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Lawrence Purdy Somerville

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(Signature - Interviewee)

906 39th St.

Address

Vienna, W. Va.

Date 4-21-73

Mrs. K. E. Norcross

(Signature - Witness)

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Dad Patted Seat Once Too Often, Wood Man Recalls

By John G. Morgan
Staff Writer

This is another in a series of stories about persons interviewed for the "Oral History of Appalachia," a Marshall University project to capture the special flavor of life among the hills during earlier times.



L. P. Somerville
Once Too Often

"My dad patted the seat of my pants once too often," says Lawrence Purdy Somerville, 93.

That's why Somerville ran off and joined the Army at the age of 14.

"Me and my dad couldn't agree on everything," he adds. "I cut corn one day, all day, and he stayed at the house. He wasn't broke out with the heats when it come to work.

"Now he would take care of his sheep, build a fence and do a little grubbin', but that was about it. So I cut corn this day, and I come home for supper and washed up and shaved.

"I don't know why I shaved, because there was nothing on my face but dirt, but he didn't say a word, and after supper I went down to get my horse—I owned my horse.

"And he said, 'Where do you think you're going?' Well, I'm going over to Medina to see a girl. And he said, 'You're not going to go. Just take that saddle off that horse, and I'm going to punish you...'

"I took the saddle off the horse and turned the horse loose... I went to Parkersburg and enlisted in the Army."

SOMERVILLE, now a resident of Vienna, Wood County, tells some interesting stories about his military career, including service during the Spanish American War in 1898.

As a member of the occupational forces in the Philippines, he served with a mounted scout detachment that was ambushed many times by tribesmen, wielding bolo knives and shooting poison darts.

One buddy, a victim of a poison dart, was killed within 10 feet of Somerville. Two others, one with his head almost chopped off, died of bolo knife wounds.

What did he do when he returned from the Army at the age of almost 18?

"I went to see my girl."

Somerville was born in a farm home on Limestone Ridge in Jackson County Nov. 13, 1882. He is a son of the late Samuel K. Somerville, sheep farmer, surveyor and schoolteacher who served in the legislature from Jackson in the 1921 and 1923 sessions.

FROM LIMESTONE RIDGE, young Somerville walked down the hill to a one-room school on his father's farm. He remembers some of the teachers.

"In the first place it was a woman teacher named Alma Spears. And the next place was Doc Gott. He'd go to sleep during school hours.

"And the next place was Joe Woodall. He'd go to sleep. Then Jake Toncrey went there to teach, an uncle of mine. He licked me about twice."

Somerville got his first suit at the age of 12 or 13.

"Yes, dad had six bushels of dried peaches, and he took them up to the store and traded them dried peaches for a suit

of clothes, and he got them damn clothes home and they wasn't worth a cuss."

HE REMEMBERS the "grubbins," the clearing of the land:

"Well, a man had to have a maftock to grub with and an ax, and all the neighbors would come in, and they would kill a sheep and have mutton.

"And they would grub out maybe eight or 10 acres for you and pile the brush. All you had to do was set it afire, and you had it clean."

During his long life Somerville has been a general store operator, farmer, automobile dealer and home builder. He has worked for a savings and loan company and a steel mill in Parkersburg. He retired 23 years ago at the age of 70.

He was married March 16, 1901, to Maud Dowler, his boyhood sweetheart. She lived until Dec. 5, 1960. He is the father of five children: Berl, Fred, Margaret, Robert and Eugene.

An interview with Somerville was taped for filing in the James E. Morrow Library at Marshall University. It was conducted by Lee Anne Somerville Norcross, his granddaughter.

A TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH
MR. L. P. SOMERVILLE

A Paper Presented to
Dr. Norman Simpkins

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements in
Sociology 290

by
Lee Anne Norcross

April, 1973

INTRODUCTION

Note: This introduction appears at the end of the taped interview with Mr. Somerville.

This is a taped interview with Lawrence Eurov Somerville. The interview took place at Mr. Somerville's home in Vienna, West Virginia on Sunday, February 11, 1990. I am his granddaughter, Lee Anne Somerville Norcross. Mr. Somerville was born in Jackson County, West Virginia near Rockport on November 16, 1892. His father was Samuel E. Somerville, born the eldest son of John Somerville (born October 24, 1830 - died July 22, 1905) and Jane Hayward (daughter of Joseph and Ann Hayward). Mr. Somerville's mother was Margaret (Meg) Campbell, the daughter of John P. Campbell.

