

CLYDE RUSSELL DAVIS

Interviewer: David Neal

Interviewed on: June 23, 2003

Interviewer: Name, age and birth date:

Russell Davis: My name is Russell Davis. D-A-V-I-S, R-U-S-S-E-L-L. My first name is named after my father, Clyde Davis. But they didn't want to call me Junior, so I've always gone by my middle name, Russell. Russell was named for Russell Silverthorn who lived in Franklin Township. Not a very respectable gentleman. He was a brawler and a fighter and had a bad reputation. But he went to WWI with my father, and he was a hero, really. He got out ahead of the lines when they were advancing and when they caught up to him; there were 16 dead Germans all around him. Like I say, he was a brawler. But he killed 16 before they killed him.

Interviewer: Was he Army?

Russell Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you know exactly where he was?

Russell Davis: He was with the 112th Infantry in France. But I don't know which battle.

Interviewer: You mentioned your father was in WWI. Could you give me more information on that?

Russell Davis: Sure. He went in the summer of 1918 and stayed until the war was over. Part of the time he was a courier and took messages to the front lines and back. He got shrapnel and gassed and everything else, so he's got a lot of medals that my sister has. He was written up [mentioned] in a book called *With the 112th Infantry in France* [by James A. Murrin].

Interviewer: So both your father and the other fellow were in the 112th?

Russell Davis: Yes. My father was a Sergeant, promoted in the field.

Interviewer: Did he volunteer or was there a draft?

Russell Davis: He volunteered. Because of that, I was almost forced [obliged] to volunteer myself when WWII came along, which I did, but I volunteered for the U.S. Navy.

Interviewer: Do remember anybody else in the township that was a veteran of WWI or the Civil War?

Russell Davis: All four of my grandparents were born in Franklin Township and most of my great-Grandparents. I'd never thought of that, but the ones I knew were born there. My father's Grandfather was in the Civil War and served in the Red River Campaign in New Mexico. Enlistments were short in the Civil War I think 18 months. But in the Civil War, you could escape the draft if you could furnish another man. And one of the wealthier families from McKean, Pa. offered my [Great] Grandfather \$1,000 if he would go [re-enlist] in place of their son. So, he took the money. He had had a good time in the Army. So, he took the money and when he went to report to duty, the war was over. He kept the money, came back, married his childhood sweetheart and bought a farm with that \$1,000. It gave him a little start in life. I have pictures of him during a reunion of his outfit at

Gettysburg and also a copy of his discharge where they said that he did all of his duties in a soldierly manner. And he got a very nice discharge recommendation from his commanding officer.

Interviewer: Do you remember what outfit he was with?

Russell Davis: I could look it up. (opens book and begins to read): Ezra Davis joined the Army as a Private on 6 August 1861 and was discharged 5 August 1864. He was in Captain Richard Arnold's Battery G of the 5th Regiment of Artillery, 83rd Pennsylvania Infantry. He was engaged with his Battery during the siege of Fort Hudson, La. in 1863 and different skirmishes that occurred during the Red River Campaign in 1864. At the bottom of his discharge, it's stated that he (quote) "always sustained a good character while under my command. And always did his duty most faithfully," signed by J.B.Rawhs, 5th U.S. Artillery. It also states that he had blue eyes, blond hair, was 5'8" and was born in Harrisburg, N.Y. Ezra died in 1913, and his wife, Julia Smith died 1917. Alonzo Davis, their oldest son was named as heir of Ezra and Julia's estate. That's about all I know about him. He is buried in McLane cemetery, just out of McLane.

Interviewer: He lived in the township then?

Russell Davis: Yeah. I could take you there, but I'm not sure I could describe it...at the corner of Stancliff Road and Silverthorn. (looking on a map/book) It's just to the north of the corner, the first corner house.

Interviewer: How old are you and what is your birth date?

Russell Davis: I'm 76 and it's May 15, 1927.

Interviewer: Where all have you lived in Franklin Township?

Russell Davis: Well, as far as living, just at my maternal grandparents' home, the Harris home. It's on the corner of what is now Fry Road and Old State Road. It used to be called the Townline Road. And it's on the northwest corner.

Interviewer: What years did you live in Franklin Township just as a child?

Russell Davis: Most of the time, I lived mostly in Erie but most of my relatives lived in Franklin Township. My dad was the first one to move off the farm. Every weekend that I can remember, until I enlisted in the Navy, and every summer and every holiday I was living at one of my grandparents' homes.

Interviewer: What was your home like in the early years?

Russell Davis: Yeah. I spent most of my time at my Grandfather Harris' place. His father had bought that farm in 1884. His father's name was Napoleon Bonaparte Harris. Interesting story why he was named that! His father, Napoleon Bonaparte's father [Livy Harris] was the head of the family, quite a large family. At the age of twelve, he was

the wage earner and the head of the family. His own father had died of malaria. And he didn't know how he could support his mother and all his brothers and sisters. But there was a military man in the neighborhood, named Phelps, who had his own regiment. This was Civil War times of course. So, he sort of allied himself with this military guy and he worked for him. Eventually he married his daughter and because his father-in-law was so hung up on the military, and he admired Bonaparte, he named his first son Napoleon Bonaparte Harris (smiling) and they kept those initials in the family. His grandson was named Norman Byron Harris-N.B., like that. Anyway, Napoleon Bonaparte's son was Charles Phelps Harris. That was my grandfather. If I could digress a little bit: He had four children, three of them had a tragic ending, and I wrote a little story about that. I don't know if this would be a good place to read it. Now, what we're talking about here is Napoleon Bonaparte Harris and his family, which included my Grandfather. What happened was, when the children died, (leafing through pages) the neighbors got together, all the young ladies in the neighborhood each made a quilt block, a memorial quilt block. Then they got together and sewed all the blocks together and made this memorial quilt. And this became a historical document because it was signed by all those young ladies in Franklin Township. And I have that quilt. It's in the Appendix of this book: The Howard, Jenness, Mathewson, Davis Families. This is the book I wrote in 1988, fifteen years ago. OK, it's Appendix Four: The Memorial Quilt Top.

