Chestnut Memories

Oral History Transcript

Interview date: 24-26 October 2008

Interviewer: Bethany Baxter (and Jim Pfitzer)
Interviewee: Anne Page Haney
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Transcriber: Iliza Myers

Note: 2 Audio Files represented in this Transcript.
AH: Can you hear me okay?

BB: Uh-huh.

The first thing I’ll do is I’ll read you this statement to make sure you know what we’re doing: The key objective of this interview is to serve as a research tool to document memories of the American chestnut. Information obtained in these interviews will be retained and made available for further use in efforts to promote a better understanding of the role of the American chestnut.

Have you signed the participant identification and release agreements?

AH: Yes, I have.

BB: Okay, great. Will you just start out telling us who you are, where you’re from, just biographical type of information?

AH: Well, I’m Anne Page Mosby Haney, and I live in Marietta, Georgia. I grew up in Mississippi, and I have family background in Kentucky, and that’s what I want to talk about today--.

BB: All right. Let’s hear it.

AH: --the Kentucky branch.

BB: Great, let’s hear--I’m from Kentucky, so--

AH: Great.

So, this is a very short contribution to the oral history project that the American chestnut Foundation is sponsoring, but I think an unusual story about the chestnut. It’s nonscientific, yet very romantic. This story harkens back to the nineteenth century a farm outside of Glasgow, Kentucky, and by the 1880’s it had come down through the family to my great grandmother whose was named Pocahontas Jackman Page. And in those days, I don’t know, they named their children Pocahontas. I’m not sure why, but I think it’s a great name.
She was widowed early but had two young daughters Ruth and Mary, and Ruth was my grandmother. As girls they enjoyed going with their friends out into an American chestnut grove on the farm and collecting chestnuts. They especially liked collecting chestnuts for the cookies and the cakes that Poca would make. When it came time for my grandmother to be married it was 1920--October 20, 1920. A lot of girls at that time in the rural areas would get married from home, and so she was married at the farmhouse and I’m told the story that she came down the staircase and went into the formal parlor like a lot of young brides would do to meet her groom, and the flower girl had the ring on the pillow. But it wasn’t resting just on the pillow. The ring was in a fully open chestnut burr. The inside as you know is very velvety smooth like the inside of a jewelry box or something, and so this story has come down to my family through the ages, and I’ve always thought it was charming and an unusual use of the American chestnut. I don’t know if it was a common or frequent thing that would happen that, you know, country people would use chestnut burrs for ceremonial purposes like that, but my own interpretation is that the chestnut burr prickly on one side and smooth and soft on the inside was a symbol of marriage itself. [laughs]

BB: Now I’ve never heard about that. That’s really interesting. That’s great.

Do you have any more stories there?

AH: That’s all I have to say.

BB: Okay, let me ask you a couple questions.

AH: Sure.

BB: How long have you been a member of the Chestnut Foundation?

AH: Well, my husband and I have been members since the early ’90s, mid ’90s I think. Before Georgia had a chapter, but then Georgia got a chapter and we are very much amateurs. We’re amazed at the scientific work that’s going on and want to support it as much as we can.

BB: What motivated you to get involved and become a member?

AH: Our love is to go on day hikes up in the Appalachian mountains around Raburn Bald Clayton, around that area--Blairsville also. And on these hikes we would regularly see sprouts of
chestnuts coming out of old stumps that were decaying, so we sort of made it a game to try to identify the chestnuts, and I think that we heard about the American Chestnut Foundation and just wanted to participate. It was very exciting to think about the resurgence of such an important tree, and we want to be part of that.

BB: Well, that’s great. Wonderful.

JP: So, this farm. It is still in the family?

AH: No, it’s not.

JP: It’s not. I’m assuming this was a farm that was filled with chestnut trees?

AH: It was.

JP: What do you know about the way that your family on that farm used those trees other than for ring bearing vessels?

AH: [laughs] Well, I really don’t know very much. Um, something that’s non-chestnut that I know about the use of the land was before Pocahontas an ancestor was a tanner, and I’m not sure of the process for tanning but you need a certain kind of tree, I believe.

JP: You can use the bark of chestnut trees.

BB: Chestnut bark was used for that.

AH: Chestnut bark was used for that, okay. So, I think is that what tanning coming comes from.

BB: Yeah, I guess different trees have a different amount of tannic acid, and chestnut had a lot, which is also why is was preserved so long. It had so much acid.

AH: Oh, right.

BB: And there’s plenty of other ones that you use too, but chestnut--

JP: That’s why the Cyprus swamp looks like tea, because there’s so much tannin in the Cyprus.

AH: I was told that a chestnut board would not need creosote for example, because it’s already has its own preservatives, I guess you’d say.
JP: Do you know when that farm left the family?

AH: It was in the late ‘30s the 1930’s. That’s when it left the family.

JP: Okay, so you had no experience with the farm whatsoever. Everything was just sort of--

AH: No, I’ve been to the area, and it is now an airport.

JP: Oh, doesn’t that hurt?

AH: Yes, it hurts very much.

JP: Well, my own family farm that I was never a part of that was around in that same time is now interstate 24 just right over here two blocks from us.

AH: Oh, that’s right. But it’s important about family and place, isn’t it?

JP: It is.

AH: It is, yeah. Sort of the roots. There’s still a tug back here and there. I guess in our mobility we’ve forgotten that in America.

BB: Well, thank you so much.

AH: You’re very welcome.

[End of first audio file]

BB: Okay, so we’re recording.

JP: Anne Page, right?

AH: Anne Haney, right? Okay. This is an addendum to the information from Anne Page Mosby Haney, and I was telling about a farm outside of Glasgow, Kentucky--Pocahontas Jackman Page’s farm and about my mother and her sister Marge remembered something additional that they wanted me to add that when they were children their grandmother Pocahontas told them a story about the big chestnut tree in the front yard of the farmhouse that you couldn’t see it now because it had grown way up into--as the tree grew, but the initials “D.B.” were carved into the trunk and the story was that Daniel Boone had passed that way and
carved his initials into that chestnut tree trunk. So, now I have a research assignment to find out if Daniel Boone ever went through Glasgow, Kentucky.

BB: I’m pretty sure Glasgow is right along the Daniel Boone parkway.

AH: Okay.

BB: So, I’d say he did.

AH: Okay. But as the tree grew, the initials grew up really high, and the children would try to envision the D.B.

JP: Makes you wonder if that really happened or if it was just a way to give the kids an adventure.

AH: That’s right.

JP: You know, looking up the tree. Either way, it’s priceless.

AH: An imaginary game that children would have played without any physical toys or anything like that.

BB: That’s great.

AH: So, that was good. And she remembered also about the tanning business that my great grandfather had, but didn’t remember very much about it just that he was a tanner and used the chestnuts.

JP: Cool.

BB: Sounds great. Thank you.

AH: Okay, great.