Mr. Somerville's father (Samuel E.) was a school teacher, surveyor, and he owned and operated a large stock farm on Garfield Ridge. He also represented Jackson County in the State Legislature for two terms. He was licensed to preach under Rev. Foster, Superintendent of the United Brethern Church in 1910.

Mr. Somerville married Laude Dowler and they had five children:

Bert (my father)

Fred

Margaret

Robert

Theone

This paper is accompanied by a paper on The History of the Solomon Somerville Family.

My name is J. J. Somerville. My father was S. E. Somerville and my grandfather was John F. Campbell. He came from Weirton (Campbell). Now he had a brother that was connected with the church and built a church up there but I forget his name, I never knew him. Now they moved down to Ravenswood when mother was eight years old and grandpa bought 1000 acres of woods lands that never had anybody on it and they only had about \$10,000 to pay on it and they got in a jam and come pretty near losing it. But old Judge Brown and him was pretty good friends and he said, "I can't keep them from suing you, but if they do sue you, I can keep laying it over until you can sell some of this land and get out." He told him to go ahead and see if he could sell any and he sold Ed Micheal first, 200 acres. Well that paid off a good bit of interest. And he sold Tom Swain a farm and he kept a farm of his own out of that and he sold another fellow Wilkinson a piece and Cliff Roberts bought a piece. And he sold off a lot so he could pay off. See they didn't have very much money in it and all they wanted was interest. And old man Judge Brown wrote to them and told them to sell some of this land and pay it off, put a price on it. Well they didn't want to put a price on it. Well, he said either put a price on it or we're not going to take it and that would stop the interest. Well, they put a price on it (Repeats some of the names of people who bought land) and a lot of people I didn't know or forgot about bought the land. Old man Mason (Charlie Mason's dad) bought 200 acres.

Did they live on the farm? Did your grandfather keep part of the farm?

He started a store there.

What kind of store? A general store, sold every dern thing you wanted.

And Charlie (Mason) went to school and when he got out of school why he took it over (helped work in the store after school).

Who was Charlie? Charlie Mason's boy -- he married Alice (Alice Somerville, sister). And they run that store till I was workin' at the steel mill and dad wanted me to quit the mill, he said it was too hard on me. But, it wasn't, I was drinkin pretty good whiskey then and I was gettin along good. He finally got me in the notion and I went out and bought the Garfield store off Charlie Mason and his brother George. He lived right up in back in a little place. He had the old Mason farm.

S P A C E

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Well, let's see. I'll have to count them. One sister, What was her name? Alice and me and Glen and Earl. That's the boys, you got the girl.

Where did you live when you were a boy? I lived up on Limestone Ridge with my dad when I was a boy.

What did your father do at that time? Kept sheep.

Did he make a good living with the sheep? He made enough money to pay for the farm. And when he loaned money to the neighbors down there he never took a note, just wrote it up on the wall and they'd come and pay us whenever it was due.

What other animals did you have? Oh, we had cows, horses, hogs, turkeys and chickens. No ducks.

How did you take care of the livestock? Well, we had a big barn and we'd run the cattle in there and then we had a big raft of thrash. We'd put a bunch of timbers down on the end and put rods across that and put the thrash of straw right on top of that and down one side and one end and left the other end open and the other side open and the cattle would run in there all winter. The horses was in the barn and the sheep, we had

places for them, two or three sheep houses.

What was your house like? The house we lived in out there was the only house, no, there was one more -- Doc Casto's house at Rockport -- and that house up there was plastered. The only two plastered houses in that whole country.

How many rooms? Well, let's see. The kitchen, dining room, front room and parlor and a bedroom downstairs. Upstairs just half of that house was one bedroom and half in another.

Where did you sleep? I slept upstairs.

What kind of bathroom did you have? Didn't have no such a thing. If you had to take a bath, now we had a tank up there and a pipe running down off of that and when you would work and get sweaty and dusty, you just turned that hose on. One feller would hold it and wash you off. Then you done the same thing for the other feller. Wasn't a bathroom in that whole country. Didn't know what a bathroom was.

What kind of kitchen did your mother have? Had a kitchen where she cooked. It was bigger than this room, and longer. She cooked over here, the table was over here and over there was a door into the front room. Then back over here was a door to the pantry. Had a pantry along the side and the stairway upstairs.

What kind of cookstove did she have? Well sir, they had a cookstove that grandad Campbell paid \$85.00 for, way back in them days. A wrought iron stove, wouldn't rust out, wouldn't burn out. And they had that stove and when dad moved up there he took it out and they bought a new stove and they bought a new stove cause it was pretty old and he (grandad) was afraid of fire anyway. It was a stove that the Sheppard boy -- two Sheppard boys was the agents for them and they went down south and sold

the stoves for \$100.00.

