Chestnut Memories

Oral History Transcript

Bethany BAXTER

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Interviewee: Edwin Manchester
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Audio File: EdwinManchester_01.wav
BB: press record. Ok, so the first I have to do is recite this statement to you. So it says: The key objective of this interview is to serve as a research tool to document memories of the American chestnut in the southern Appalachian region. Information attained in these interviews will be retained and made available for future use in efforts to promote a better understanding of the role of American chestnut in Appalachian culture. So now I have to ask, have you signed the participant identification and release agreements?

EM: yes.

BB: ok great, so now we’re ready to start. So the first thing I want people to say is … Will you just tell me your name, when you were born and where you’re from.

EM: Ok, I’m Edwin Manchester, I was born 1933 at Bent Creek, North Caroline. I was born at what is now the Appalachian Forest Experiment Station. I’ll recount some of the stories my father told because he had, he was accused of the blight following him from New England because he moved from New Hampshire to, where he was District Ranger, and the what is it…. Green Mountains there, to the middle of Virginia, to Erwin, Tennessee to Hot Springs, North Carolina to Bent Creek. And I think a lot of the chestnut followed... or the blight, followed about the same route. The fact of the matter was he laid out a lot of the Appalachian Trail and he had the measuring wheel, and I guess only one in the Forest Service that had that, so he brought the wheel with him when he came to lay out more trail. Do you want me to just move on into…

BB: what’s a measuring wheel?

EM: It’s a.. like a bicycle wheel, and every time it goes around it clicks and records another four feet, five feet whatever it takes….so he carried a little router, portable router on his back, stopped and made signs at the Gaps, trail crossings or stuff on the AT and then recorded distances. That was just a small part of the job, but a lot of his cronies attributed his moves to that they didn’t have the wheel there yet. But he thought the spread that he could see was tied to tannin mills, or acid plants, because they bought the chestnut blight, and the blight spread... seemed to radiate from those tanning plants. You ever heard that?

BB: no, that’s interesting.

EM: It would have spread anyhow, but he was saying the center of the spread seemed to radiate from those acid plants, or ... acid wood they called it.

BB: yeah, wow. I’ve heard of them using the bark to tanning but I hadn’t heard that theory about the blight. Was your Dad from New Hampshie, or how did he...?
EM: Yeah he was from New England, went to ranger school in New York, and his first job was the forest service, was New Hampshire. But my first recollection of chestnut was the big old dead stems that dominated the landscape around Grandfather Mountain. All of that ranger Mountains through there. Huckleberry picked and fished from the time I was a youngster and saw those big hunks of, hulks of chestnut, some of them five feet through or bigger. And I remember one fire pretty close to Grandfather Mountain, that after the head fire went through the chestnut trees were on fire then, the dead ones, they stood out in the daytime because they were bleached out almost white, kind of a bright grey color, and you could see them on the Mountain side. Standing out. But on the fire, all those big... a lot of them had some hollows in them, and they were like great big torches, it would be like fireworks going off, because there’s be maybe 100, 150 on them on fire at the same time. That was one of my first memories, seeing all those, that would have been in the early 40s I guess, or mid 40s maybe. But, I started.... I came here to Murphy, North Carolina in '63, and I knew Ivan Thor. Dr. Thor was the forest geneticist working at the University of Tennessee Knoxville and he had a lot of interest in chestnut and began trying to pick trees with some resistance, and propagate them. And he kept thinking he had one, and he’d let out a little publicity and everybody’d get excited, and then it’d get the blight. But he kept trying, he kept trying to radiate them, radiate the seed, to what, change the chromosome? So I collected a lot of the seed that he did that with, came from here. And, I know one of my favorite trees stayed there for 30 or 35 years, the power company finally thought it was too close to the power line and came and cut it down. Made me gnash my teeth and other things. But, I’m trying to come up with the fella with the Tennessee Division of Forestry at Knoxville that works with tree improvement...Russ Cox, Russ Cox worked with Thor and I remember he had real good success with making use of the chestnuts, he was propagating with seed and he’d cut them in half, or would pull them apart in half, one year, and got successful plants from both halves. Then the next year he put them in 4 pieces, got success, then I think he kept on until he got to almost 16ths, or at least 8ths. So he’d get 8 plants from one seed. He did a lot of work in the ... oh gosh, I can’t remember if it was the late 60s or early 70s. And, I think Russ still works for Tennessee.

