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Oral History Interview: Alice Hall

Alice Hall

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KH: This is Mrs. Alice Hall, she lives in Hurricane, West Virginia and she's 76 years old. 'kay what do you want to (laughs) tell us about?

AH: Well I was mostly raised in Putnam, I was born in Cabell County, West Virginia / KH: Uh, huh. / in a little old place called Sarah which isn't on the map now. It's not on the route / Oh, okay. / or Salt Rock well I don't know which / KH: (Laughs). / and, uh, my grandfather owned a 160 acre farm there, my parents died when I was, my father died when I was six my mother died when I was eleven / KH: Um, mmm. / I spent several years with my grandfather on the farm, part of the time us, two of my aunts one was on a farm and the other one lives in a town in Ohio, Bradrick, Ohio / KH: Um, mmm. / That's where I went to school most of the time and then I would go backwards and forwards to grandpa's in the summertime and I had three sisters and one brother and they mostly lived with grandpa and they farmed, we didn't farm them days like we do now because they had to use a horse and a plow / KH: Um, mmm. / And, uh, my grandfather was, uh, his father came directly from London, England and they just, uh, several of, of um in the family, one of who's brothers was a doctor which rode his horse from over in Ohio back up in the hills of West Virginia. He made all of his own medicine and doctored and they would call on him and he would be gone on a trip for weeks at a time and while he was there why he'd go all over Ohio, West Virginia, whichever one he was called to / KH: Um, mmm. / And he knew all the roots and the herbs and what they were good for and the doctoring of them things / KH: Um, mmm. / and one of my grandfather's brothers was a preacher. He was a Baptist minister and he lived then on the Ohio River. Well in fact all of, uh, grandpa's brothers lived in Ohio and sisters, mo-, one, one of um lived in Wyoming County, I don't know much about her because she never was with the family very much. At, uh, but the ones that was they was around they were farmers and fruit growers, they gr-, ra-, growed their own food they'd have to haul the barrels from, oh for miles from the Ohio River when a boat would come round. They'd have to meet

that boat for to get the barrels to barrel their apples in in the fall of the year. And, uh, then they would have to haul um back wherever they was taking um to a market or something / KH: Um, mmm. / and, uh, and for amusement, well now when Sunday come was usually just church and Sunday school or to go to the church. Grandfather was very strict about everything and he didn't believe in doing too much on Sunday / KH: Um, mmm. /. And we didn't get out, we had no cars and I was 16 years old I imagine before ever I saw a automobile. And this here, and I was, uh, 11 years old when I saw the first, uh, well they called um talking machines then, they call um phonographs or victrolas then now. And then of course I saw then the victrola and the talking machine and then when the radio came in I don't know how old I was then but I know they were something after I was bout grown and now the television's in and of course the airplane has come in existence since, my, uh, been in this world, there was no airplanes. And of course the automobile just started bout too / KH: Um, mmm. / but we traveled with a horse and buggy. Some people had ox teams hitched um up to the wagon and, and go with them but my grandfather always kept horses and buggies and carriages and things like that for to travel in / KH: Um, mmm. /. And he could, he could peddle most of the summer through with, uh, he would run a peddling wagon buying up butter and eggs and chickens and things like that and he would take um to Huntington to put um on the market there and, uh, . . .

KH: Uh, I know like you still quilt an awful lot / AH: Yes. / how long you been quilting?

AH: How long have I been quilting?

KH: Uh, huh.

AH: Well my dear child I was quilting fore I was hardly big enough to hold the needle (laughter) and my grandmother was a good quilter and I use to go, before my mother died course I was just eleven when mother died, I use to go out to grandma's

and she have me to get a needle and thread and help her quilt / KH: Um, mmm. / course it wasn't very good quilting then (laughter). So I've quilted every since then as far as I know, I've always quilted and piece quilts and I love to do that, I love to crochet, I can embroidery do any kind, do most anything with a needle and a thread / KH: Um, mmm. / and that's bout my, my most amusement 'cept I keep house and of course, and of course we have the washing machines now we, when we got, when the first washing machines came out we thought they were great things but now we have automatic machine and we don't have to do anything to it only just put our clothes in and turn, turn the knobs / KH: Yeah (laughs). / so, uh, I saw quite a bit of changes in my time and, but they, I think they've all been for the best, alot of people says oh for the old, for the old days back but no, no.

KH: (Laughs) oh, uh, like during the wars you've lived through what two, three / AH: I lived through. . . / two major ones and. . .