What did you burn in them? Wood.

Where did you get the wood? Off the farm.

Who got to do that? Why, us kids and I and the hired man Mark Kittle, who used to work for us. Me and him would saw wood. Dad and me would saw wood.

Did you help with the gardening? Mother done most of the gardening. She wouldn't let me help with it. Dad plowed it and had it ready and she planted the biggest part of it. Me and dad planted sweet potatoes. He made ridges outside the garden because we didn't want sweet potatoes in our garden. If you did, when you went to dig you had so many vines you throwed it over on the other stuff.

What did your mother grow in her garden? Well, she raised strawberries and radishes, limas, and turnips, stuff like that. She had a lot of strawberries.

Did she ever have flowers? Flowers in the front yard. We had a big yard. There was two long cedar trees that growed up straight, not very big around but 10 to 15 feet high. They was cut down. Palmer got that and cut a big maple tree down that was out in the yard and made the finest shade in the world and cut all that stuff down.

What else did your father do? Well, he surveyed and he taught school.

Where did he teach school? Down at the school on Lockhart Fork and he walked seven miles over there and seven back home, taught school, three months was all they had, for \$80.00. I said, "Dad, what in the name of God did you do that for"? And he said, "Well, you couldn't pay your taxes with sheep or anything you had to have the money to pay taxes so I taught school and got that money to pay my taxes". He preached some after he got older. See after he got up in years he got awful nervous and he got so he didn't farm anymore. I said I was old enough to take over. And he didn't

anymore after I came back from the Army. I run off and went to the army.

How much schooling did you have? Well, I was seven years old when I went to school.

Where? Right down on my Dad's farm on Mercer Fork. We just lived up on the hill. Dad gave them the ground and they built the schoolhouse. The only school house out there yet.

How big? Oh, just one room. Pretty good size. And all the schoolhouses built in them days they had about half of it a flat floor and then back toward the back they used to raise the floor up so the teacher up in front could see every scholar in the house. A great big stove about that large that you could put wood in kept it fair warm.

How many students? Well, I'd say not over 50. Cause a lot of people didn't come to school in those days. I was seven years old when I went and Alice was pretty near nine. We went to school and afterwards Glen growed up and he went and Earl went to school. I'm not really sure, yes, they both went to school there.

Do you remember who your teacher was? Jake Toncrey was a teacher once. In the first place it was a woman teacher named Alma Spears. And the next place was Doc Gott. He'd go to sleep during school hours. And the next place was Joe Woodall. He'd go to sleep. Then Jake Toncrey went there to teach, an uncle of mine. He licked me about twice.

How long did you stay in school? I stayed in school until I was 14 years old.

Then what did you do? Joined the army.

At fourteen? 14 years old. I told them I was 18, but I wasn't.

Did you go to church? We had a hewn-log church. It was the old Walnut Grove United Brethern Church. Right down on -- Dad give them a piece of

ground to build a church on. Horn-log church. That was the first church I ever went to. When I come back from the army they had tore it down and sawed the logs up into lumber and built a church up on the ridge but nobody ever went there. At the old Walnut Grove church they had pretty much of a crowd but they wanted to get it up on the hill and they would be by theirselves. That church is standin there yet. Joe Davis was the minister. His one arm -- left arm was shot off.

How did he lose his arm? Civil War

And he was the preacher? Can you remember anything about him? Yes, I remember that stubbed arm. If he had a book in his hand he would put it down on there and clamp down on it to hold it. That's about all I know about him. He come to our place a lot of times. He lived - Joe Davis lived out on Limestone Ridge the biggest part of the time. He had a son that lived down toward Elizabeth.

What did you do for clothing? I sold suits at the store. Mother made
(later)
them.

What from? Well, out of what they call -- warn't waterproof stuff but it was good and warm. I used to know the name of it but I can't think of it anymore.

Did she make your clothes too? Yes, at that time they warn't no -- a man had to go to Ravenswood to buy a suit of clothes.

How often did you go to town? We never went to town. Only to pay taxes. We didn't have no business down there. We had a country store where they had overhalls and jeans -- pants and that was what men wore, and the kids, mother made their clothes. I can remember when I was. I was about 12 or 13 years old was the first suit of clothes I ever had.

Was the store?

Yes, and had six bushels of dried peaches and he took them up to the store and traded them dried peaches for me a suit of clothes and he got the damn clothes home and they wasn't worth a cuss.