BB: So this would have been after the US government gave up their chestnut restoration program?

EM: I think so, yeah

BB: Do you know anything about that program?

EM: He did some, I know I talked once with, I think Dr. James, I believe in New Hampshire. He was with USDA North Eastern Forest Experiment Station. He did a lot of work with chestnut and he has a lot, from his seed ... there’s a lot of plantations around, some at Bent Creek, the experiment station out of Asheville. We took some of his better crosses and grafted them and found we couldn’t do that successfully. Cause we were planting them here and they’d grow like the dickens for 3, 4, 5 years and then blight out. We grafted maybe, I don’t know 18, 20 different families with 0%. We did learn how to graft them. We’d do a top cleft graft ... trying to think of the little, the biologist with TVA who told me how to do it. He
said to go out in the morning and touch the top of that .. don't immediately graft when you make your cut of the under stock. But go out until there was no sap, keep touching that until it was dry. He said that if you didn't do that it'd sour out, and turns out he was right. We got about 30% on our first attempts and then we did it his way and got about 80% success. Plantation's still there of all those crosses but I'm reasonably sure there's zero hybrids in the bunch, I think its just the under stock that's come back. I've heard a lot of the old timers talk about... here the big thing was ranging, turkeys and hogs in the mountains. Turning them out to eat chestnuts in the fall and then rounding them back up.

BB: yeah, that's definitely the biggest memory that people have. That, and getting pricked by burrs, that the thing that sticks out in people's memories. Do you have any specific stories, any of those folks?

EM: well, I'll try to recount the one Ester has. My wife's mother, my mother in law saved up, she wanted a pump organ. And she picked up chestnuts to buy the pump organ. Sold them. How much would you guess Ester? Maybe a quarter? So she had to made 17 dollars for the pump organ, maybe a used one, or was it new? And they would trade things, they'd take them to the store and trade them for groceries.

BB: Did your mother in law live around here in Murphy?

EM Lived in Ashe County, North Carolina. And it was the same all over mountains, people traded them. Around Grandfather Mountain country they would go by train to the, I think they sold a lot of chestnut in lower South Carolina and Georgia, the train would go from – it didn't go to Blowing Rock, but I guess they'd take them by wagon to Lenoir put them on the train to go to Low Country and sell them.

BB: Some people I talked to in Madisonville talked about that, and I haven't gotten any older people in Georgia. It seems like but people I talked to in eastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia didn't remember that as well but I think it was probably because the train didn't go through eastern Kentucky, that area, but it would have come through around here.

EM: Around here and, over there too, there'd be some people that would take wagon loads of stuff to where ever their market was. They'd take a wagonload and they'd drive turkeys too, and that was a challenge, instead of hauling the turkeys they'd haul them in flocks. And turkeys don't drive well. I've heard some of those stories. They'd camp at night, sleep under the wagon. I don't remember what all they did take, they'd take apples, and chestnuts, can't think of what else they sold that would be in in the fall. Maybe a late crop of cabbage, what else Ester? Take cured hams, sure. Yeah, and side meat.

BB: So you're saying they'd put those on the trains?

EM: No they'd take those from here, I guess took them to Atlanta area, they'd take them south from here at Lenoir, they may have taken them to Charlotte, Columbia, South Carolina.
BB: yeah, I talked to Rex Mann and he said something similar to that. He said that was probably because down there, there were so many plantations, they were putting all of their land into growing cotton or whatever it was, so they depended on these people coming down from the mountains.

EM: when did you see Rex?

BB: Maybe a month ago.

EM: Yeah, we'll visit a little later about him. He's a long time friend.