AH: I lived through the world war, I was born in Mck-, in McKinley District then of the, uh, the, uh, uh, (mumbles) wasn't the Civil War, I forgot (laughter) anyway I, uh, I was born in 1897 in December so, uh, World War I through that I was, I lived through that and I married a soldier boy that came home from World War I and now World War II I had two sons in that and then, uh, the, uh, Spanish American War was the one I was thinking about in the beginning the one that I was born when they was just in and, uh, then we had the Korean War and I don't know how many more wars.

KH: Um, mmm. Well is there anything real outstanding about any of those like some of the things you all had to make due with or . . .

AH: Oh yes in World War I everything was, uh, we couldn't get sugar, we couldn't get, uh, lard and, uh, and things like that they were, oh they wasn't rationed out like they was in World War II though, in World War II, uh, we had to have stamps for, uh, our meat

and, and our, uh, sugar, most of the can goods were in the stores and things like that in that and also the material was, uh, dry goods we couldn't get those when, and just so much of it would be allowed and the, uh, and coffee was rationed also we had stamp for coffee / KH: Um, mmm. / . Each one was, uh, allowed a pound of coffee a month, if, if they was five in the family they had five pounds of coffee but if there was only two then they had two and, uh, . .

KH: There were not very many heavy coffee drinkers (laughs).

AH: So I guess that's why I'm not very much of a coffee drinker. I couldn't get very much coffee / KH: Yeah. / and, uh, I was trying to think of something else that happened.

KH: Oh, like you know when you said you lived, uh, you know with your grandfather on his farm like did you all like live close to town, close enough to go in and buy everything or did you all raise everything or . . .

AH: No we raised most everything when we lived there on the farm because we was, uh, oh I say we was, we had a little country store now there was a little country stores around we could buy such things as flour and sugar and things like that. But if we wanted to go to town we, we'd have to go into Huntington which was 12 or 15 miles, / KH: Um, mmm. / we done that and, uh, we thought it was a treat to go to Huntington, uh, to the stores and things and we also, uh, uh, when they'd celebrate the Fourth of July why we were at Guyandotte when they celebrated the Fourth of July and I can't remember whether Guyandotte was a hundred years old that day or whether it was fifty but, uh, some of um said, my daddy told me I wasn't too old that it was hun-, was fifty years old but I think it was when Guyandotte was a hundred years old I'm not too sure and, uh, well it was several things and then the steamboats, uh, I rode the boats when we'd go into, uh, Huntington and we'd want to go to one of my aunts up on, uh, that lived Athalia, Ohio we kept, we'd get the boat and it was called the Greyhound (laughter) and we had Greyhound buses, / KH: Yeah. /

but that was the Greyhound bus, uh, boat / KH: Yeah. / and, uh, then we, there was a ferry boat, there was no bridges across the Ohio River there at Huntington at this time / KH: Um, mmm. / and even when I was a girl and growing up there was no paved streets, roads anything in, uh, Huntington and they had boards for sidewalks / KH: (Laughs). / and I remember those / KH: Yeah. / Things have come quite along since I've been in this world.

KH: Yeah, um, mmm. Uh, like as far as your all's churches went you said, you know, Sunday school and church was about it, did you all ever in time of emergency collect things or did you have a ladies' aid all the time?

AH: No, not way back there then they didn't have a ladies' aid then if, uh, the people, if our neighbors needed anything why the neighbors all pitched in and done for um. But, but we had, uh, we had a Baptist church close that we went to and we had a Methodist close that we attended those. The Methodist had their Sunday school the Sunday mornings at nine o'clock we'd go back home we'd drive, they'd take the buggy and we'd go there. Grandmother usually stayed home and have dinner ready when we come back. And, uh, then in the afternoon the Baptist would have their Sunday school at two o'clock and we would go to that / KH: Um, mmm. / then of the night why one of um would have church one Sunday night and one the other Sunday night, the churches worked together they, they wasn't selfish.

KH: Well that's nice, yeah.

AH: And we called that, the Baptist church was Bloomingdale Church and we called the, uh, Methodist church Mary's Chapel and they was on 16th street road that goes from Huntington to, toward Salt Rock.

KH: Yeah, uh, like, uh, when you were small do you remember I mean do, did you ever have to spin your own wool or / AH: No, no. / did you ever see it done?

AH: I saw it done but I never did, uh, we never done it

but one of our neighbors would spin the wool that was a Mrs, uh, uh, Bias, I think her husband's name was Ben I'm not too sure / KH: Um, mmm. / and they spun their wool and I watched the spinning wheel and things but I know how they did it but, you know, / KH: Yeah. / they had to card it first now they, they would shear the sheeps / KH: Um, mmm. / and then they would wash the wool and dry it and then they'd have to call carding it. They had a, uh, a wheel of a thing they card that wool on, put it on then they spun it.

