

FRIENDS OF MARSHALL PUBLIC LIBRARY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEWEE: BILL GOODWIN
INTERVIEWER: STEVE ARNEY

SA: This is Steve Arney. The date is March 25, 2005. I'm interviewing Bill Goodwin at his home here in Marshall. Bill do you want to start with telling us where and when you born?

BG: Well, I was born September 27, 1909 in a house on a farm 4 miles south of Palestine. That's where my grandmother and grandfather lived.

SA: Who were your parents?

BG: My parents, the Goodwins, came from around Heathsville. In fact they went to school with the Heaths. They were famous for the candy.

SA: What were their names?

BG: My father had a name I have never heard but the one time before – the name of Parmer.

SA: Parmer? P-A-R-M-E-R?

BG: Uh-huh.

SA: And your mother?

BG: My mother's name was Mabel, an old-fashioned name used back several years ago.

SA: What was her maiden name?

BG: Fox.

SA: Did you have brothers and sisters?

BG: I had one of each. I was the youngest of the three.

SA: You were born on your grandfather's farm. How long did you live there?

BG: Thirty years.

SA: So you went to school in Palestine or in a country school?

BG: In a country school. They didn't have consolidated schools then. I went to a one room country school. It was a sort of community building, I guess. It had an upstairs

which was unusual for a school. It had a platform. They called it the farmers union but I don't think it had anything to do with the Farmers Union that we hear about at the present time. It was just a neighborhood organization and they used to meet once a month. In warm weather we kids would play outside and in the cold we'd go upstairs and they always had a program of some kind and the neighbors all practiced and sang songs for the community. The whole town was probably 30 or 40 people. They had a gold curtain. We used to look forward to those meetings.

SA: This was like a cooperative of farmers that used this building.

BG: Yes, it was just a neighborhood get-together, cause there wasn't any such thing as telephones then although I can't remember when we didn't have a telephone – home switchboards in somebody's house. But I think maybe Palestine had a telephone office.

SA: You went to school there eight years in that building?

BG: Yes.

SA: Then you went to high school?

BG: Yes, we had to furnish our own transportation to Palestine. We had an old Chevrolet touring car and I drove it most of the time.

SA: What model year was the car?

BG: 1922.

SA: What was the neighborhood like? Was it a single family dwelling out in the country? Your grandfather farmed?

BG: Yes. He farmed and it was a nine room family farmhouse. Originally it was a two room dwelling and my father had had it all remodeled. It was nice big farmhouse.

SA: Did it have wiring and running water?

BG: It had wiring. Running water came when the electricity came. We had a well up to the house and if there wasn't much rain it usually went dry in the summertime. We had a well at the barn which never went dry and we had to haul water from the barn to the house that time of year. So after they got electricity, after I had moved to Marshall, they got an electric pump. Later on, a drilling rig came in and drilled into the well by the house which was 28 feet deep and only had to drill 27 inches to reach water. All those years they had carried water, and I helped when I was little, and water was only 27 inches deeper.

SA: Who was your closest neighbor?

BG: We had a neighbor about two blocks away – we called it half a quarter.

SA: Besides carrying water what other kind of chores did you have to do?

BG: Oh, everything, carry wood. The first thing I did when I got home from school was fill the woodbox so we'd have heat at night. We didn't have that many trees on our place and so we burned coal as much as we burned wood. Had a coal furnace in the basement for awhile but it died so we used the old wood heating stove for several years.

SA: How young were you when you were asked to do chores around the house?

BG: Too young to remember, I think.

SA: Did you have garden and pretty much raise all the food you ate?

BG: Had a big garden. Had hogs. The neighbors all got together on butchering day and they all came before daylight. The hogs to be butchered were penned up and would come moseying through the gate to where they were going to be killed. I had been around a lot of them since they were piglets and it was sad to me to think about what was going to happen. There was no pain to them but it was like killing your old friends almost.

SA: In going to school do any memories of your education stand out?

BG: No, not especially. I was just one of several. We had about 30 students.

SA: When did you start dating?

BG: Oh, I was in high school.

SA: Did you get married down there or was that after you came to Marshall?

BG: Down there.

SA: When was that?

BG: I was married in 1935. I farmed until I graduated from high school. 'Course, we didn't have any money and the depression was on so after high school, I decided I wanted to take a business course at Brown's Business College in Terre Haute so my folks raked up the money to send me and here I was a little country boy taking off to Terre Haute. I hated it, I hated Terre Haute. It was smoky. If you put on a clean shirt it was dirty before noon just from the smoke in the air. I just didn't like the city anyway. So I just went through three months and decided I wasn't cut out to be a secretary so my girlfriend was a year behind me and she and some of her friends had, her sister taught country school, and they had been to Charleston and at that time teachers were scarce and they were giving every incentive to qualify as a teacher. So there was rule then you could go to school one year at Charleston and get a temporary teacher's certificate and I thought that

was about the easiest thing I knew of, not that teaching was necessarily easy. So Charleston had already been in a session about a week and I heard from my girlfriend that she was going up there so I said that's about the quickest thing I could do even though they had been in session a week. Probably wouldn't work now. (He means they probably wouldn't let someone start late now.) My dad and mother had a Star car – you probably never heard of a Star. It was made by Durant for a few years and from south of Palestine to Charleston was about 75 miles cause we couldn't go by Clarksville. That was just a dirt road. So they took me up there in the old Star. I just looked around in amazement at all the big houses. I was from a little country town and that was high style.