“On a quiet day in June 1940, Charles Phelps Harris hitched the team to the wagon. Colonel, the Bay was hitched to the near side and the big roan Duke, was hitched to the off side. I was 13 years old. Together we rode west from the Harris barn at Harris Corners midway between McLane and Franklin Center in Erie County, Pennsylvania. Three hundred yards down the road, was a grove of huge hard maple trees which was always referred to as the old Corry place. The remains of a foundation attested to a house having been there at some time. At the old Corry place, we turned right to a plowed field not yet planted in anything. The field was square about 40 acres in size with a beech and maple forest at the north end. Two thirds of the way to the forest, we stopped, and started picking up stones from the plowed field and putting them in the wagon. The stones were rounded about the size of a softball. Occasionally, there was a larger one but my Grandfather told me he had already hauled off nearly all the big ones. He had been hauling stones off this same field for fifty years, he said. He took the two wagonloads each year after the plowing. That way, it was not really an unpleasant job. Lately, he's been taking only one wagonload per year. That is what we would do today. The potato field, he told me had been good to him and to his father, Napoleon Bonaparte Harris. It furnished them each year with their cash crop. The land was very rich. It was clay soil and my Grandfather had dug hundreds of feet of ditches, deeper than plow depth in which drain tiles were placed. This kept the low spots drained so the potatoes didn't rot if there was a wet spell. The field is located within a mile of the divide that separates the Great Lakes drainage from the

Ohio River drainage. It's just north of the divide so that a heavy rain would run off northerly to Elk Creek to Lake Erie and the heavy rain on the neighbor's farm would end up in French Creek, then run down the Allegheny River to the Ohio, then eventually to the Gulf of Mexico. In actual practice, however, there isn't much runoff. The water soaks down into the rich black soil. Rounded rocks were brought down from the north with the glaciers and then dumped there thousands of years ago when the glaciers melted. Most likely, they came from someplace in Canada. They had been long time visitors to the Harris farm. Every year the plow seems to turn up a new crop of the Canadian visitors. While we loaded rocks, my Grandfather told me about his family. He had two brothers, Norman and Craig, and a sister Lottie. His father, Napoleon Bonaparte Harris was known as Poe. His mother was Amanda Miller Harris. Poe bought this farm in 1884 when Charles was nine years old. One of the first things he did after the purchase was to build an icehouse. In February, he would cut large rectangular slabs of ice from Edinboro Lake and store them in his icehouse. The icehouse was insulated with packed, dry sawdust. And it kept ice all summer long. During the summers, he would make the trip each week with the team and wagon to Erie and sell eggs and butter and freshly killed chickens, all kept cool with the ice until they were sold. One day in the summer of 1892, Poe let his youngest son Craig go along on the Erie trip. They were in and out of several houses in the course of their selling. And one of the houses was infected with the virulent, contagious disease called black diphtheria. Unknowing, all the children hovered around Craig and took care of him when he became ill. And they all took the disease. In those days, there was no cure. Craig was the first to go. He died August 16, 1892 at the age of fifteen. Lottie died six days later, age nineteen. Norman was twenty-one when he died, September 9, 1892. Charles, my Grandfather was the last to catch the disease. He didn't become so ill as the others and he survived. Poe's heart was broken as he watched his children die. And he was never the same after that.

The wagon wasn't full but the team could hardly pull the load because of the freshly plowed earth, so we quit. We hauled the load to the end of the field, next to the forest and threw the stones over the fence next to the first trees. There was quite a deposit from such journeys in the past. Charles was lost in thought as we unloaded. I was surprised to see us unload in thirty minutes what had taken pretty near three hours to load up. The horses were visibly pleased with the empty wagon, when we headed toward home.”

Poe's sister was named Alice Harris Amidon. In 1892, she had been through a tragic 18 months herself. Her baby Alea had died November 17, 1890. And her twenty-year-old daughter Zoe had died May 30, 1891. She knew how her brother felt. She was a good woman and my Mother's favorite Aunt. My mother was her namesake. Alice Amidon organized the young women in the neighborhood. And they made a memorial quilt top with the names Norman, Lottie and Craig in the middle. And twenty-four blocks around the middle, each with a floral design and the makers' embroidered signature. It is an historical document in white muslin and turkey red embroidery thread. The twenty-four names are all from the Franklin Township

and some from McKean and Washington. They are the friends and relatives of the Harris family in 1892, and they include many names previously discussed in this book. The quilt top is dated December 25, 1892 and was presented to the Harris family at Christmas that year. I'll just read you the names. These are names of people who lived in that area.

Lois Amidon was the daughter of Alice Amidon. She was ten years old and she died six years later. Edith Amidon, sister of Lois. Ida Mathewson, daughter of Albert and Alice Mathewson. Alice Spence, she was a schoolteacher, I believe. Lucy Mischler, daughter of Hannah and Fred Mischler. Lucy was twenty years old. Celia Benjamin, Bertha Washburn, Bertha Howard, Mrs. Amidon, this is Alice Harris Amidon sister of Poe, an originator of the memorial gift. Mrs. Hawkins, Alice Baker, Anna Hayes, Bessie Swift, Inez Hayes, Flora Davis. Flora was the daughter of Ceylon and Clarissa Mathewson and the bride of Mark Davis, October 8, 1892. Flora was twenty years old. Mabel Spaulding, Grace Goodrich, Cora LeSuer. Cora lived two miles south of the Harris family. She was Lottie Harris' best friend. She was sixteen years old, and she later married Charles, the survivor. Nora Swift, Hattie Stafford, Maude Alward, Mrs. Goodrich, Inez Spaulding, and Mary Mathewson, daughter of Ceylon and Clarissa Mathewson, and sister of Flora Davis. Mary was twenty-three. That's some names from Franklin Township. And that gives you a little story. (returning book to shelf behind him)

Interviewer: Very interesting. We were talking about your Grandparents' home.

Russell Davis: My Grandfather was a farmer. He was a natural leader among men and whenever he joined an organization, he seemed to end up President of it. One of the things he did early on was decide that the farmers were not getting a good price for their milk. So, he organized the Erie Pure Milk Association, which was the forerunner of ECOMA, which was a pretty big milk combine in Erie later on. So, they had their own place to send the milk and they could increase what the farmers got. But the only thing was, as President of the thing, he had to go to Erie everyday and wear a suit and sit at a desk. And he was very good at it, but he hated it. And so, when things were going good, he resigned and went back to the farm. But he always kept his hand in. He was a Supervisor of Roads for Franklin Township. He was a Justice of the Peace. He was always on the School Board for the seven schools. They had a Franklin D. Roosevelt Project where they ...it was a Soil Conservation Authority where he measured all the farms and they discussed what they could put in and gave subsidies for not growing some...I can't remember the name of it [probably the Soil Conservation Commission].