KH: Oh, okay.

AH: And that was quite a, nice to watch um do it.

KH: Yeah. Do you ever remember, do you remember what your reaction to the first wringer washer was?

AH: No I don't remember my first reaction with the first wringer washer but, uh, I was real glad the pleasure that it was. I know I was so glad when I could buy me one (laughter).

KH: (Laughs) oh those were nice, uh, (break in tape). . . you do alot of your own canning and all that, how do you do, how do you preserve some of your own foods do you, when you do?

AH: Well I have preserved most any kind of food, of fruits and things. We'd make our apple butter, uh, my daughter and I made apple butter now for the past three years in a kettle the old timey way they call it. We'd take and peel our apples and core um and get them already one day and run, and put um on and cook um, make a sort of a applesauce out of um then the next morning real early we'd put um in the kettle, the big kettle and we cook those down and we stir in and thin apples until about, uh, noon then we cut, c-c-cook that down and then when that begins to cooking down why we'd add our sugar to it / KH: Um, mmm. / and, uh, I think that, it's according to how sweet and how sour the apples are how much sugar you put. Some apples it takes more sugar and some less and then we stir

that, after you put all your sugar in you stir it about three hours until it thickens up / KH: Um, mmm. / and then we seal that up and that's apple butter. But now when you make your preserves why you just take um, I usually if I'm making peach preserves or pear or apple preserves I get peeling my apples or my fruit, get that ready and I put it in a pan and I put a layer of sugar and a layer of the fruit and I let that set over night and it'll raise to syrup. Next morning I boil my syrup down and then I drop my fruit in it and cook that down till the fruit gets tender and then that gets thicken up and that way I make my preserves / KH: Um, mmm. /. The berries, you just take and wash your berries and get them already and put them in with your sugar and it takes just about as much sugar as it does berries or I do and it don't take so long to make it down / KH: Yeah. / but, uh, that's the way we make it, uh, our preserves.

KH: Did you ever try to like, uh, can meats of any kind?

AH: Yes, I've canned meats, I've canned sausage I, you take and fry your sausage just like you were going to eat it and then you put it in a glass jar and whenever you get your jar full why you just take and pour grease over that and let it come all the way over it and then seal it up and it'll keep. And if you're going to cook, uh, other meat, want to can other meat why you usually just cook it the same way whatever, when you cook beef, if you're going to can beef why boil it till it gets tender and then put it in your jar, pack it in then pour the, uh, shall I say broth over that, it has to come over the top of it or it won't keep over it what, what's, syrup over it, er have it over it / KH: Um, mmm. / and, uh, chicken the same way. You can take and put your chicken in a jar and cold pack it and cook it in that / KH: Um, mmm. / and, uh, I think it's 3 hours that you cook your chicken in that and then that's finished / KH: Oh. /. And that's the way I cook, I can my beans, I put my beans, I can several beans every year and I just put them in what they call a cold bath but, uh, lots of people uses a pressure

cooker now but I prefer the way I've done it all my life (laughs).

KH: Did you all like, uh, smoke your meat or keep it in a cellar or how did you . . .

AH: We had a smokehouse [KH: Um, mmm.] and hung the meat up in, up, there was tiers across it or rafters, poles [KH: Um, mmm.] and they would hang the meat in the smokehouse and then they had to have a hickory wood and they would build a fire just enough for the smoke and they would let that hang in there I imagine about 24 hours, a day and a night maybe longer [KH: Um, mmm.] if it was heavy meat and they would, uh, that's the way we kept the meat in that smokehouse a hanging there.

KH: Uh, huh. Oh, uh, did you like it that way like better than this or do you like the [AH: Well . . .] convenience of going to the store?

AH: It was the easiest done but, uh, we didn't mind it then we were all use to it and that [KH: Um, mmm.] was what we done [KH: Uh, huh.]. And then we'd make kraut you know in the win-, in the fall of the year and we'd put that down in usually a keg or a jar, a big jar of some kind and put it down in [KH: Um, mmm.] and all winter long we'd use it out of that [KH: Um, mmm.] instead of canning it. And then we also pickled beans that way [KH: Um, mmm.] and, uh, they didn't can too many things they have to do now but you couldn't go to the store and buy all this can stuff when I was growing up.

KH: Oh, okay, uh, after you and grandpa were married you all had kids well like for a doctor I mean were they real easy to, I mean you know, come by or did you make up your own remedies alot of times?

