

Marshall University

Marshall Digital Scholar

0064: Marshall University Oral History
Collection

Digitized Manuscript Collections

1994

Oral History Interview: Ralph Clay

Ralph Clay

Follow this and additional works at: https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history

Recommended Citation

Marshall University Special Collections, OH64-525, Huntington, WV.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Manuscript Collections at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in 0064: Marshall University Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact zhangj@marshall.edu.



ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA
 400 Hal Greer Boulevard
 Huntington, West Virginia 25755-2667
 304/696-6799

SUBJECT: Green Glass Plant

ORAL HISTORY NUMBER: _____

MORROW ACCESSION NUMBER: #525

ORAL HISTORY

GIFT AND RELEASE AGREEMENT

I, Ralph W. Clay, the undersigned, of Milton,
 County of Cabell, State of W.VA., grant, convey,
 and transfer to the James E. Morrow Library Associates, a division of the Marshall
 University Foundation, INC., an educational and eleemosynary institution, all my right,
 title, interest, and literary property rights in and to my testimony recorded on
Aug 4, 1994, to be used for scholarly purposes, including study
 and rights to reproduction.

- RWC (initial) Open and usable immediately.
- _____ (initial) Open and usable after my review. (See review release)
- _____ (initial) Closed for a period of _____ years.
- _____ (initial) Closed for my lifetime.
- _____ (initial) Closed for my lifetime unless special permission is gained from me or my assigns.

DATE: 8-4-94

Ralph W. Clay
 (Signature - Interviewee)

Rt 2 Box 723
 (Address)

Milton, W.VA 25841

(304) 743-9246
 (Phone)

DATE: 8/4/94

Jennifer L. Stubb
 (Signature - Interviewer)

412 10th St. #1; HUNT. WV 25701
 (Address)

304-522-0143
 (Phone)



OWENS GLASS HISTORY PROJECT

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: RALPH CLAY

CONDUCTED BY: JENNIFER STOCK

DATE OF INTERVIEW: AUGUST 4, 1994

Jennifer: Jennifer Stock, it's August 4, 1994, and I'm interviewing Ralph Clay, at his home in Milton, West Virginia. Mr. Clay I am going to start out by asking you some biographical information. (ok) Well when were you born?

Ralph: October 14, 1924.

Jennifer: And could you speak your full name for the record?

Ralph: Ralph Woodson Clay.

Jennifer: And what kind of education did you...?

Ralph: I finished high school, and I went to business school for about 8 months, probably.

Jennifer: And are you from here?

Ralph: Yes, originally.

Jennifer: Ok, tell me about going to work at Owens, did you work any where before you started there?

Ralph: I was in the Navy, then I was in the Army, and when I came out of the Army in 1949, I got a job at Hootowl Hershey in Huntington, worked there about a year and got laid off, and the employment office sent me to Owens and I got a job there, in 1951.

Jennifer: And how long were you at Owens?

Ralph: Thirty-eight 1/2 years.

Jennifer: What did you do at Owens, tell me your work.

Ralph: Well, when I first start Owens, (can you hear this thing) (I think so, I think it will be alright) (ok) when I first started there I was a layer attendant, in the packing department. I just stacked cartons and emptied cullets and uh, pull trailers, just handy man really, handy man.

Jennifer: Yeah, that's what I heard the job described of.

Ralph: And then I went to checker, which you count the cartons and count the cullet back then. You counted the cullet and the cartons both.

Jennifer: Are you saying the cullet?