Interviewer: Was it the CCC?

Russell Davis: No, anyway, he was the representative for Franklin Township for that. I used to go around and help him measure some of the fields. Franklin Township and the surrounding townships after WWI became a home for a lot of immigrants. And a lot of them were Eastern Europeans: Slovaks, and Czechs. Because my Granddad was quite a prominent figure, at least in Franklin Township, they used to come to him every Sunday as if he were a kind of godfather.

They would tell him that somebody wronged them and asked him how they could get help for this or that. And he just sat there on the porch a lot of Sundays and people kept coming. A lot of them could barely speak English. I remember I was in the house one Sunday and my Grandma was in tears. And I said, "Grandma, what's wrong?" She said, "The Mayor of Erie just came out to talk to Charles and Charles is sitting there with manure on his shoes!" (laughing) And of course, the Mayor was all dressed up. And he spoke to the Mayor occasionally when he wanted to know what was going on from time to time. And he enjoyed this a lot. He wouldn't go into town and be a bureaucrat. He loved his farm and refused to go in there, but yet, he always had contact. He brought the first electricity to Franklin Township.

Interviewer: Do you know when that was?

Russell Davis: No that was before my time. He had the phone line brought in up Old State Road. He had the first flush toilets. We had indoor water and things like that, that you don't think about. Right after WWI, these were new. My earliest memories are in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and his house was just as uptown as anybody's, but most of the neighbors were not so. He gave some land to each of his sons, and they both built homes just to the west of the old Harris place. So, we really had three families together. Byron, his youngest son got into fox ranching. He raised silver fox. And I worked for him for six years. If the war hadn't come along, I'd still be there, doing something.

Interviewer: What did they raise the fox for?

Russell Davis: Their pelts. And it was a good business. A good business until the soldiers started coming home from Europe after WWII. A lot of our soldiers in Europe had seen half starved Germans, skinny French women, and the American girls started to look sort of fat. And the fox pelt is a big full pelt. And when they put on a fox coat, they looked shorter and fatter! Then suddenly, fox pelts went out of style. They were great up until 1947 and then they just went out of style. And so the fox business just died.

Interviewer: What was your job there?

Russell Davis: Well, I was a kid and my job was the menial type. I had to clean out the water dishes and there were seven hundred fox. I cleaned out their food dishes and then we had to feed them. So, we had to clean out the fox pens. Mine was strictly a low level job. However, when we pelted the foxes in November, I did learn a lot about taking care of the hides and grading them, so we knew how to price them, which were the better pelts and which were not.

Interviewer: What was done with the meat?

Russell Davis: Nothing. Nobody wants to eat a meat-eating animal! (smiling)

Interviewer: I didn't know if it could be used for a feed or anything like that.

Russell Davis: At that time, we just buried them...dug a big hole and buried them. So, that's what went on in my experience. I had a Grandfather farmer who was a little wealthier than most of the neighbors, a little better educated.

He graduated from Slippery Rock. And he taught there at Slippery Rock as a young man. It was always pretty exciting out there because there were three families. And my uncles loved to go hunting and fishing and I was a teenager, and that was just right for me. (smiling)

Interviewer: Did you guys hunt on their property out there?

Russell Davis: No, we hunted everywhere. And we did a lot of fishing around Edinboro and Waterford Lake. My Uncle Leon, who was one of the nicest guys I ever met, he got interested in small-bore rifle shooting, muzzle loading. And he eventually became U.S. Champion one year. I did an awful lot of shooting with him, to where, when I went into the Navy and they had us on a rifle range, I shot and all my scores were very, very high. I was accustomed to this national competition. I went to the national shoots with my uncle.

Interviewer: Where were they held?

Russell Davis: Marietta, Ohio. And there were other shoots at Canal Fulton, Ohio. That area seemed to be the muzzle-loading region. Anyway, it was a wonderful way to grow up. I had just about everything a boy could ask for! What's the next question?

Interviewer: Could you give the names of your parents and their dates of birth and as far back as we can go in the different branches?

Russell Davis: I'll refer to my notes, but I shouldn't have to. My mother was Alice Harris, daughter of Charles Phelps Harris and Cora LeSuer Harris. She was born at the farm where I spent so much time. She was born August 22, 1899 and died January 1, 1987. And my father was born down the road right at the north edge of Franklin Township on Shaddock Road. He was born in...his name was Clyde Mark Davis. He was born June 25, 1894 and he died October 17, 1987. They were married September 20, 1920. They had five children. Would you like to know their names?

Interviewer: You could just give me their names.

Russell Davis: The oldest was Carol Lucille Davis and she married Earl Stubbe, who was Superintendent of Schools out in Waterford. The next was Phyllis Marie Davis and she married Raymond Hevner. The third was me, Clyde Russell Davis and I married Shirley Kuns. Then my brother Stanley Reid Davis who married Loretta Petralia. And finally, Roger Davis, who married Barbara Hartleb. I've got all those dates, and everything but you don't need all that.

Interviewer: What about your Grandparents on your father's side?

Russell Davis: They all lived in the same area. We've already talked about Ezra. Ezra was my Great-grandparent, right? Ezra married Julia Smith. Their son was my Grandfather. His name was Mark Anthony Davis and he married Flora Belle Mathewson. Mathewson's lived right down the road from the Harris'. When you go to Silverthorn corners going west, the big farm on the left is Mathewson's. Mark Anthony had six [five] children, one of whom died as an infant. So, of the four children that grew up, the oldest

was my father, Clyde M. Davis who married Alice M. Harris from the Harris farm we talked about. Next was Clarence Elwin Davis who married Floy Pieper. And Stanley M. Davis who married Floy's sister, Thora Pieper. So, we had two brothers marrying two sisters. And the youngest was Marvin Davis and that's Reverend Davis who had a church in East Springfield. And he married Pauline Fischer.

Interviewer: Now, did your Aunts and Uncles on that side, did they live in the township also?

