...And we were all expelled, by Sidney G. Gilbreath. And he talked to us as if we had committed mayhem, or something worse. And he never did tell us when to come back. We asked him when we could come back and he said, "I don't know whether I'll ever take you back." But we finally...we stayed out for a while and then we just went back and went to class and nothing was ever said.

There's one thing that I remember from my early days...I used to mess with almost anything that came along, like basketball--I was short, but I played. I never will forget, we went on the basketball court with enough clothes on to weight us down. We had long black stockings and bloomers that would make uniforms for a whole team, and middy blouses...but we were properly dressed, thoroughly dressed, completely dressed, I might say, when we went out to play basketball.

Gradually, the Normal School added students. It had a good reputation, and from the early days after they got rid of the high school students there they began adding more Normal School students. It grew rapidly, and as that grew, it seemed as if the different services in town came along and..we could go to the moving picture show for five cents; and we used to--none of us had much money--and we used to walk from the Normal School downtown. We had two paved streets, they were paved with brick--Main and Market--and we had a street car running down the middle of Main Street. We had sidewalks on our "best" street in town, where we had some of our best homes, and that was Watauga Avenue; and it was a wooden sidewalk, as I recall.

The Hotel John Sevier was opened in 1924. They had the most beautiful ballroom and we had some wonderful occasions in that ballroom...they could take care of quite a large crowd. I came out to this Johnson City Foundry--it was Johnson City Foundry and Machine Company then, operated by my brother-in-law, Glenn Setzer. At the time of World War I, there was a machine shop, and foundry, and blacksmith shop that made up the company; and it was in the

twenties that the company began spreading out, and they added... they bought the lower part of this property and added a structural shop and an ornamental shop and began fabricating steel products.

Some place along the line, it wasn't too much later, that the blacksmith's shop was discontinued because welding took over some of the things that the blacksmith used to do. And then, people had different ways of sharpening drills, and of a lot of things that a blacksmith did; he was one of the most important people in an industrial plant in the early days, but he went out of existence almost. Of course the railroad was a big thing when you didn't have automobiles and everybody wanted near the railroad. Now they want as far away from a thing like that as they can get.

Nearly everything in Johnson City you'll find has always started low and then they'd move up and move up, but we have had just a sort of a steady growth in every area almost. (Excerpt of "Johnson City Rag")

JWC: My name is John Wayne Cox, and I was born in Johnson City in 1949, and with the exception of nine years that I spent in the American Army during the Vietnam era, I have lived here all my life. Back in the early fifties, I can't remember a date, but the old Tennessee Theater--which is now I guess the Capri--used to have live stage shows on Saturday night where they'd bring in Country-and-Western singers from..some from Nashville and a lot of the local people here, I suppose. And I guess

the thing that always impressed me the most with that, and why I guess I remember it, was the yodeling. I was awful impressed with that...I guess that's why I remember it. But we used to go about every Saturday night to see that.

Johnson City back then was just Main Street and Market Street, really, and there wasn't too much for young kids on Market Street, so we kindly stayed on Main. There were three theaters in downtown Johnson City then and they changed the program three times a week, and especially on Saturday for all the kids. It only cost fifteen cents to go to the show then. We all did our work and would get our allowance, usually about a half a dollar, and that was enough to take you to the show and buy you something to eat afterwards. There used to be a lot of restaurants, and cafeterias, downtown. Kress's was always our favorite hangout when we were growing up. That used to set in next to where the Majestic Theater is today, and they made the best hot dogs in Johnson City. And all of us would get together, all of us school kids that were in the class... we'd all go downtown together and go in to Kress's and load up on the hot dogs; and sometimes we'd take 'em in a bag into the Majestic with us and set in there and eat 'em...I don't think the manager cared too much for that, but we'd sneak 'em in. And we'd watch the movie and eat our hot dogs and then we'd get out of there and sometimes we'd go down to Jones-Vance and get some ice cream or something. I guess it probably wouldn't impress too many young people today to do something like that but, that was all there was back then and it didn't really bother anybody 'cause we didn't have

anything to miss.

Then when I was a teenager, I guess about the time I was going to Science Hill back in '64, that's when the K-Mart and everything started coming in and the town started the beginning of its shift to the north. I don't really believe a lot of people here in town ever expected North Johnson City to become what it did, over the years. I went into the Army in 1968 and I didn't get out until February of '77. I was home off and on during all that time, obviously, on leave, but I didn't really have a chance to be around the town and notice how day-to-day life really was. Well, after I got out and I came home, I had ample opportunity and the town had changed quite a bit in nine years--I guess a lot of things had, though. But it seemed like some of the charm that the town used to have--I don't know, maybe that's not the right word, maybe it's personality, I guess--had changed. I'd been around the world, and I came home to live here because I--this was my home--that's where all my relatives were, and, somehow I just didn't recognize my home. Some of the old things were still there, but, it just wasn't the same kind of place. It reminded me more of a boom town, out west--something that had just kind of exploded overnight. I realize it didn't; it was a long period of time, I suppose, but to someone who had been gone it was a real culture shock to come back and find everything had changed so much.