AH: Well when we were, after we were married and, uh, we, our first baby which is 54 years old now [KH: Um, mmm.] we had the doctor because I didn't doctor him because I was afraid to we had, we was close to the doctor after, after I was married here in Hurricane. Why we

had plenty of doctors around here when we need um, oh for just a little cold why maybe I'd give um a little home remedy such as a dose of castor oil or
 [KH: Um, mmm.] use a little bit of Vicks salve or something like that although Vicks salve never come in years, uh, until, uh, 1918 when that flu epidemic that was in that bad one and, uh, I never heard tell of Vicks salve until then [KH: Um, mmm.]
 but, uh, . . .

KH: Uh, you say that one of your uncles, uh, was it Uncle Jack once [AH: Um, mmm.] uh, was a doctor do you know any of his remedies and how he maybe used them for or . . .

AH: Well he had, he made, uh, he'd take wild cherry bark and, uh, rawhue bark and white walnut and there was a little flower that he got out of the meadow, it had a little pink bloom on it and it was kind of sort a stick weed I'd of called it but it, I don't know what he called that weed, I tried to think and he mixed that, equal parts of that and that is what he would get for his spring tonic, no
 [KH: Um, mmm.] matter what was wrong with you he'd get a bottle of that why that was suppose to cure you [KH: Oh (laughs).] and, uh, he doctored, uh, for TB he had, uh, he used, uh, the wild cherry and, uh, then there was another little weed that grows in the woods that he used they called pepsiciley or rat's vane, it's got two names [KH: Um, mmm.] and he used that in it [KH: Um, mmm.] and, uh, he had then there was a cownall, cownall that grows [KH: Um, mmm.] he would use that for some of his medicine. I don't really know just what he did use for all of um only his spring tonic [KH: (Laughs).]
 but I remember that one real good.

KH: Did that taste very good?

AH: Yes if he'd doctor it up and put a little bit of alcohol or whiskey or something in it and some sugar, (laughter) taste pretty good.

KH: Oh, oh, uh, did you ever see moonshine or anything

like that made or?

AH: Well I never did see but one still in operation and I did that accidentally I was at one of my friend's homes and she told me to go in the cellar to get something or other and I didn't know that they'd changed the cellar to a different place. So the kitchen cabinet was up against where the cellar door should have been and I pushed it aside and walk through. And then when I walked in there was, uh, still going and I, she said, "Oh not there, not there." And I said well I see not now, what is this? She said, "Oh don't you tell what you run into." So I, I went ahead to see what I run into that was that still [KH: (Laughs).] that's the only one I saw in operation.

KH: Oh, uh, (break in tape). . .about, uh, the wars and things do you remember, uh, I seem to remember you talking about standing in line one time, uh, . .

AH: Yes, when World War II was going on why they would form lines whenever they would get anything in. Sometimes it would be for some groceries and sometimes it would be for something, sometimes it would be for material. And at one incident I remember we was, I was in Anderson Newcomb down in Huntington and a lady stepped up to me and she said, "Are you going to get in the line to get some of this material?" And I said well no I don't think I have any need of any of it. And she said, "Would you mind standing in line for me?" And I said well what could I get for you? And she said, "Well I want some material for some baby clothes," she said, "I can't get enough material for di-, diapers, or little gowns or anything." And I told her yes I'd stand in line for her. So I did and I bought, all the lines she got through the lines and I bought for her, you know, [KH: (Laughs).] so that's the only time that I ever really ever stood in line but I was in line one time in the store and there was some things in there that was to be out, nylon hose I think, and they had just gotten um in and I thought well I'd just stand there when the girl told me they had nylon hose in and I'd get a pair.

By the time she got um undone and I got my hose I looked behind me and there's a whole string behind me so I, that's the only time I was ever in a line. And then one man asked me if I'd stand in line for some cigarettes and I said no I won't / KH: (Laughs). / I don't smoke, I won't be caught in the line for um.

KH: (Laughs) oh, do you remember V Day what all of you did?

AH: Well I don't remember everything we did but on V Day we lived here and, uh, when they, V Day come around well we said let's go to Huntington and see and hear what all of it is done, there was quite a big stir everywhere / KH: Um, mmm. / So we got in the car with, uh, two of my sons and one of the neighbor boys and my daughter and we drove down to Huntington and, uh, Ray Vass and Billy, my son Billy, why they taken their horns, they was in a band and they'd taken their horns and when everybody else got out of playing, I don't remember what it was they was a playing it could have been most anything and they got out and marched around down there and played / KH: (Laughs). / but we couldn't hardly get through the crowd, they was just, everybody was lined up and you couldn't hear yourself think hardly, / KH: Oh. / it was so much noise.