Ralph: Yes, that's the bad glass that has defects in it, yeah. (uh-huh) You count it and dump it down a hole, down the cullet hole. And I pulled trailers, and keep track of each unit that you are assigned to makes for the shift that you are on. You know, you

work 8 hours and you have uh, a half-hour for lunch, and the uh...the uh, lehr attendant usually replaced the checker, he just...they just worked together, (uh-huh) you know. (uh-huh) On the packing room floor, each checker and lehr attendant at this time, had a tank. When I went to work there they had a A, B, C, D, and E, tanks, five tanks. And uh, I think I started out on D tank as a lehr attender and A tank as a checker. Ok, the next job? (ok, sure {laughter}) Ok. My next job was a quality inspector, (uh-huh) now these would run several years, you know, I don't know exactly how long. I was in the packing department about 14 years. And the next job was quality inspector, you had a sampling plan that you went by and you sampled the uh, loads that the ladies was...back then the ladies done the packing of the bottles by hand. And inspectors...back when I was a quality inspector they had one woman a quality inspector, and the rest of them were men. (uh-huh) But when I left, I think all of them were women, they didn't have any women, or any men doing that.

Jennifer: Yeah, yeah, I think that switched around (yeah, switched around) pretty fast. {laughter} Pretty fast. So you just had like uh, you said a plan, uh what kind of...

Ralph: You had a sampling plan, you took...you took so many bottles off of the load, and you looked at them. If you found so many defects in so many bottles you rejected the load. (uh-huh) And they had to send that load to resort and reinspect the ware again. (uh-huh) So the next job was crew leader. (yeah) And you kindly, you assign the girls and men to the lehrs and uh, took the defects to the hot end and uh, told the operators back there that uh, what was running, you know, what kind of defects was running. And then the checker usually marked up back on the board on the hot end what the operators made for that hour, how many grossage they made for an hour, you know. (uh-huh) And at the end of the shift why usually you had an idea of what each operator on each lehr made, you know. (uh-huh) And the crew leader, he was just kinda an overseer on the tank, uh, in the selecting department. (clearing his throat)

Jennifer: Little more personnel work there?

Ralph: Well, he's just kindly like uh, you know, he replaces...if someone got sick, he had to go get a replacement for them and if there was something wrong with the count he had to find what was wrong with it and uh, you know, just over all, just seeing what was going on. (I see) I can turn the light on if you want. (ok, I'M fine)

Jennifer: And did you stay as crew leader?

Ralph: I stayed crew leader until 1964. (ok) And in 1964, on the day after Christmas the 26th of December, that was kindly uh...I got out of the selecting department, and I went into gauge

department. (yeah) And I stayed in there until I retired. (ok)

Jennifer: Well, so tell me about your trajectory here. Did you bid for a job, in the gauge department...?

Ralph: Yeah, it was kindly like a seniority deal. If you took a test and was mechanical inclined, and passed the test, why then if you was older than those that took the test and passed, well you got the job, you know. It was really a seniority, (uh-huh) the way they... you know usually, I suppose if a guy would really uh, didn't want you, he'd find some reason to disqualify you. Back then that is usually what happened. {laughter} (yeah, why sure)

Jennifer: So this is uh...most of it was based on seniority?

Ralph: Right sure. Well you had to be a little bit mechanically inclined to do the job like that. (yeah, yeah)

Jennifer: So what were you doing exactly in there?

Ralph: We uh, we just trouble shoot the machines. (huh) You know, we had each lehr probably had four or five machines and two or three different kinds of machines on them. And they detected defects in the bottles. They just run the bottles through the machine and uh, if the bottle had a choke neck, they would throw the bottle out, they would reject the bottle. If they had bar cracks and checks in the finish they would throw those out and if they were uh, had a crack in them or something, they would run them through a machine and they would just crunch the bottle up, you know, (uh-huh) make uh, just break it there, and it would be blown off the single line into a cullet hole. And uh, it was just on shut downs, why we repaired all our equipment and uh, we had all kinds...we had the lehrs to maintain the uh, not the lehrs but the uh, coming of the lehr the single lines, and unloaders, and bottle machine...bottle detectors. Then we had the uh, palatizer to work on the palatizers...case packers we worked on, uh, in the balcony we had the carton machines, the staplers, uh...

Jennifer: So you basically fixed all the machines?

Ralph: Everything in the packing room we fixed. I mean from the balcony...our men was in the balcony, they were on the packing room floor, they were on the shop, over all and stuff. We were the maintenance part of the selecting department. (got ya)

Jennifer: So this is different from like the machine shop?