Russell Davis: No, none of them. They all scattered, not very far, but they scattered. We didn't talk about Charles Harris' wife. Her name was Cora LeSuer. The LeSuer family isn't in this book. But Cora was born up the Townline Road right across the road from that school up there. Maybe you know what school that was. Right up the road from the Silverthorn School. I guess they called it the Townline School.

Interviewer: Now when did you move out of the township, or you just didn't live there at all, or just your grandparents?

Russell Davis: I lived in Erie, and I lived as much as I could with my Grandparents, both of them.

Interviewer: Did you have any friends that you paled around with in the township?

Russell Davis: No, I had a big family there. Both Davises, and Harrises and Mathewsons, so, I did pal around when I lived with my Grandpa Davis' down on the Shaddock Road on the northeast edge of the township, there were some families right across the road, the Coburn's. And I did sort of pal around with them. Then when I lived with my Grandfather on the Old State Road, where Townline crosses, there were the Duntons who lived across there and I used to pal around with them.

Interviewer: What were some of your fond childhood memories of the township?

Russell Davis: We used to tap the sugar bush, as they called it, and make maple syrup in the spring when there's snow on the ground and the sap's rising in the maple trees. We had a great big iron vat that must have been about 10' long and 3' across. And we boiled the sap in it. And that fire had to be kept going day and night. To me, that was pretty exciting, being up all night! We set that up in the woods about a half-mile from the home, where the trees were. So, we stayed out there at night, sort of camped out and kept the fire going. I enjoyed that. (smiling) We'd get a team of horses and go around collecting the sap. We collected it in 40-gallon milk cans, actually.

Interviewer: I'll bet those were heavy.

Russell Davis: When they were full of sap, they are. Well, you know when you hang the buckets on the trees and then once a day you make the rounds and dump the buckets into the milk cans. If you got a sled arrangement where you got the team of horses that go to each tree and empty the bucket and go around, hell, I thought that was great! We had a little shack out there and we slept out there. We took turns

relieving. My Uncle Byron did a lot of that. He enjoyed that!

At the Franklin Center Church, they were always putting on plays at Christmas time. I can remember I went to see the play and somebody hadn't shown up. I remember somebody grabbing me, putting me into costume, and pushing me on stage. I was a Roman soldier who stood around at the Crucifixion, as I remember. We had lots of parties. And we had weddings. And we had hornings. You don't have hornings much anymore.

Interviewer: What's a horning?

Russell Davis: It's a terrible nuisance-type of thing. When a young couple gets first married, the neighbors all get together in the middle of the night and they blow horns and ring bells and they have carbide cannons that make an awful lot of noise. It's just a celebration of a wedding, but it's very crude. The newlyweds usually hate it!

Interviewer: Do you know the origins of hornings where that came from? I've never heard of it.

Russell Davis: Well, it was a pretty traditional thing back before WWII. My Dad had a carbide cannon and it had a spark plug on it and some batteries. You touched it off and it made one hell of a noise. Those were pretty exciting to juvenile kids. And the adults who took part in it did a pretty juvenile thing, too. But they were exciting anyways. And those things took place when I was pretty young. Up the Townline Road, they had something called a Ram Lamb and you'll hear more about that as you study Franklin Township. Leeson Fellows was the township poet. He had a farm up there not far from that Townline School, and close to the LeSuer farm. And once a year, he would kill several sheep and invite...everyone on Townline Road would come. They would just have a big roast sheep, they'd all bring something else, and they'd have a big party. Leeson could quote poetry, he never had to look at anything, it was things he had learned fifty years earlier. He was quite a grand old man. When my Great Uncle Mathewson's barn burnt, this was the Mathewson farm on the State Road, Elmer Mathewson, who was a brother to my Grandmother Davis. When his barn burned, I remember we could see it from the Harris farm, we could see the glow in the sky, and we went down to see what was going on, and I remember two things: I remember Elmer coming out of that barn with his Model T Ford and it was burning, the whole car was burning and he was driving it out. The other thing I remember is Leeson Fellows, an old man, standing there with tears coming down his face. He had built the barn. And that must have been about 1933, somewhere in there. I was about six years old. Those were some of my strongest memories. It happened after dark. I'm a little kid out in the dark, a barn is burning, and a car comes bursting out of the barn with a top in flames and this old man next to me just weeping. I remember about 10-15 years later; my Grandpa Charlie Harris had built a house and a barn on his place, around 1902-03. They were built out of huge, big oak beams right from his own woods. And the roofs were slate, so you never need worry about the construction. But sometime around 1952-53, when 50 years had gone by, some of those slates were broken and the guy they got to repair it

was the guy who built it in the first place, and that was Leeson Fellows, a real old man. He climbed that ladder way up to the top of that barn and repaired that roof. I remember that.

Interviewer: Did he write poetry as well?

Russell Davis: I don't think so; I think he just recited it. All the older people just loved Leeson Fellows-a very fine gentleman. He was Grandfather to the woman that wrote this book. This is a good book. I don't know how much of this you're interested in, but if you get a copy, it's called, "School Memories of Marian Harned Collins For the Davis Family." It's a history of Franklin Township, really. But it's too long for me to read. She tells about her life as a schoolteacher. I'll just read you a paragraph or two:

"The Joys and Trials of Erie County Teachers" by Marian Harned Collins. I am a mid-octogenarian. Like most old folks, I keep looking back, maybe just to the good times and maybe just to reconcile the past with the present. There have been so many changes. My parents were a link between the original settlers in the 1880s. Now, maybe I'm another kind of link. In Franklin Township, we had one-room, white clapboard schoolhouses. Some places had two-room schools. The older, more affluent townships, they had brick schools. I am told there was a log school north of the Fellows property-that's Leeson Fellows. The town of Edinboro started with a log school. At least some of these schools had fireplaces. We had all eight grades in one room. The younger children learned from the older children. The older children were protective of the younger children. The water came from a neighbor. The water became infected. There was an epidemic of typhoid fever. A teacher, a VanDusen from Townline and several of the children died. Measles, mumps, colds and whooping cough came along periodically, sometimes scarlet fever and diphtheria. The Harris family lost three children. That was 1892. A Fisk family lost four daughters. One son remained and he said he would not die. He would not shut his eyes. And he did survive. I was told of other families that lost several children. One mother looked into the eyes of another small child and asked, "Are you going to die too?" The child at the time did not know what she meant, but she never forgot it. Restrooms were out back and equipped with a Sears catalogue. Floors were dusty from all the wood fires in the potbellied stoves, and from the mud, snow and dirt tracked in, according to season. After a while, somebody got the idea that oiling the floors would help keep the dust down. We also had a sort of mealy kind of stuff to mix with the dirt when we swept the floors. It did help. I'm not going to read all this. It's fascinating. Marian died just recently. I wish I had spent more time...