KH: Yeah, uh, now what, you had, let's see daddy and Bill, uh, Don were the two in the service / AH: Yes. / I know daddy came home early, / AH: Yes, he come home. / did Don?

AH: Oh no, Don was in the army, he went in in February, uh, in, uh, '42 and, 15th of February and he never came home until in '45 / KH: Yeah. / the war was over with.

KH: Did he have to go overseas or anything?

AH: He wasn't never stationed overseas, he was, uh, in the air corps but he made several flights across / KH: Um, mmm. / in his work, in his training and things, / KH: Um, mmm. / but he wasn't, he never, he wasn't never stationed over there. He trained,

he was in training, he trained the boys.

KH: Yeah, okay, uh, I know like, uh, okay grandfather was a clerk on the railroad, / AH: Yes. / uh, how long did he work for the railroad or, / AH: Grand. . . / or did he work several other places?

AH: Uh, no he was, uh, he come home from World War I in, uh, Jan-, in uh, the last of December, the first of January and on the 23rd day of January in 19 and 19 he went to work for the C&O / KH: Um, mmm. / and he had just retired on, uh, on Monday he had went and signed his papers that he was retiring and it would have been 42 years that, I guess that 23rd day of that January he had worked for the railroad, / KH: Oh. / for the C&O / KH: Um, mmm. / Now he never had no other job only just the railroad / KH: Oh. / right at here.

KH: Seems like most of my family's been railroading.

AH: Yeah my, most of family was all C&O men till my, / KH: Um, mmm. / till my own boys and they were Carbide boys / KH: (Laughs). / and, and one was here in Columbia Gas.

KH: Yeah, uh, like okay grandpa was a cook, did he ever cook for you or was that you (laughs)?

AH: He tried to he, he would, he learn to cook at home and then he would go back to the cook, he wasn't a cook at all times on the railroad just 14 years of it was a cook / KH: Oh. / and he had been, uh, a foreman for a while on one of the forces and then he had been different, a carpenter first, different things until, uh, they couldn't get cooks to stay on, work as cooks and he decided that he thought that's be pretty good job which he'd have to cook between times on some of the forces when he was on he was never, he was never stationed at one place, he worked all over the Huntington division / KH: Um, mmm. / where, uh, wherever they sent him all along there were camp cars you know and he lived in these camp cars through the week / KH: Um, mmm. / but he'd come home

on Sun-, on the weekend [KH: Um, mmm.] and then he thought they was going to make him cook some pies well he'd just take the job permanent and then he could do better and that's how he done. Oh yes we had, just have to eat whatever he'd practice cooking

KH: (Laughs) oh, I was just wondering if that was considered women's work or [AH: No.], or was there any . . .

AH: One time the camp cars was laying over that hill out from us and, and, uh, he had some business he had to take care of him and the boss had signed a, a note for one of the men that worked on the road with um and, uh, uh, the man skipped and they had to pay off. So they found out where he was a working so they went to see the man to see what he was going to do about it and it was right close and he wanted me to cook for, go and cook I was right there close to um. So the company wouldn't allow me to come on the camp but I had to cook the meal and the men had to come over with my two boys and carry it over to the camp cars for um to eat [KH: (Laughs)]. So that's what they had to do I wasn't allowed on the camp cars.

KH: Yeah, like this new women's lib movement and everything, was there, do you ever remember any quote women's lib going on or [AH: No I . . .] or did you just accepted it?

AH: We just accept it.

KH: You all just stood there (laughs).

AH: No we, we did our part and everything [KH: Yeah.] but we didn't come out on, on strike or anything, [KH: Oh.] we just let um know that we wouldn't only go so far with it.

KH: Oh okay, oh uh, did you ever have to, during wars or anything have to go outside the home and work in a factory or anything like some other women did or?

AH: No I didn't go out, I worked in a tomato factory,

or canning factory one year was the only time that ever I went out / KH: Um, mmm. / . No, I, because I was married I went to work in a store all the time, I was a clerk / KH: Oh. / in a store.

KH: Well is there anything else you can think of?

AH: No / KH: Okay. / only we had to go an awful long ways to school. When I got my education I walked over a mile of the morning and then coming home of the night we'd usually go down the hill of the morning and back up the hill of the night, / KH: (Laughs). / so we didn't have school buses / KH: Yeah. / which they have now and things. So children have a better way of education but sometimes I wonder if they take good advantage of it now.

KH: Uh, huh, alot of um don't.

AH: I just had an 8th grade education but still yet I can find out that 8th grade education of course then when my children went through high school I helped um with their lessons and things until I did understand more about things and like so / KH: Um, mmm. / that's that.

KH: Okay thank you alot.

AH: Um, mmm (break in tape).