BB: yeah he was really great to talk to. So did you ever see chestnuts? I guess you did. Did you ever pick chestnuts yourself?

EM: Well I've collected them for Thor, Ester has too. She can climb a tree better than I can. It's a real trick now to get chestnuts because you've got to get them before the chipmunks or the squirrels do. About the only way to do it is to climb a tree, or get to where you can get them off a tree. We had good success 3 or 4 years ago, because we hit it just right. I think we collected off of 7 trees, 6 or 7.

BB: did you ever hear any stories about how people would prepare or eat them? Anything interesting there?

EM: Not so much. I've heard about roasting them and boiling them, using them in different dished. Most of what I remember is for the Asiatic or Italian species. I know the Cherokee really prize them for the bread, chestnut bread, the Cherokee like them a whole lot better than the wheat bread. Make cakes out of them. I had a cake once that Paola Craddock made. She can make chestnut cake.

BB: Yeah, she's great.

EM: did I pronounce her name right?

BB: Yeah, Paola. When you were a kid do you remember seeing...?

EM: All I remember is those big shells of trees. Of course I've gotten logs and seen loggers, the logs that are good, there's probably still some around, are the ones that fell over, got wind thrown or something, into a hollow or a wet place or high rainfall place, and got covered over with moss. And they, just a few years ago were good, I presume they still are. We'll show you our cabinets and panels are made of chestnut, that's where they came from, was logs that hit the ground and mossed over. They stayed good.

BB: Yeah one guy I talked to down in Georgia said the same thing, he was saying that when he was out in the woods he'd look for because even though its been dead for so long, still it hasn't rotted away at all.

EM: Still as far as I know the ones that are, so far as I know, that are good are the ones with a lot of log moss on them. I guess keep the air out, keeps them preserved.
BB: Do you think your dad had a special interest in chestnut trees?

EM: I think he did, he probably salvaged, at timber sales, salvaged a lot of them that were dead as he came from New Hampshire to Virginia to Erwin, Tennessee. And they were wonderful for about anything in the furniture, I’ve heard the old furniture people. I worked for Broyhill Furniture at Lenoir for a while and some of the old hands said that the chestnut was just wonderful to work with. It sanded good, it held nails good. It wasn’t too awful heavy, you didn’t have to sharpen your equipment as often because it planed good. They were really spoiled working with chestnut. It does fuzz up some as you plain it, and I guess as you sand it too. Not fuzz up but it make a lot of dust that some people are allergic to. I’ve heard of some people who’ve gotten pretty sick plaining chestnut lumber, I don’t know why. I remember this we did for the house, I helped do it, another fella and I planed it and he got sick and I didn’t. I think we both had respirators on, and I don’t know, maybe his wasn’t as tight as mine or something. Let’s see what else do I recall... the folks in the northeast have got a lot of records and expertise on the research. They’re good with the, what is it, electrophoresis, that tracks the families, they’re really good at that. Connecticut Experiment Station is particularly good with it, and Notre Dame, I think Notre Dame is as well.

BB: Did you ever hear your dad or anybody else talk about how the forest just looked different with the Chestnuts were there?

EM: They said it was just overwhelming how big and how thick they stood together sometimes. And I have an old photo, just thought of it, that came from Robinsville, over in Graham County North Carolina, of four or five of them standing ten, twenty feet apart, and they were all about four or five foot chestnuts, so I’ll dig those out before you leave, but I don’t remember, there was a lot of Lumber companies that followed the chestnut south. I don’t know if they were contentiously following the blight, I think it just happened that they cut out a lot of the big timber in the north-east and central, northern central states. Then came to the Appalachians, then they went to Idaho, Washington and Oregon from here.

BB: I know you said you worked with UTK and all that, was that what you did for a living?