Ralph: Yes, absolutely, yeah. They had different machines than what we had. (interesting)

Jennifer: What was the hierarchy like there, was there...did you have any bosses in the...

Ralph: Yes, we had the boss, and at the end we had an assistant supervisor. It was really a supervisors position, you know, like selecting department, uh hot end, corrugated, all that had a supervisor and we had one as a uh...see when I went in there uh, I believe Bob Owens, was supervisor and when I left...I don't know who was boss, {laughter} I know uh, its (why sure)...we had several.

Jennifer: I just wondered how you did your work?

Ralph: Ok, we uh (cough) when I came in the gauge shop we had two men on the shift and we had four shifts, and we probably had three or four men in the shop and then we had a crew leader in the shop. And then we had uh, usually the apprenticeship didn't start until after I had been in there a while, so uh, we had the uh, usually the guys that worked day shift, they got the uh...you had a mold change, different bottles go on different machines, you have to change everything on the machine. (uh-huh) And one fellow, he got the equipment all out that day for what you had to do the next 24 hours, he would get everything out. (in the warehouses?) Well no, he'd get it out of our equipment room, put it in the shelf for us to start wheels, the plugs, the uh, everything we had to change on the machine, (uh-huh) he got it out and put it in the shelf for us, (so it was there for you) so when we have a mold change, the uh, assistant shift foreman usually in the packing room would usually tell us when to change the machine. Because he would know how for...how much grossage it already had on that job, see. So they just...well they shut the machine down on the hot end, and the lehr emptied then we went out on the packing room floor and change everything on the uh...our machines, (uh-huh) and get ready for the new bottle coming down the line there. (sure, sure)

Jennifer: And how often would that happen, in the shipping...?

Ralph: Well it just depends...no, no we'd do that maybe uh, usually you would have two mold changes a shift, because when I first went out there, we had about 32 lehrs and uh, sometimes you just couldn't do it all. Because you had to much to do and uh, (uh-huh) and uh, but uh at the end we had so much equipment on the layers, I mean, you know, when I quit, we had so much equipment on there that usually they had the mold changes on the day shift and the day crew would get out there and make the mold changes with you, because we'd have like six FP machines, we'd have three crushers, three pluggers, one CID machine, a case packer, and a palitizer to do on one layer. (one lehr, yes) And there was no way two men could do that. We'd usually have a man assigned to each thing on there...one man on the FP machine, one man on the pluggers, and he would probably, when he finished a plug, he would go help someone on the case packer, you know, (uh-huh) we'd have maybe seven or eight people out there trying to get the mold changed, (yeah) cause it was...(alot of machines) alot of stuff to do. (alot of stuff to do)

Jennifer: How did, uh...what changes did you see in the factory as time went by?

Ralph: Well when I first went there it was all done by hand and uh when I left uh, they weren't packing anything buy uh, well I'll take that back, it was packed by hand, but when I first went there uh, they uh, took the bottles off the lehr, may be five women standing on a lehr, beside the lehr, just reaching over and taking them off, and putting them in a carton and throwing them on a trailer. But as years went by they uh, started running the bottles down a single line, detecting defects in them and they...see the women didn't have to inspect the bottles on the lehrs, usually the machines done most of the inspecting. (yeah, that's amazing) {laughter} Yeah, and uh, they would run the bottles through all of these machines, and then around through a uh, we call it a CID and it...all you had to do was just go on this machine and punch in a mold number that was...you wasn't throwing away, (uh-huh) it had rings on the bottom of each bottle, usually each bottle. And those rings were coated, you know, you could just punch it on the uh, machine and as it went through that machine it would read that mold number and if you had it punched on their it would just throw the bottle away, see so anything you wasn't throwing away, all you had to punch it in the machine, (tell it) tell it and it would throw it away. Then it went around to the case packer automatically, uh it would sit there all day at that case packer, packing bottles. Uh, maybe 24 or 48 would run down there and when it would filled up, why it would just drop them down. Now the carton would come under there automatically, and then another one would drop down, so. It was really, went from manual to mechanical, (yeah) and uh, in all those years.