What did you do about the doctor or medical help? Well, we had a doctor at Pockport, that was seven miles away and another one up on Limestone ridge. That took about a mile and a half off of that. "Doc" Casto was the doctor that brought us kids into this world. Another was an old doctor an old stout fellow lived up on Limestone ridge and Glen had white (blisters) in his throat and he wheezed like he had tizzic and that old doctor come over there one day and he slipped on a board, the board was on the grass and it flew out out from under him and his feet went up in the air and I went out and helped him up and I said, "Are you hurt?" and he said "No, you couldn't hurt me". Well, he took care of Glen and straightened him up. And finally after he moved away from there we always got Doc Casto (Repeats children).

Were they law-abiding? Sure, the reason was what made it law abiding. They violated the laws themselves, to get the others. It was against the law to be a reefer but they had to do something. They would steal your sheep every once in awhile and take your bees, take your beehive out in the creek and soak it in the water until the bees would all leave then they would take it out and take the honey and throw the hive away, so that you just lost a whole bunch of bees.

What did they do to these people? They're the ones that were whipped.

On the spot? Yes, if you could catch them. They got a stranger to come in here to work in the sawmills. Dad was stacking lumber there and Draper Sheppard, was a little bit of relation to us and a good friend to dad, and he hired a fellow by the name of West and he was just a no account bum

and he kept at Draper, sayin, "Now boys, come on let's gather up and go out and steal some chickens and have a chicken roast. If you cusses are afraid, I'll go and get the chickens." Draper said, "O.K. go ahead". "You set a date you want to go". And he (West) told them, "Now Sam Somerville has got more chickens than anybody else and easier to get at." So Draper went up and told dad, "You and Jim Barnes (who had a club foot and worked with dad) go out and cut a bunch of good hickory whitts (whips) and we'll come and tell you when we are coming up and you get out there by that old dry house and let them get in the chicken house and you can go out there and just whip them to death. Draper Sheppard set it all up and he said, "I'll come up and tell you". And, he did. They were going to let them get into the chicken house first. And they went over there and dad was in the chicken house and he said, "Now Jim, you've got a club foot and you can't run as fast as I can so you stand back about ten or twenty feet and I'll catch him up here and I'll whip him as long as I can keep up with him and then you commence on him". We had a pasture right up there. This was on a ridge you know and it was 50 feet wide and there was an old bull over there in the field and he came out there and jumped over the fence and jumped right in with the bull and he took out and he was running and the bull was running too. He came over to the mill the next day and dad was tellin it to another fellow and the fellow said he would have given a dollar bill to have been there to see that old bull run after him.

What was a dry house? A dry house is a little building, I'd say about eight or ten feet long and about six feet wide and you put a stove in there right in the middle of it and on the sides you have racks and you put yor peaches -- you dry a peach with the peeling on -- and you half them and take the seed out and lay them up in there and have a fire in the stove and in three or four days they dry. Maybe a little longer. And they'll

keep. I've seen mother have them two or three years.

What else did they put in there? Well, there was something else, beans, they used to dry a lot of beans. They'd string them -- leave them in the pods and string them and dry the beans.

What other buildings did you have on your farm? The barn, the dry house, chicken house, the house we lived in and the hog pen and two sheep houses.

How did you get your water? Well, we had springs. We had a well and a cistern both at the house. That country out there wasn't all cleared up and you could always find a good spring that would never go dry. About ten feet from the top of the hill the water would come out. Had one by the barn, and one in the pasture field.. Then we had what they called a blue grass field down to the creek and we had plenty of water.

How long did your father keep this farm? We ... I must have been about 15 or 16 years old because I was 14 when I went to the army and he left before I got back.

Where did he go then? He bought the John P. Campbell farm at Garfield. That was mother's dad -- John P.

What kind of farm was it? It was a dern good farm. A sheep farm. All that country out there was good meadow for sheep cause cattle going around the hillside and sliding down just plowed the grass out. Then the sheep would get up on the higher ridge and sleep for the night and the manure would be there and the rain would come and wash it down over the banks and you didn't have to haul it out.

What kind of house did you have at that place? A big kitchen to cook in and use as a dining room and a big pantry on one side. A big sitting room and a big parlor and another room off to the side. Upstairs there were two big rooms up there.

Just like the other one only larger? Yes.

What kinds of crops did you raise there? Corn, wheat, oats.

What livestock did you have? Well, mostly all sheep. We had cows.

We always kept two or three cows and calves. Dad wouldn't sell calves for veal. He said leave it out there on the grass and in a couple of years it would make you ten dollars more. He never sold a calf.