Interviewer: ...Howard's?

Russell Davis: (turning pages in book) What I wanted to show you here is Clarence Mischler, Fred Mischler's son, Clarence. Fred Mischler was an immigrant from Switzerland. He married Hannah Howard. And Hannah Howard was daughter of Sarah Jenness Howard. And Sarah Jenness Howard was my Great-Great-grandmother. And that's how I'm related to Clarence Mischler. It's pretty hard to figure all that out. But when you got so many relatives in Franklin

Township as I did, remember both grandparents were from there. Their parents were from there. So, they intermarried pretty closely. No one went too far from home. I had one relative that bragged to me that he went all the way to Crawford County to find a wife! And nobody else went that far away. Anyway, I could go up and down most any road and there was some relationship back there. I wrote a little squib on the Howard's, which would be more accurate if I read it. What happened was: David Howard was living up in Vermont. That was in the early 1800s. He was actually born in 1784 in Grafton, Vermont. And he joined the American forces defending Vermont and Lake Champlain from the British. By 1814, the British had successfully blockaded all the ports along the Atlantic. And in August 24, 1814, they invaded and raided Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: War of 1812, right?

Russell Davis: Right, but it lasted a while. That's when Dolly Madison became famous for running into the White House and rescuing the family silverware and all that. They decided that a British expedition that could come down from Canada and take over Lake Champlain could successfully divide the country in half, and they were gonna whip us! There was 14,000 coming down by way of Lake Champlain. And there was a small fleet of American ships under Commodore McDonough on the lake. And David Howard joined that group. And the British fleet carrying more guns and more men attacked McDonough on September 11, 1814 in Plattsburgh Bay. I never studied this in school, but I read about it since. McDonough's men went into the fight with such ardor and managed their vessels with such skill, that within three hours, all of the British ships' flags were hauled down and they left. The Battle of Plattsburgh Bay was over and the union was not divided. This was a key battle in the War of 1812. There was no invasion from Canada. This saved New York State. But David Howard lay dead on the deck. He was killed September 11 in the Battle of Plattsburgh Bay and was buried in Plattsburgh, New York. Now, it was his son, Henry, when his mother remarried, he left home with his rifle and walked all the way to Erie County. He had heard about Erie County. Erie County was getting a reputation at that time, because nobody knew where Erie County belonged. Was it part of Pennsylvania? It wasn't part of the original Pennsylvania. Massachusetts claimed it. They thought they had all the land between two parallels all the way to the Pacific. Actually, they had to go to the Congress to settle. And Congress thought that Pennsylvania should have a port on Lake Erie and they eventually gave it to Pennsylvania. But the land...they wanted it settled. So they gave warrants for the land, where all you had to do was live on the land and you could buy it very cheaply. I've written about that in some detail, but that's the gist of it. So, even by this time, by the War of 1812, people knew there was rich land cheap in Erie County. All you had to do was come here and live on it. So, Henry Howard walked to Erie County. And Sarah Jenness, her family had come here a few years earlier. I think they came from New Hampshire. They came in early February because in early February all the creeks were frozen over. You know when you go up the lake, there's Six Mile Creek, and Eight

Mile Creek, Sixteen Mile Creek. These are formidable obstacles if you're pulling a wagon. So, they set out in early February, not with a wagon but with a sled. They had come a few years earlier. Well, it's quite a story! During the season immediately after 1812, the U.S. colonies had furnished cotton to England and England made the cloth and sold us the cloth. All their weaving mills were strictly guarded so that none of the colonies could make the machinery to make the cloth. We had to get our cloth from England and we would furnish them with the raw materials. After two-three years of getting cut off from our supply, there wasn't any cloth in the colonies. They made something called linsey-woolsey. And then they made a very crude cotton cloth by spinning. That's what the Jenness' had done. They had a big wooden box and they filled it with that cloth. And Mrs. Jenness was pregnant and she came bumping all the way from New Hampshire on that sled. And when she got to Erie County, she said, "That's far enough." She kind of liked the hills around Girard. They had planned to go to Ohio. But she insisted they quit. So, a neighbor in Girard let them live in his barn awhile. But then they found out up on Tannery Hill, was a farm for sale. And she showed the guy her cloth-this big box full of homemade cloth. And he traded her ...that's how valuable cotton cloth had become! He traded her the farm for that big box of cotton cloth. I've got some old letters...when people went to see the Jenness' they would take them out...and set up that box and used it as a pig pen. But that box had the cloth and it was famous, and I got letters from my Grandfather talking about that box and how they got the farm. When they made the trip, they had this little girl with them and her name was Sarah. And so, Henry and Sarah eventually found each other and got married. And he had already bought this land at Howard's Falls. And he already started his quarry...for this course grain sandstone. And that's the sandstone that they built the Erie Court House out of. I've been out there. The Howards still live there. I don't know them very well, although they're related. And the quarry, what's left of it is still there. But that's the story of how Henry and Sarah got together. Their children...Henry and Sarah had a daughter Clarissa. And Clarissa married my Great-grandfather. And his name was Ceylon Mathewson. And that's kind of an interesting story there. His father had come to Erie County also, looking for cheap land and rich land. But he got typhoid. Went home and got typhoid and died. His wife was Mary Robinson. She was from the Rhode Island Robinsons...one of the earliest families to settle in the colonies. So there she was with two little boys and no husband and she had to move in with her brother. So, when you got two women in one household, it doesn't work out too good. And she had the two little boys, Ceylon and his brother, can't remember his name now [Alfred]. But she waited until the oldest boy was eighteen. Then she got a covered wagon and her two boys and some farm equipment, Ceylon was eighteen, and they headed out to Erie County. Because, when her husband had been here, he put in the claim for that first land just to the west of Silverthorn School in Franklin Township. There was an old log house on the place and it wasn't much. I don't remember ever seeing it, but it was there in the early thirties. Anyway, she moved her two boys in there and Ceylon married Clarissa. And that was

my Great-grandparents. And incidentally, I knew both of them rather well...Ceylon and Clarissa. She went blind when she turned about 90. But she used to visit my Grandmother. And I would be out at the farm and Clarissa would be there. She would get me to move her out on the lawn under a great big maple tree where there was always a breeze. And I'd hear her talking and no one was there. And I was a young kid I'd go sneak up behind her and tried to listen to what she was saying. And she was at a dance and was talking about a dance and some boys were asking her to dance and she was being coy. And I was listening to all this when my Grandmother came out of the house and asked me, "What's she saying?" "What's she saying?" (laughing). She was just a nice old lady in her nineties talking to herself...some kind of memories. She was blind and couldn't see much. I remember asking her if she could see anything at all. She said she could tell light from dark...if someone turned a light on or she looked at the sun that was about it.