Jennifer: How did you think management dealt with that, decrease the labor that was required?

Ralph: Well, when I first went there, it was a hard job, it was really hard. I mean I worked...you know you'd...they had so many bottles coming out and you had to do them...everything manual. Uh, we ran coke bottles, you have a different city, they had to make coke bottles for different cities (uh-huh) and on the bottom of the bottle they would have the city on there, and maybe on one lehr you would have two or three different cities. (oh, my goodness, little details, yeah) And you know, you would have to keep everything separated. Maybe you would have Huntington on one side, and Ironton, on another side, because they would be coming down in rows. (sure) And then you would have to keep Huntington separated from Ironton...or Chilicothe, or which ever city you were making. (yeah) And then you would make...we'd make ketchup bottles. That was a...I mean they would have so many ketchup bottles running, {laughter} and uh, you know, that was one of the hard bottles, because a ketchup bottle was packed hot. (uh-huh) And if you had a little defect in it, they would just blow up and all that ketchup would go in their filling line, you know. (a big row, huh)

{laughter} Yeah, and so they were really particular about their ware. But uh, you know, at the end, most of it was done by machinery. (yeah, yeah) Management, you know, uh, they were pretty well controlled when I went there, the union had just started not to long, I guess during the war they put a union in. And uh, it was kindly a company union, they done about what they wanted to do.

Jennifer: You mean management did what they wanted to?

Ralph: Yeah, management done about what they wanted to. But uh, it got stronger as...I guess at the end it got weak again, because our international union was, they didn't do the job they should have done. They never protected the people, you know, they didn't...it wasn't a place where they fired you very...unless they had really good cause, I'll say that. You know, probably some people brought up before the mast, as they say in the Navy, but they usually rehired them, or something like that. But it was a good place for me to work, I enjoyed working there mostly. (did ya) Yeah, I mean it was a good job. When I left I was making good and uh, so.

Jennifer: You retired?

Ralph: Yeah.

Jennifer: Any reason why, you just...?

Ralph: I got 65, {laughter} that was it.

Jennifer: Yeah, I would say. {laughter} Why do you think the plant shut down, what do you think happened?

Ralph: Probably to big. Uh, I mean, as far as I know, they were making good bottles, yet they had plenty of gas and uh, transportation was easy, it was right near interstates. I don't think I could figure out, they were just to big. At the end they was making mostly beer and alcohol bottles. When I first went there they were making baby food and prescription ware. (uh-huh) And wound up they was making beer bottles, and they said, you know, you have to make, uh your pack from pack to what you melt, has to be real high, like 90 percent or better. (uh-huh, yeah, getting up) And you know, theirs no room for air in a low profit bottle like beer, you know. You make alot of beer bottles, but you don't make a lot of money on them.

Jennifer: Oh, I see. So there would be a difference like...

Ralph: Well you know, baby food was a good, you made good money on baby food and prescription ware, because they were sold at a pharmaceutical. But your breweries, you know, they don't, they have alot of volume, but they don't make much profit on their...we

didn't on their bottles, you know. (right, right, huh) And we made wine bottles, and champagne bottles, big ole heavy champagne bottles that weighed so much. They took so much glass, I mean they were enormous weight on them. (yeah, I talked to some of the selectors about that) Great ole big bottles. (huge bottles, yeah) And uh, you lift those things all day. That's when I first went there, (huh) you lift those things all day, you would be dragging down through there. (really, I bet, that's...)

Jennifer: Did you take part in any of the social activities that the plant sponsored?