EM: I was a seed orchard manager with US Forest Service, and we grew seed for the southern Appalachian forests, improved tree seed. Worked with three different pines, black cherry, four different oaks, and yellow poplar. Now they don’t call them seed orchards, they call them genetic resource areas or something like that, but the one is still here for the southern Appalachians. They have a few chestnuts but not many. My work with Thor was while I was with USDA, and then I have worked with Dr. Schlaurbaum, when he came there, and then in 1990 I started working with him, when I retired in 90, I’ve worked with Schlaurbaum ever since, periodically. Worked with any trees with genetic diseases, that we were looking for a tie, probably more with butternut than anything else.

BB: I guess you probably do think it’s important to restore, or, why do you think it’s important to restore the chestnut tree.
EM: Well chestnut just had so many uses, it was one of the best wildlife foods we've about ever had, and then was a super wood for cabinetry or furniture or just about any wood use I guess. Plus the American chestnut nuts were good for a lot of cooking uses too. And I personally, with no scientific backing, I think they'll come back. The Italian chestnuts grow in a similar environment, and they blighted out and came back, so I don't see any reason... I think I'll see any of them, and you may not, but somebody will. I think. I think they will evolve, one of these days there's going to be one resistant and it will go from there. But its not there yet.

BB: Yeah. Why do you think so many people get involved with the Chestnut foundation, and want to save the tree?

EM: It's just a wonderful feeling, I think, to be involved with something where you have the potential of restoring a tree. A tree with all those attributes.

BB: One think that I think is really interesting is that a lot of people I've talked to who are part of the chestnut foundation or interested in the restoration process... a lot of the people who are involved, motivated and interested had parents who told them about chestnut trees or had these stories told to them.

EM: sure...

BB: Can you speak to that at all, or do you think that sentiment or nostalgia plays into it at all?

EM: Sure it does, yeah. Everybody I think about, that lives in the Appalachians or maybe the east, if they're long time residents, have heard those old stories about the ground being covered in them, and the hogs fattening up, and the turkeys and ... I guess cattle ate them. It's just an attractive bit of nostalgia I guess, isn't it.

BB: Yeah. I think it's really interesting to think about that as a motivating factor for people to get involved. Do you think that the American chestnut is particularly, just because it was so useful and widely used I guess, do you think that makes it an easier tree to try to restore?

EM: I think so, yeah, I think that's pretty much right on target. When either technology or genetics makes resistant stock available, everybody will jump on the bandwagon to reforest it. We can now reforest oak, and we thought that was difficult to do 30 or 40 years ago. I think chestnut will be easier than Oak.

BB: Do you think there are more people interested in restoring chestnut than other, like butternut and other trees, that you've worked with?

EM: Sure. Butternut used to be sort of a popular thing. I've found in my visits up and down the Appalachians looking for it that, even a lot of the foresters now, it doesn't jump out at them, they don't know onw, they think it's a black walnut when they see it. A lot of them do know it, but I've run into a lot of them that didn't. I'm sure the general public, that's not on their radar much.
BB: Do you know of any other non-profit organizations that have been started around the restoration of a tree?

EM: like the chestnut?

BB: or, so there’s the American Chestnut Foundation for folks wanting to restore the chestnut but are there any other organizations organized around trying to restore other kinds of trees?

EM: Can’t think of it, may be. Well, yes. There’s some now that are trying to restore the Hemlock from the Adelgid. Dogwood? I don’t know, there may be. That’s another one that genetics played a big role in. We crossed some western, or I don’t know all of the genetic background, but they came up with a tree that looked like a Cornis Florida, that is crossed with something else and is resistant to the dogwood anthracnose, and we have great hopes that... we think that there’s resistant butternut to the butternut disease, so we have hope that the genetics will work on that.

BB: Earlier you were saying how you might not see the chestnut in your lifetime, and I might not see it in my lifetime, so I think that’s interesting too, that we’re talking about more than 100 years down the road and there’s going to have to be a certain amount of work done in more rural places for people to try to get these trees back in the wild. So, I’ve been asking people will it be difficult to get these people who are going to be land owners and grown up people in the next 20, 30 50 years to get involved in the effort. Yes or no?

EM: Oh I think the only problem will be having the stock to plant, I think everybody’s are going to want them.

BB: Why do you think people will want them?