Interviewer: Let's talk about Christmas growing up. What was Christmas like at your Grandparents?

Russell Davis: We always had a tree, 'cause we had lots of trees to cut. Some of the ornaments of the tree were very old. Some of them had been made by my mother. And they were very simple. Quite often, there were red paper chains that you just make each loop and glue it together. They had chains across the tree and they had some store bought ornaments. Christmas was a pretty big thing here in Erie with my folks. So, we spent most Christmases in Erie. I do remember how my Grandmother couldn't throw away all those old, old paper chains and things that her daughters had made. (smiling)

Interviewer: Did you meet your wife in Erie?

Russell Davis: No. I met my wife in Glendive, Montana. I was an engineer on the Discovery well, the first well to produce oil in eastern Montana. I lived in Glendive, which is on the main east-west highway through Montana. I got to chasing the schoolteachers whenever I had any spare time. Shirley was from Bismarck, North Dakota. They're terribly short of schoolteachers in that whole area. So, after two years of college, they would grant an emergency teaching certificate to these young girls if they would promise in blood to continue their education every summer until they had the equivalent of four years. They didn't pay much, and when Shirley got her emergency teaching certificate, she found out that Montana paid more than North Dakota. So, she thought she would go just across the line into the first town in Montana and that way, she would come home easier on holidays. So, she started teaching in Glendive. And she had a twin sister who was also doing the same thing and she was teaching in the next town north. Well, in the meantime, the Shell Oil Company had discovered oil in a big wheat field north of that. And the nearest town that I could live in was Glendive. There was one other little town, but Glendive was huge-like 7 or 8 thousand people. And so, that's how we happened to end up both living in the same town.

Interviewer: You want to give the names of your children and when they were born.

Russell Davis: I have two daughters. The first one's name is Jane Elizabeth. She got married but she refused to change her last name. So, her name is Jane Elizabeth Davis. She was born in Billings, Montana on December 4, 1955. Of course, she has a family of her own now. She has two children, Alice and Lloyd. My other daughter is named Sarah Templeton Davis. She got married but she refused to change her name. She was born on June 24, 1958. And she married Alexander Stoll S-T-O-L-L. [Editor's note—not on video, and they have a daughter, Bryn.]

Interviewer: You want to talk about farming in the township? Your Grandfather's farm and what kind of equipment they had? You mentioned potatoes and dairy.

Russell Davis: They were mostly then, dairy farmers. They had multi crops... a little of this and a little of that. Now there isn't much farming going on except dairy. But potatoes were our cash crop. So, we had all the potato digging equipment. And it was changing. After WWII, there was a great demand for tractors. Most everyone had used horses up 'til then. As the horses died off, my Uncle Byron, who had 700 hungry foxes, bought the old horses that they had no use for anymore. They were usually pretty old and infirm anyway. He bought the old horses and we butchered them to feed the foxes. Tractors were in short supply but there was a strict price control going on, so that you couldn't gouge each other. I know. I went to a tractor sale when I was about fifteen, just at the end of the war, when the first tractors were coming out. They had this nice pretty tractor up there all shiny. And all the farmers standing around. And the auctioneer said, "This tractor has a fixed price that we cannot exceed." I forget what it was called, the office of Price Control. Anyway, they had a fixed price. He said, "But I'm not auctioning off the tractor, I'm auctioning this rooster!" He said, "Whoever buys this rooster, I'll throw in the tractor!" (with outstretched fist) He said, "Now the starting price for this rooster is \$1,000. What am I bid?" (holding out his fist) And they bid for a while and he said, "Man, look at that rooster, see that beautiful tail sticking out there?" "Fifteen hundred dollars. Who will bid fifteen hundred dollars?" So, they auctioned off the rooster and whoever bid on the rooster, they threw in the tractor! But I remember. So, we had a lot of equipment and they had spray rigs at that time that moved around the township. You hired the sprayer and you didn't have to own the equipment, the same as they did with thrashing machines and combines and all that. Small farms like they had in Franklin Township couldn't afford to own all the equipment that it takes.

Interviewer: Do you know who owned the sprayer?

Russell Davis: No, I don't remember now. I remember the guy, though. One of the strongest men I've ever seen. He had to take a barrel, a forty gallon barrel...(with hands spread apart) some were fifty-five gallon barrels...I filled...it was my job; I filled the barrels with water from the well, with the pump going. (making pumping motion with arm) Then he would put the water in his sprayer with the sump pump and mix the stuff. Well, he'd get impatient and when his little vacuum pump had got about half of that barrel into his tank, he would pick up that barrel up, up over his head. (with arms

held high overhead) I had no idea what that weighed, about 250-300 pounds, a huge man. They eventually, as the years went on, about the time I left, they got to spraying with 2-4D, which they called an insecticide. But it took Rachel Carson about ten years later, about 1957-58, she wrote a book called, "Silent Spring." In it, she said that it was not an insecticide it was a biocide. It will kill anything. It's now banned. Both my Granddad and my Uncle Leon died from the effects of that potato spray. It's a carcinogen. And they died as described in Rachel Carson's book, "Silent Spring." But that's what they did. They sprayed the potatoes, kept the weeds down. And that was their cash crop. And they hired workers, and mostly women, about thirty or forty of them at a time, and they'd go through the field and pick potatoes.

Interviewer: Quite a large potato field.

Russell Davis: About forty acres I guess.

Interviewer: Where did they sell them, up in Erie?

Russell Davis: I don't know. They had buyers who came around.