We used to have grubbins. What was that? Well, a man had to have a mattock to grub with and an axe and all the neighbors would come in and they would kill a sheep and have mutton. And they would grub out maybe eight or ten acres for you and pile the brush. All you had to do was set it afire and had it clean. Was this kind of like a party? Yes, farmers would trade work. Now every man that came in there was poor. He always had a house full of kids. So they would rent a piece of ground in the woods off a farmer then go in there and have a grubbin, and clean that out and raise a crop of tobacco and a crop of wheat or oats. They took three crops off it and didn't charge the farmer anything for cleaning it up. He got his farm cleared free of charge that way. And then they would do that for another one? Yes. They were generally real poor people and they would come in and rent a piece of ground and clean it up for three crops off it. They didn't have the money to do it so they just had a grubbin.

Why were there only three crops on it? It usually took a crop or two of corn and one of wheat and then sow it with grass.

Why was that? Well, the idea was to get your grass. Get the ground sodded up for pasture. You killed a lot of the sprouts so you wouldn't be bothered with them.

Why did you run off and join the army? My dad ratted the seat of my pants once to often.

So you ran off to the army? Me and my dad couldn't agree on everything.

I cut corn one day, all day, and he stayed at the house. He wasn't broke out with the heats when it come to work. Now, he would take care of his sheep, build a fence and do a little grubbin but that was about it. So

I cut corn this day and he stayed at the house and I come home for supper and washed up and shaved -- I don't know why I shaved because there was nothing on my face but dirt -- and he didn't say a word and after supper I went down to get my horse -- I owned my own horse, and he said, "Where do you think you're going?" Well, I'm going over to Medina to see a girl. And he said, "You're not going to go, just take that saddle off that horse and I'm going to punish you for disobeying me." I took the saddle off the horse, and turned the horse loose.

Where did you go? I went to Parkersburg and enlisted in the army and they sent me up to Wheeling and I was up there ten days in a hotel then to Camp Meade, Penna. just below Harrisburg.

Space

Where did you go after that? We went to target practice up in the mountains in Pennsylvania. space

We went then to New York. Took a ship there -- transport -- .

Where did you go then? Went across the Atlantic Ocean to Gibraltar to Malta in the Mediterranean and crossed the Mediterranean to Port Said. From there we went through the Suez Canal, clear on down to the Red Sea and there we saw where the pilgrims crossed over to the other side.

In the Bible? Yes, we had an interpreter who had that all down by heart and he explained it all to us. The ship was going real slow to give us a chance to see. The Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea then the Chinese Sea and we got on down to Singapore, that was a Chinese place. We had to take on coal there. We were three days taking on coal. They carried

it on in big baskets. They came up to about your shoulder and they put a pole through the two handles on it and one man got each end of it and they carried it full. It would be six or eight bushels of coal. Up the gangplank and up on the deck and pour it down through and it went down to the bottom of the ship. We went back in the China Sea again and that took us down to Manilla. We went up in the port there. There were a lot of ships that had been fired on and it kind of wrecked them and a lot of them they just run ashore, rather than see them destroyed.

How long were you in the Phillipines? I was in the Phillipines for two years.

How old were you when you got back? I was close to 18 years old.

What did you do when you came back? I went to see my girl.

I stayed over in Rockport three or four days to rest up. I had been wore out on the ship and shucked around and I just wanted to rest. And I run across a fellow that I knew from up at Palestine, and he said, "How long you gonna be in town?" And I said, "Well, I'm going to have some fun, I ain't had any since the last time I saw you." "Oh," he said, "It wasn't that bad was it?" Bad enough. We walked 96 miles once, up a hill and the Captain said, "By God, we're not going to walk back down, if Uncle Sam wants us down there he can furnish us a ride down." And we stayed up there a week and they finally got a bunch of Phillipine ponies and we rode back down.

So you were tired of walking? Oh, our feet was bleeding. You'd wade every dern creek or river you come to and you got water in your shoes and sand in your shoes and it just cut the hide off. - END -

Follow Up

Following the war duty, Mr. Somerville came back home and married Maude Dowler and farmed with his father about one more year. He then moved to Beechwood, near Parkersburg, to work in a mill. He left his family here and worked for four years in a steel mill in Youngstown, Ohio. After this, he went to Garfield and bought a general store which he sold to Jim Kittle, a cousin, and then he bought a store at Leroy with his brother Glen. He sold the Leroy store and went to Ravenswood and went into the automobile business. He lost this business in the depression and again farmed and did carpentry work. Around 1950 he moved to Parkersburg where he continued to build houses and do carpentry work. Upon retirement, he moved to Vienna, W. Va. where he still resides.