EM: Because of all of these stories they’ve heard. And they’re right, it’s just a great tree. It, when there’s either a hybrid or a natural resistance tree, why, everybody’s going to jump on the bandwagon and want all the trees they can get for their acreage.

BB: So, do you think these stories will play a part in this?

EM: I do, sure.

BB: do you think that people will tell their children about chestnut in the same way that your father told you about chestnut, or how will that change?

EM: well, it will probably be less and less total number of people who are interested in it, because some of that’s going to get diluted, some of the stories will, with young people not being interested in it. But still, like the following of the chestnut foundation now, there’s going to be a lot of people who maybe haven’t heard a whole lot of stories but that’s just a neat thing to be involved with I think.
BB: Yeah. I’ve been asking people, do you know any traditions, sayings, songs, stuff like that about chestnuts. That kind of folklore, stories that incorporate..?

EM: I don’t. The one person that would know would be the folklorist at John C. Campbell folk school, David Brose, B-R-O-S-E.

BB: ok

EM: I don’t know his email, I know his phone number.

BB: Ok. I’ll have to get that from you. I’ve been trying to find... you know how there are those old time saying that people have, I feel like there must be some of those about chestnut.

EM: There very likely is, but I can’t….. well I do, I can think of something that’s sort of related.. One of the forest service recreation technicians was visiting a campsite over on Chattooga Lake, and one real old lady was sitting there whittling with a knife. And they had a campfire going, and they talked a little about firewood. And she said, ‘I sure hope that when I die they’ve got plenty of chestnut wood’. And he said, ‘Why?’ and she said, ‘when I hit the fire I want to be popping and cracking’.

BB: that’s great (laughing) that’s really great.

EM: Because when you burn chestnut it pops and cracks, makes a lot of noise.

BB: that’s great. Yeah, I’ve heard people say it was good for putting in the stove but it wasn’t good for putting in the fireplace because it would pop and crack out.

EM: right, cause it will throw coals.

BB: yeah, so a lot of people tell me that they remember hearing about feeding chestnuts to the hogs, and building split rail fences, and building their barns out of chestnut, things like that. But its those personal stories about specific people, that are unique to the individual, that are really fun and great to hear. So you worked for the forest service?

EM: 32 years.

BB: ok, in that time would people ask about chestnut a lot.

EM: Sure. The receptionist in the ranger district office had someone in real regular saying they found an American chestnut tree. Probably 80% of the time it would be a European or Asiatic chestnut that had got out. But sometimes them were. I went to a great big one one time, in Clay County, North Carolina that must have been 36 maybe 40 inch. And it was still alive but not much, and it threw a lot ... the ground just covered with empty burrs where it had crops of nuts on it, but it was dead from the blight and didn’t know it yet. It was still making nuts, anything that’s under stress a lot of like that throws a lot of fruit.
BB: How do you think the chestnut blight changed people lives? Like just the way people lived. Do you think it made much difference?

EM: Sure, had a great effect. It closed all the tannin mills I guess. I don't know where they used some Oak for tannin or not, and there might have been other factors that played a big role in closing the... for one thing we started not using as much leather. I don't know what came first, our use of leather or chestnut blight. Well, when I grew up, we still - teenagers would love to have a new leather jacket once every year or two, and you don't see that now or just a whole lot of uses of leather, even then. It changed a lot of the thinking in the furniture industry and, gosh, I don't know what else, but it surely made a big economic impact.

BB: Did you ever hear about any more kind of obscure or really localized efforts to stop the blight? Any remedies people made up?

EM: No I haven't. I've heard of people burning the woods to get rid of insects, and some may have done it to get rid of the blight, but I haven't heard that specifically. And I don't, I've heard of people, but I guess that was researchers mostly, like inoculating the trees with an antibiotic.

BB: I just didn't know if there were things that some old mountain man would have done, or if they just kind of accepted it?