SA: What year would this have been?

BG: 1929. I graduated in 1928 and then laid out the year I went to Terre Haute.

SA: So you went to school for a year and then started teaching?

BG: I started down in the old neighborhood and got 90 or 95 dollars a month.

SA: This was in Palestine?

BG: No, it was in a country school down around Heathsville. That's where my Dad went to school. It was named after the Heaths – they were farmers down there.

SA: They were a big name even back in those days?

BG: Not yet, they were just neighbors. Although I think they did start a dairy herd.

SA: So they were just farmers who somehow got into the candy business.

BG: They got a candy recipe somehow.

SA: So you taught a few years and got married.

BG: I started teaching in 1930 and got married in 1935.

SA: When did you move to Marshall and why?

BG: That "one year" certificate was good for six years, I believe, and then you had to take a test and if you passed that, it was good for another three years. I studied up real hard and even paid somebody to tutor me on algebra. I got through it. Taught another three years and then wrote on the test again which gave me another year of teaching. I saved my money all my life and bought the automotive store on the north side of the square, sold tires and batteries and so forth.

SA: That was in about 1940?

BG: Yes.

SA: That building was which one?

BG: They always called it the old drug store building. The building where they put the little cupola roof out on the front a few years ago.

SA: But then you moved from there after awhile didn't you?

BG: Well, I was there about four years and the war was going on and I was 34 years old and they changed the draft limit. Originally they wouldn't take anyone over 26 or 28 but Roosevelt changed the limit and I was told they were going to take me so I sold the store to Paul Walker but as it turned out I didn't have to go. Velsicol then asked me to go to work there, so I did for about four years. But I still wanted my own store. Pat Smith had a little tire store up there where the old fire station used to be and I bought that. After a few years I moved the store back down to the north side of the square, but farther west.

SA: By the time of the war, you had children, am I right, and they would have taken you even though you were 26 or 28?

BG: They had taken some, yes. But after Velsicol, I bought the Western Auto and felt like I had improved myself some. Had it about 12 years and then had a Firestone store. It did pretty well.

SA: Do any memories come to mind about Marshall back in those days?

BG: Well, of course I had always lived in the country but I was always impressed with all the things going on in Marshall, always something going on. Band concerts. I wasn't a very good musician, but I liked it. Played trombone for about 10-12 years until I lost my front teeth.

SA: My Uncle Vaughn Arney was the director, then, right?

BG: Oh, yow, Vaughn was. I've often bragged about that men's chorus he organized, do you remember?

SA: Yes. In fact, I remember they had minstrel shows. Did you participate in those?

BG: Yow, I've got one of the books still that I look at.

SA: You put on blackface?

BG: Yes. 'Course you couldn't do that now.

SA: No. Those performances were in the old Strand Theatre, as I remember.

BG: Right.

SA: What would you say, Bill, about modern conveniences. What had the greatest effect on you?

BG: I suppose electricity. Down in the country, all we had was kerosene for lights. On Saturday nights, we'd listen to the old battery radio, WLS barn dance.

SA: Back during the depression when you were teaching school for 90 dollars a month, how were your living conditions?

BG: Well, it went down because of the depression. The worst year of the depression was 1933. Which reminds me that was the year of the World's Fair in Chicago. By that time I had traded cars and had a Chevrolet coupe with a rumble seat and wasn't married yet and so I got a load of boys I went to church with and we made three trips to the World's Fair in '33 and '34. Took my Dad one time.

SA: You went up Route 1? Was it paved then?

BG: Yes.

SA: That must have been quite an experience going to Chicago for you small town country boys.

BG: Yes. One of the boys had an aunt who lived there and he made arrangements for us to sleep there.

SA: Anything else you can think of you'd like to say?

BG: No.

SA: We surely appreciate your participating in this project. You've had an interesting life.

BG: I'm sorry for being hoarse – you probably can't understand it. I always get hoarse when I talk a lot. That's the reason I quit singing in the choir.

SA: Oh, that's another thing I wanted to ask you about. How many years did you sing in the Methodist Church choir?

BG: Oh, about a week after I moved up here, a nephew of the preacher of the church I went to lived up here and he asked me to sing in the choir. He had a fine tenor voice. So from then until a few years ago, except for a year or two when I worked shift work at Velsico, I was in the choir.

SA: So that would be over 50 years. OK, Bill, thanks again.

Postscript: After the tape was turned off, Bill remembered that when he was in high school, he attended a military-type camp for a week one summer at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. They attended a St. Louis Browns (who are now the Baltimore Orioles, I think) baseball game and they played the Yankees. Babe Ruth played but Bill doesn't remember if he hit a home run. This memory was prompted by my asking if he had seen the Cubs or White Sox play when he went to the Worlds Fair. Babe Ruth was still playing then and I was just curious about the possibility he might have seen him play. Bill said he had not, that he had no interest in baseball.