Interviewer: Did you do your own butchering out there?

Russell Davis: Well, of course we butchered horses. One summer we butchered fifty. We had a cold room that was about twice the size of this room that we kept at zero degrees and we had meat in there for the foxes all the time. We used to butcher hogs but that was before my time. I butchered hogs, but I don't remember doing it there. We did have a smoke house. Somebody butchered hogs because my Granddad had a big ceramic crock in the basement. He had two or three of them. He filled it with brine and they put this pork in there and this big flat stone on the top so none of it popped up from the brine. They cured meat that way. They cured bacon and then they took it to the smoke house. And the smoke house had a metal floor. And they built the fire and the fire was always built out of corncobs and hickory wood. The corncobs produced a dense smoke and the hickory flavored it. They just smoked that bacon for days and days and days. But the stuff that came out of that crock was called sowbelly, and nobody would eat it except my Granddad. But I'd go down and bring up a piece of it on a plate so it wouldn't drip all over. My Grandmother would soak it in water overnight to get rid of some of the salt. And then fry it up the next morning and have it for breakfast. I tried it and it's horrible! It's just fat. But it's fried. But they used to eat that. As long as you're working hard, I guess you can eat most anything. I wouldn't think it very healthy, at least today!

Interviewer: List of businesses in the township?
Blacksmiths...

Russell Davis: We had a traveling blacksmith came around to shoe our horses.

Interviewer: Do you know who that was?

Russell Davis: No.

Interviewer: Sawmill...

Russell Davis: The Harris farm was originally known as "Wildcat Corners" from the whine of a saw. It's right at the corner of the Harris farm. It's right at the northwest corner of the crossroads of State Road and Townline. In fact, we used to find along the road, remember I told you that Charles' sons were given some land to build their own homes. We'd walk back and forth at lunchtime. We'd find at one-time oxen shoes. Do you know what an oxen shoe looks like? It looks like half of a horseshoe, a little small. They had a lot of oxen running back and forth bringing in saw wood. One of them lost a shoe sometimes and we'd find them along the road.

Interviewer: Cheese Factory...

Russell Davis: We didn't eat a lot of cheese. But my Uncle Leon had a pretty good-sized truck and he picked up milk from all the farmers and took it to the Carnation plant. Do you know where that was? Meadville, I believe.

Interviewer: Mechanics...

Russell Davis: Well, there were automobile agencies that were mechanics. There were different garages. Walkers had a Buick garage there in Edinboro, run by Jinx Walker. I used to go fishing with him. Jinx Walker had a grandson who is now an Ophthalmologist right out here on 38th St, Walkers. I go there to have my eyes checked and I told him I used to go fishing with his Grandfather. Then he said, "Yeah, when I got married, my wedding present was an all-paid-for fishing trip to Canada from Jinx Walker!" Merchants-Right there at McLane where the State Road crosses (Rt.) 99, was a stone building built out of brown stone. In fact, I used to marvel at how little cement they used. They fitted those stones so that they needed very little mortar. And it was a beautiful job. That was run by Lynn Crandall. Ever heard that name? I'd go there and buy 22(cal.) shells from him. I'd walk from the farm down to Lynn Crandall's store, buy my 22 shells, and walk back. If I had any money, I'd buy an ice cream cone. They were five cents, a huge ice cream cone! (making a tall cone with hands) He was some relative, too, but I don't know how. There were a lot of Crandall's around. One of them had the Ford Agency. As mechanics, my Uncle Leon was a mechanic. He worked as a mechanic in Mayville for a while. I don't know what you mean by "mechanic." Everyone was a mechanic back then. They worked on their own cars. If you're a farmer, with all the machinery they had, you had to be a mechanic. When I was learning how to operate machinery, I broke my share of it, and we had to repair it. I remember hauling manure once, through some heavy ground and backing it up. We had very powerful horses. We had the biggest team of horses in Franklin Township. They weighed a ton apiece. So, when you got 4,000 pounds of horses pulling on a piece of machinery, if you get that in a bind or something, they're gonna break it. And that happened to me. My Granddad didn't think much at all. He claimed that due to the fact that I didn't live all the time out in the country, and if I'd been a real farm boy, I'd never done that, I was city. But my Uncle Leon was very patient and he'd do the repair work. But, you had to be a mechanic. You had all kinds of machinery. Even the mowing machine didn't stay sharp very long. If you got to mow twenty or thirty acres of hay, which we did, you can't

do that whole thing without sharpening the mowing machine cutters. And they're complex. I don't know if you know what they look like. They got edges that slide this way (back and forth motion with hands) so that they're beveled. You need a special grindstone to do it. So, everybody had to be somewhat of a mechanic. There were always welders around. Any complicated jobs we would bring to Erie. That's about all I know about the mechanics. Although my Uncle Leon was pretty good at it. He was professional for a while.

Interviewer: Stone Quarry...

Russell Davis: We talked about the one that was in Howard's Falls. Oil and Gas became my profession later on. That was something different around here. Before I left home, I went down to Titusville, I talked to some of the producers down there, and they took me and showed me some of the wells. And they told me that...you know a barrel of oil is 42 US gallons. And they told me that some of their wells could produce a quarter of a barrel or about 10 gallons a day. And I thought about that later on when I was working in Saudi Arabia. I had just read in the oil and gas journal that the state of Pennsylvania, at that time, that would have been in the '60s, the state of Pennsylvania produced 80,000 barrels a day of oil. I had one well from the Abu Safa field that produced 85,000 barrels all by itself! So, when you turned that well on to production, you had a big ten-inch line. Because to produce 80,000 barrels a day, you got to have a ten-inch line. I remember that big valve; it took 18 turns to open the valve. I'd open that valve and say, "Here comes the state of Pennsylvania!" -that one well! That wasn't the biggest well we had some others. When I worked in the states as a production engineer, we had dozens and dozens of production engineers out in west Texas, and only a few thousand barrels a day production. When I went to Saudi Arabia, there were seven of us, and we had six million barrels a day production. And for a good share of that time, I had the biggest chunk; about 3 million was under my control alone. It was about half of what the USA produces in all the states. I don't know much about oil and gas production in Pennsylvania. There are some gas wells in and around Waterford. I don't know if they're producing much oil anymore.

Interviewer: Wagon makers...