EM: they probably did but I haven't heard the stories. I would guess they did, because there was a lot of resourcefulness in the Appalachians. They had all sorts of uses for water. I knew one fella under Grandfather Mountain, Bill Krump, he’d never been to school, but he made furniture, and he didn’t have electricity to where he lived, didn’t have any power lines, but he rigged up a generator, a water power generator and had a little furniture shop with electric equipment, and it just worked like a charm. And then a lot of the old folks houses had water to at least come outside the house from a source, maybe a lot lower than the house, by using a ram, where a little trickle of water would go in a hydraulic ram, R-A-M, that would build up pressure and squirt water up to a higher elevation.

BB: that does amaze me too, the ingenuity of people. Were there any games, or holiday celebrations or gatherings that happened around chestnut?

EM: A lot of the Cherokee celebrations happened around corn. And there may have been some around chestnut. The lady that we’re referring to over at Cherokee will know that I bet I don’t. It’s about time for the annual corn festival at Cherokee and that’s not open to the public I don’t think. I think its for the native people.

BB: Do you think the chestnut is an important cultural symbol for Appalachia?

EM: I expect they are, but I don’t know examples of it. No, there’s a lot of folklore about buckeye, which is, a lot of people confuse that with chestnut because in Appalachia it’s called ‘Horse Chestnut’. In fact there’s a restaurant close here called Chestnuts, and a lot of
the inside of the restaurant is chestnut paneling, and I've noticed their menu has chestnut leaves on the front, drawn on, and its not American its Horse Chestnut, Buckeye. I think Dr. Craddock called that to their attention one time, no, maybe ... don't remember if it was him or someone else. Makes sense, but lets not say, we better not say (laughs).

BB: I know, he's a character. He's fun to work with. What time would the blight have passed through where the area where you grew up?

EM: Well my recollections were in the early 40s probably, and then there were just the big old dead skeletons of trees. And I don't remember... my dad went to Virginia in about 1923 and they were dead there then, and came to Erwin in maybe 25 or 6 or something, I don't know how far, I've never read the history of it.

BB: So they were all gone by the time you were old enough to remember anything?

EM: Well, I don't know whether there were pockets of them or not, I don't remember seeing them. All of my recollection of living trees are sprouts. I had a ... owned a piece of land there Blowing Rocks, and they had big sprouts, some of them were probably 8 or 9 inch diameter and 45 feet tall, and that was in the late 50s, 60s. But, I just sort of have the feel that the sprouts got smaller and smaller before they got the blight, and then maybe in the 90s, or around the turn of the century they got bigger, don't know whether that's just my reaction of seeing more, or bigger ones. I don't know whether that's fact or not, but it just kind of seems like they're getting bigger. And if they are that gives us some encouragement resistance.

BB: Yeah definitely. Were there any places named after Chestnut, like Chestnut Ridge or...?

EM: Sure. Yeah there are. There's Chestnut Knobs all through the Appalachians, seems like there's a Chestnut Mountain somewhere, I forget where. Chestnut Flats, Chestnut Ridge, sure a lot of ... don't know any streams, but I think the names all over the Appalachians. Just like buffalo is, there's ... It's curious that, I don't know how long the buffalo's been gone, but there's a lot of names persist of buffalo, because we had, you know, the eastern buffalo.

BB: yeah that's interesting. As far as the restoration effort goes, how have you been involved in the chestnut restoration?

EM: I think most all I've done is grafting that scion wood Dr. James sent, and collecting nuts for, I think almost all of my collections have been for UT Knoxville.

BB: ok, so what motivated you to get involved and to do that?

EM: Oh it's just any tree or plant or anything that has danger of being extinct is plenty of motivation. I've had a special interest in it, and butternut, and the little plant shortia, I've had a lot of interest in. Which is, a lot of people call Acony Bells.

BB: There's a song, I think there's a song about that.
EM: yeah I think there is too.

BB: have you ever heard any chestnut songs?

EM: Well Brose would be the authority on that.

BB: so, do you think the restoration effort will be successful?

EM: I don’t know. I’ve heard claims of success for 40 years, but ... I’m sure it’d be successful to keep breeding until we get a tree that’s similar to American, that will be successful, but it won’t be American.