One day they imagine, that Johnson City, Bristol, and Kingsport will all be one giant town. I don't mean that maybe it'll happen

in ten years, or twenty, or even thirty, but eventually, I'd say it'll all grow together. I can't exactly say I'm crazy about the prospects of it. Because the larger your town, the more complex your problems become. You always just have to make sure, I think, as you grow...you know, when you learn to walk, you don't go running off; you take it step by step, and I hope we do that.

(excerpt of "Johnson City Blues"--see appendix for transcript)

You have been listening to "Down in Johnson City," memories of several Johnson City residents. This program is part of the "Tennessee's Mountain Heritage" series, a joint production of the Archives of Appalachia and WETS-FM. This project is funded in part by a grant from the Tennessee Committee for the Humanities, Incorporated, a not-for-profit corporation with primary support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The contents and conclusions of this program do not necessarily represent the views of the National Endowment for the Humanities nor those of the Tennessee Committee for the Humanities, Incorporated. Additional funding has been provided by East Tennessee State University, Powell Construction Company, Ray Hillman, Jr., the Sullivan County Historical Society, and anonymous donors.

The interviews with Jim Goforth, W.B. Miller, May Ross McDowell, and John Wayne Cox were recorded in 1980 by Laurel Horton for the Archives of Appalachia. The excerpt from Governor Bob Taylor's lecture, "The Fiddle and the Bow," was read by Dr. Frank Williams. This program has been adapted for radio by Margaret Counts and was produced by Margaret Counts and Richard Blaustein with the assistance of Sam Wheelock of

Sounds Good Recording Studio. All rights to this program have been reserved by the Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University. Your comments on this series of programs will be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in this and other activities of the Archives of Appalachia, we urge you to contact the Director, Dr. Ellen Garrison, at the Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, zip code 37614, or call area code 615-929-5339. This program has been narrated by

Excerpt from "The Fiddle and the Bow," by Governor Bob Taylor

Did you never hear a fiddler fiddle? I have. I heard a fiddler fiddle, and the hey-dey-diddle of his frolicking fiddle called back the happy days of my boyhood. The old field schoolhouse, with its batten doors creaking on wooden hinges, its windows innocent of glass, and its great, yawning fireplace, cracking and roaring and flaming like the infernal regions, rose from the dust of memory and stood once more among the trees. The limpid spring bubbled and laughed at the foot of the hill. Flocks of nimble, noisy boys turned somersaults and skinned the cat and ran and jumped half hammon on the old playground. The grim old teacher stood in the door. He had no brazen-mouthed bell to ring then as we have now, but he shouted at the top of his voice: "Come to books!" And they came. Not to come meant "war and rumors of war." The backless benches, high above the floor, groaned under the weight of irrepressible young America. The multitude of mischievous, shining faces, the bare legs and feet, swinging to and fro, and the mingled hum of happy voices, spelling aloud life's first lessons, prophesied the future glory of the State. The curriculum of the old field school was the same everywhere--one Webster's blue-backed, elementary spelling book, one thumb paper, one stone bruise, one sore toe, and "Peter Parley's Travels."

The grim old teacher, enthroned on his split-bottomed chair, looked terrible as an army with banners, and he presided with a dignity and solemnity which would have excited the envy of the United States Supreme Court. I saw the school commissioners visit him, and heard them question him as to his system of teaching. They asked him whether, in geography, he taught that the world was round or that the world was flat. With great dignity he replied:

"That depends upon whar I'm teachin'. If my paytrons desire me to teach the round system, I teach it; and if they desire me to teach the flat system, I teach that."

It was at the old field school exhibition that the fiddle and the bow immortalized themselves. When the frowning old teacher advanced on the stage and nodded for silence, instantly there was silence in the vast assembly; and when the corps of country fiddlers, "one of which I was often whom," seated on the stage, hoisted the black flag and rushed into the dreadful charge on "Old Dan Tucker" or "Arkansaw Traveler," the spectacle was sublime. Their heads swung time; their bodies rocked time; their feet patted time; the muscles of their faces twitched time; their eyes winked time; their teeth ground time. The whizzing bows and screaming fiddles electrified the audience, which

cheered at every brilliant turn in the charge of the fiddlers. The good women laughed for joy; the men winked at each other and popped their fists. It was like the charge of the Old Guard at Waterloo, or a battle with a den of snakes. Upon the completion of the grand overture of the fiddlers, the brilliant programme of the exhibition, which usually lasted all day, opened with "Mary had a little lamb" and it gathered fury until it reached Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty, or give me death!!!" The programme was interspersed with compositions by the girls, from the simple subject of "flowers," including "blessings brighten as they take their flight," up to "every cloud has a silver lining;" and it was interlarded with frequent tunes by the fiddlers from early morn till close of day.

"Johnson City Blues"--recorded in 1928 by Clarence Green

(excerpt #1):

"Down in Johnson City,
Oh the hospitality,
Are the finest bunch of people
In the state of Tennessee.

"I'm tired,
Of roamin' this way,
Goin' back to Johnson City,
I'll go back and stay some day."

(excerpt #2):

"Daddy, sweet Daddy,
I know you're gonna quit me now,
But I don't need no daddy no how.

"Ah, trouble, trouble,
Is all I ever find.
Goin' back to Johnson City,
Lord, and worry you off my mind."

(last excerpt is a repeat of #1)