Russell Davis: If you go down by Howard's Falls, you come to, what's the name of that road...you know where that covered bridge is? What's the name of that road? [Gudgeonville Road] There are several covered bridges of course, but that one is-I can't think of the name of it. It'll come to me later. It's named for the German word for wagon wheel hub. And if they named a road after it, there must have been wagon wheels made around there. I know that when they make the hub of a wagon wheel, they always make it out of American elm. American elm wood is one of the most worthless woods in the whole world because you can't dry it. You can cut it and when you dry it, it twists and you can't make boards out of it. But there's nothing that would grip the spokes of a wheel better than American elm. And so, that's

what they used to make the hubs out of. And we had lots of elm in Franklin Township, some spectacular elms!

Interviewer: Shoemakers...

Russell Davis: I don't know anything about them. My Grandfather Davis, Mark Davis could make his own shoes. He had all the equipment. I don't know where he learned that. Doctors and Dentists- There were two doctors in Edinboro, you probably know.

Interviewer: There weren't any in the township though?

Russell Davis: Not that I know of.

Interviewer: Feed Mills or Grist Mills...

Russell Davis: There weren't any of those in the township that I know of, but there were some not far away and Cider Mills, too. I think one of the Cider Mills was just out of McKean. I remember we hitched the team up and put the sideboards on the hay wagon and made it a box wagon and drove it out into the orchard and filled the wagon with apples. They were windfalls mostly; they had fallen down. And then we'd put three empty barrels that had been soaking up so they wouldn't leak; we had them full of water. And we drove to Clapper's Cider Mill. We didn't have any money so he'd squeeze all our apples and then he'd take some of the apples in lieu of money. And we'd come home with three barrels full of apple cider. My Granddad put one of them out in the woodshed, which was attached to the house for the grandchildren to drink. He put some planks down the steps into the cellar; it had an outside opening. We'd roll one down and put it in the corner. That was for my Grandmother to have vinegar year round. Also, we drank a lot of what we called switzel. When you had a group of men working, like during haying season, or during thrashing, you always fed them switzel. All the farmers did that, both my Grandparents. And sometimes during thrashing season, each farmer would come over and help the others. And when my Granddad got to where he couldn't work, he'd send me. I was pretty proud too because I was pretty young. When I was about thirteen or fourteen, he'd send me. The other farmers would have switzel. And you made it out of ginger, sugar, vinegar and lemon. And when you're hot, dusty, and dry, it just cut like a good pop. It didn't have a sweet after-taste because of the vinegar in it. But it could really cut your thirst. It was a good drink. You never heard of switzel? Some of them called it ginger ale. It had so much vinegar in it; I don't know how you could call it that. One of the farms I went to, I was a bagger there. You know those big separator machines, they used back then, the grain comes out this chute that divides. You switch it over into this bag. And when it gets full, you switch it so the grain goes in the other bag. You quick take this one off and you tie it with a bag knot and you got to learn how to do that, (making circular winding motion with hands) and put a new bag on it. By the time you tied the bag knot and hauled it off, and put a new bag on it, this one's full. It's a pretty busy job; you can't screw up. If you screw up, the grain's coming out all over the floor. I know! One of the places I was at, they took around some homemade wine! (smiling) I think that's the first alcoholic beverage I ever tasted in my life! Right after I drank a half a

glass of that, like it was water, my uncle come charging in and said, "Now if they bring about this wine, don't you touch it!" And I said, "Ok Uncle, I won't!" (saluting) And I didn't after that, but I had a pretty good glass! (smiling) I was about thirteen. I think that was the first alcoholic drink I ever tasted.

Interviewer: Leather goods...

Russell Davis: We tanned leather, some, ourselves. But there was that big Tannery in Girard on Tannery Hill. Incidentally, that tannery (getting up from his chair, off the video) tanned, instead of chrome-tanned, it's got a quebrach tan. They make all the covers for all the basketballs in the United States. They make them right out there in that Tannery in Girard. Of course, they have a lot of scraps left over so they stamp those things out by the thousands and give them out when you visit. (not shown on camera) I used to tan leather. I tanned woodchuck hides, and squirrel hides and deer hides. I did some Taxidermy work.

Interviewer: Tinkerers...

Russell Davis: You'd have to go back way before my time to get Tinkerers. One of the Harris' was a Tinkerer, way back though. I have no personal experience. Although my Uncle Leon could do almost anything. So, with him around, there was no need for a Tinkerer.

Interviewer: Horse and Cattle Dealers...

Russell Davis: Well, we raised sheep among other things but we also bought cattle. Some friends of mine, Bill Weaver who lived nearby, Buckskin Bill from Old South Hill, (getting up from chair-no camera on him) He made this for me. He has a little verse on it. I was living in Montana at the time, (showing a powder horn) it says, "Now keep your powder dry, my boy, and please don't let it spoil," if it got wet, they called it spoiled, "or you'll be pushing daisies up through old Montana soil." (not on camera) Quite a guy. When Bill died, his brother, Walter, they were both ancient, I don't know how old, they couldn't farm anymore. But he had a pretty nice farm, it was all well fenced. So, what Walter told me he did was every spring this big truck would back up and they would unload about 30 or 40 young stock and then unload it in his pasture. He had water and grass. Then about every October a big truck would pull up, they would load the cattle back on the truck and pay him for the weight they gained, and he would go to Florida. That seemed pretty darn nice, the way to live to me! I asked him what he had to do during the year and he said that the only thing he ever did was count the stock and make sure they were all there and then he'd take off and go to Florida. (smiling)

Interviewer: Cattle Dealers...

Russell Davis: There was this big dealer out on (Rt.) 19; it's an Automobile Agency out there now. There was a big cattle dealer there. He used to come in and get our sheep. He's out about 7 miles out of Erie; it's on the right as you go out. They were Jewish. It doesn't matter now they're gone. I remember the way you prepare your sheep for the cattle dealers. You lock them up for 24 hours with no water and then we'd bring out the platform scales and get it balanced so

that it's good. There was this great big guy and he'd go in and grab each sheep under their front legs and just hold them. Then they go on the scales, they would weigh them, and my Grandfather would witness and marked that down. They'd throw him in the truck and just do it like that and then they'd weigh the guy and subtract each sheep. [Editor's note—not on video, Then, they would subtract the big guy's weight from the combined weight and they would know the weight of that sheep.]