Ralph: Well we uh, when I first went there we had a ball team, and I played softball, uh, eventually we had a golf league, I played golf. I never did bowl any, they always had a bowling league, I never did bowl. Basketball, we had basketball, played a little basketball, wasn't very good at it, {laughter} but I...we really...back years ago, I guess I know alot of fellows it was hard, because they were ball players, (I bet) that's all...they would give them a job working down at the ball field, uh, cleaning up or sweeping or doing this or that, you know. But, their main (reason) the reason was play ball or something like that. But they built ware houses on the ball field, and management kinda shied away from any athletic activities for the, you know, as far as footing the bill for them. (oh, they did) yeah, they quit. Use to they would pay half on your uh, golf fee or you know, or maybe you would just have to pay so much. And bowling, they would give so much on the bowling, but that went out years, you know, along time ago. (sure, sure) And the main thing they were after, the money, the dues, and that was it. (yeah) {laughter} I mean that's the way...(with gun clubs and ...) Well you know they had a Rod and Gun club out in Wayne county, (yeah) and fishing lake out there. Really the employees had a good...everything was family orientated, you know. (yeah) We use to go have picnics and everything like that and each shift have a...we'd have parties, and all this stuff. But eventually that just went.

Jennifer: Yeah, yeah it did. Thank you for talking to me.

Ralph: Ok.

Jennifer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Ralph: Not really, I don't guess.

Jennifer: I appreciate your time, and your memories. {laughter}

Ralph: Ok, ok.

January 28, 1981

Dear Doris,

I have been reading your column in the Press-Observer for some time, and thoroughly enjoy it, as you seem to have such a vast supply of material. I am especially interested in the "Copley" genealogy, and glad you are going into this in detail. My great-grandmother was Nancy Jane Copley who married Christopher Chaffin. The Bowen, Chaffin, and Copley families of the Tug River area had considerable inter-marriage, so I'm wondering if you have any information on these families that possibly hasn't been printed. In the Oct. 20, 1980, Press-Observer, the pictures of Pearley W. Copley could pass for pictures of my father, Christopher Franklin Chaffin (grandson of Christopher Chaffin and Nancy Jane Copley Chaffin). My father also was a grandson of Franklin and Margaret Carey Bowen, mentioned in Virginia Carey's article of May 26, 1980.

History of Logan County by Henry Clay Ragland has this small article: "Christopher Chafin from Montgomery County, Va., settled near Elk Fork of Pigeon Creek. He married Miss Roberts near Lawrence County, Ohio. Mysteriously disappeared."

A recent clipping from Logan Newspaper gave the following:

Christopher Chafin } 1st generation
Mary Roberts Chafin }

Their 3rd child, Stanley Chafin, born 1810, married Aug. 6, 1834
Sarah Copley by Richard Chambers, JP
Vol. 1, Page 111

Wayne County, W. Va., 1850 Census shows:

(2) *Stanley Chafin, Age 39, Farmer, born Ky.
Sara (Copley ?) " 45 " Va.
Nathan " 14 " Va.
Mary A. " 10 " Va.
Aaron Whitt " 20 " Va.

Owned 1 male slave, age 12

Early Wayne County Marriages lists:

Stanley Chaffins, age 45, Parents - C. & M. Chaffins

Ann Fluty " 35 " F. & E. Fluty

Nov. 22, 1856, by Rev. Robert Hager

Could this be second marriage of the above Stanley?

The dates come out right.

(3) Christopher Chaffins, age 22, Parents *S. & S. Chaffins (2)

Nancy Jane's Copley, " 17, " **J. & M. Copley

April 19, 1856, by Rev. Robert Hager

1st generation Christopher & Mary Roberts Chafin

Their 7th child, Margaret Chafin, born 1822, married *M. Mar.*

**James Copley, " 1819(1810?) Ky.

Kentucky Marriages - Louisa, Lawrence County:

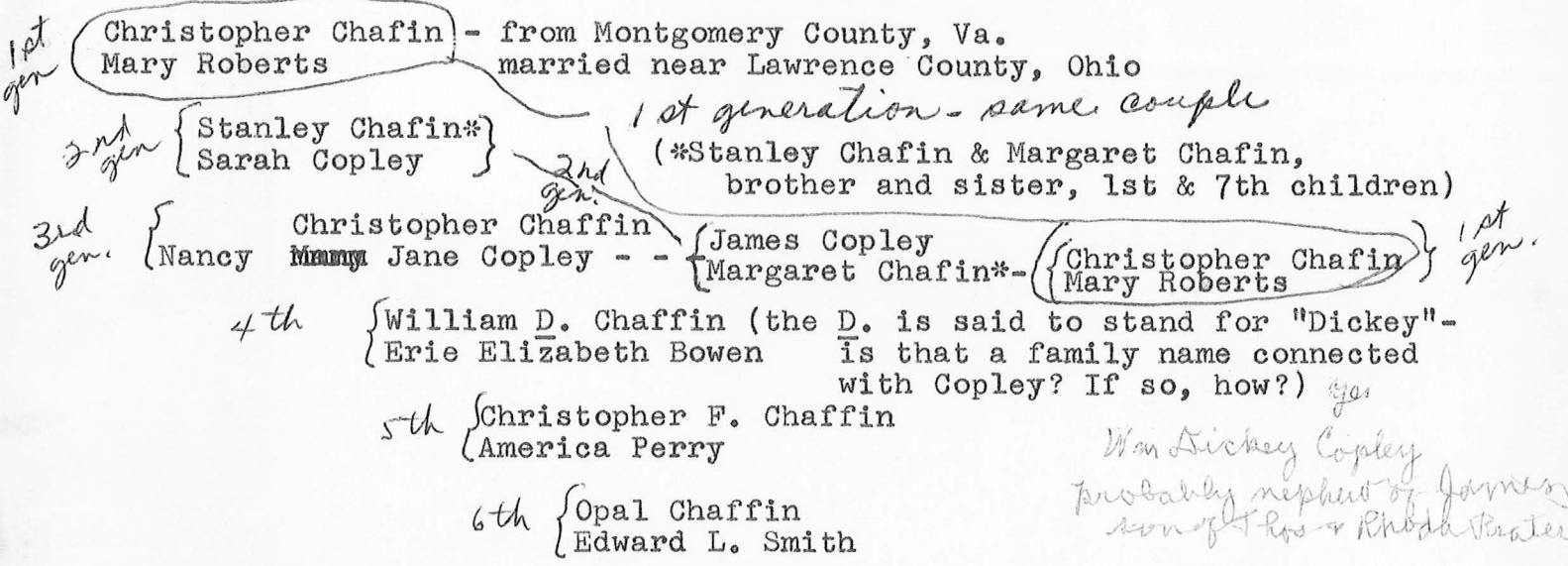
William Chaffin } married Dec. 26, 1865 by R. Sammons

Mary Ann Copley } witnesses: Christopher Chaffin, Rachel Chaffin

Henry Clay } married Sept. 25, 1866 at S. Chaffins
Mary Jane Chaffin } witnesses: Robert Ruggles & wife
(dau. of S. Chaffin?)

William D. Copley } married Dec. 8, 1864 (Vol. 1-A (47))
Sarah Ann Chaffin } by Wm. A. Christian, MMECS

What do you think of the following? The names, dates of birth, census records, etc., check out as far as I can tell.



All this information is quite complicated to someone who is not familiar with any of the names. If you can add anything at all to it, I will appreciate it very much. Can you tell me the relationship of any of the Copleys listed in the 1850 Census--I have a copy.

The Logan Newspaper clipping listed all the children of Christopher and Mary Roberts Chafin; I copied the ones that seemed to pertain to my family branch. If anyone is interested in the complete article, I will send a copy. The Logan County Genealogical Society is researching this family, also.

Looking forward to hearing from you; also, reading more of your columns in the Press-Observer.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Opal Chaffin Smith
Opal Chaffin Smith

1105 Chestnut Street
Kenova, W. Va. 25530
Phone: 453-4541

I am compiling information on Chaffin, Perry, Bowen, Workman, Carey, Copley, Calfee, and Bailey, and would appreciate hearing from anyone.

Call Mrs Smith