BB: Do you see any problem with that, with having this hybrid tree?

EM: No I don’t. I don’t, you know, there are a lot of environmentalists who are opposed to hybridizing anything, but I don’t understand that.

**Edwin Manchester_02.wav**

BB: ...its just, it's a good way to learn and its free you know, its good practice and all that. But I guess that I started to learning to play when I was in Kentucky, and then, I picked it up recently. There are some people who learned classical violin when they're young and I'm kind of jealous of those people because they just pick it up really quickly, but I just decided to learn how to play about 3 years ago, so I’ve been playing for a little while, but definitely have a long way to go. But anyway its back on, I deleted some of those old tunes. But... So one thing I’ve been asking people too is, so, we were talking about what kind of role the chestnut used to have being a timber source, and feed for livestock, and important to the culture, how do you think the chestnut will be used in the 21st Century, or whenever it is finally restored, do you think it will fill those same roles it used to?

EM: no it wont. It will have the real important use of wildlife food. The wood will be used for all kinds of crafts, not only furniture, I think I've seen some beautiful pieces that were turned wood, and wood carvers I know use it. And, I think there'll be more uses like crafts and things like that. Maybe in furniture... no, not furniture, we’ve about lost our furniture industry, it may come back.

BB: you mean it's all just gone...

EM: It’s all gone to china.

BB: Do you think people will.... That the chestnut tree will inspire the same kind of stories folklore that it did originally?

EM: I don’t think so, I think a lot of that went a long with the culture. I think a lot of that a lot of those stories were about making apple butter, and tapping the trees for maple syrup, and all sorts of things like that. Where people were self-sufficient pretty much.
BB: Are there any other ... I guess I'm just curious since you've worked with all these other trees before and other restoration stuff, are there as many stories about Butternut and different Oak trees as there are about chestnut?

EM: no, no

BB: why is that?

EM: I don't know. I think there were just so many uses and they were so outrageously good for fattening hogs and building barns and houses and just all sorts of things that they used the lumber for. I mean, when you can cut a four foot tree that's straight as, and pretty as some of those were, and put it on a saw mill and saw whatever size cants out, squares, and then the cants can go through the ripper saws and rip it into whatever size lumber you want. Its so easy. And then it's dry good and everything... Super lumber.

BB: Do you think people would be interested in bring chestnut back on a large scale

EM: sure all kinds of folks would.

BB: What would be some of the main reasons that would inspire people to get motivated to get involved?

EM: All the stories. And they'll know, hunters would be interested because it'd be such super... I'd presume you could get a lot more animals per acre where there's chestnuts in the woods, although acorns are a fine food too. I'm not a biologist, but I imagine the carrying capacity per acre would increase greatly with wildlife.

BB: yeah, I think that's true. I'm about done, but do you have any sort of hopes or fears or concerns about the restoration process? Any advice you would have for folks?

EM: No, I would... before I put much planning in I'd sure want to see the parents of where the seed came from, or know a good bit about them. I don't know whether there's any strong relation to what area of the country, how far you could move them without genetic problems. Some trees you wouldn't want to move over six hundred miles or something like that.

BB: yeah, they're working on that, I guess maybe you know that but they're trying to find all of these mother trees around, I guess that's part of what you...

EM: yeah, elevation, and latitude, and longitude.

BB: what's the story behind this property you live on here?

EM: It was inhabited, like all of, or a big part of, western North Carolina in the 1800s and was still a fairly, comparatively, large Cherokee presence, and this place right here had a grist mill right down the way and there's a water flume that circles around where this stream goes down maybe 3% the flume just goes down maybe 1% or less, so it builds up
away from the stream, and on down here it would drop, down into the grist mill, so that tells you there's sort of sophisticated farming went on.

BB: So chestnut would have grown here?

EM: oh yeah, yeah. I don’t see sign of it, I don't see any leftovers. They're all gone.

BB: do you ever hear people when you're out, getting breakfast someplace or, does the chestnut come up much anymore?

EM: they do, well --- (cut off)