

Manuel Briscoe

Interviewed at his home by Pauline and Edwin B. Cheek
June 18, 1983

For a MHC project Edwin asked Briscoe about making pottery at Long Branch School:

"I started at Long Branch School in 1927, and we made pottery about 1930. Our teacher was Charity Hazard, from Abington, Va. I don't know where she learned pottery, but when she came, she really knew how to do the job. She made us get buckets of clay near a small branch below the school. We didn't mix anything with it. If it was too soft, we'd let it dry till we could knead it like flour, stiff enough to roll out to form a vase. We'd take a little water on a knife or paddle to smooth it. We'd get a vase or bowl formed and then work it down to make it smooth inside and out. Then we'd set it out to dry. We did not fire it in a kiln. When it was dry we'd paint it. Charity Hazard was craft-minded, and we took our pottery to the fair in Asheville in the fall of the year. In those days, we'd take baskets made out of walnuts and crossbows and arrows. One fellow won a shot gun with his cross bow. I won a blue ribbon, surprisingly enough.

"A Pearson fellow was head of the fair for blacks, held on a vacant lot on the corner of McDowell and Southside. Charity taught at Long Branch for two years and then went to Burnsville, and then after ten or twelve years she went to Avery County and taught. She married a guy out of Burnsville, Hugh Lee Griffin; I knew him well. I was talking with Charles Young today, and he said Charity Hazard taught crafts there. She passed less than a year ago in Richmond, and her husband burned up in an accident in a house.

"For the fair we made pitchers, vases, and bowls and painted them with water colors. Also we made a type of basket with a handle and carved birds--ducks and other types of fowl. You know, in those days we called that junk, but now we value it. I doubt you could find anybody who kept any. Under the school building there's two feet of coal dust; I doubt whether you could find any pieces of pottery."

Mr. Briscoe tried to recall names of teachers at Long Branch. His first teacher was -----Mackie. His second teacher was Ms. Roseberry. Other names he mentioned were Mrs. Phillips from Lenoir, Mrs. Davis, and Mrs. Conley "Our teacher trusted me and another boy to take her check, about \$50 a month, to the bank."

"We went barefoot as kids. We'd stump a toe--it would be nearly hanging off--but the doctor'd get pine rosin and bind it up and first thing you knew it would be healed." This led to reminiscence of home remedies:

"We'd bring in resin and steep it and make a tea for colds. We'd put it on sores and on horses when the bridle rubbed them. We raised Rhode Island reds and Plymouth hens, and we'd dye their eggs--brown with walnut and gold with sage. We made real good wine back then--blackberry and grape. Some people used yeast, but we just put in sugar and let it work till it quit. Wine helps cramps.

"We collected all sorts of wild stuff--poke, plantain, sessle (it was thorny), wild mustard, lamb's quarters. Sumac tea was good for bed-wetters. We'd decorate with galax wreaths. Gudger Barnett would kill a hog and his wife would render out the fat for people to take with a little sugar at night, like cod liver oil. Blacks and whites both came for that. Also onion plasters. We'd cut pumpkins like wheels and hang them on a hoe handle to dry.

"My daddy kept the banks grubbed. He knew how to keep things fixed. If the wind blew wooden shingles off something like the chicken coup he'd make new ones out of oak wood, and they would stay on. He made oak bottomed chairs, and he got hickory splits to tie chair bottoms. The blacks, that was their thing. We got broom straw to make brooms; the kids scraped off the seeds for it. My uncle made split baskets, and white folks bought them. A lady on Middlefork. Charity Ray has a picture of one of the baskets. I remember Aunt Sarah with a basket full of goodies. Some baskets were square, and there was a gizzard basket. My mother knit little booties and sweaters and quilted. We'd have quilting parties.

"My mother used horse mint for bronchitis. Boneset was bitter stuff, but you'd boil it and drink it for a cough. For nerves you'd boil catnip and drink it at night. We'd boil wintergreen and make a syrup for

coughs. I keep it and take it with a little brown sugar. It's hard to find good molasses now. My daddy made it the old way, and oh boy, that was good. He raised everything we ate, even wheat, peanuts, rutabagas, all that stuff in our garden. He and mother pickled cucumbers and made kraut in a wooden keg. He raised celery. My mother would take tansy and wash it real good, cut it and put it in a jar, and we'd drink it. White plantain was good for women's discharge. My mother-in-law would cut it up and make a drink out of it. Sassafras tea was good for the blood in spring. We'd make spicewood tea, sweeten it and drink it cold or hot. My mother used to take molasses and sulfur to purify her blood, and I'd try it once in a while. I had whooping cough one time. A neighbor had a mare so daddy went to him and got some mare's milk, and it cured my cough. . A lot of people used mare's milk.

Augusta Ray

Interviewed in her home by Pauline and Edwin B. Check

June 15, 1983

"My mother was born on September 17, 1893, in Yancey County, and my daddy in Madison County. I was born on Paint Fork in Madison County., the oldest of 14 children. I married when I was eleven. I went to Long Ridge School about 1924 and finished out the seventh grade.

"We made pottery about 1927 or 28. Ruby Fortune was our teacher. I don't know where she was from. She was married. She taught two or three years. You had to have water to make the pottery. This here red clay, it looks right slick. We got it out back from the school, and we rolled it out by hand, then baked it. I don't remember any glaze. We made corn shuck dolls and shuck mats, and other things from shucks. I can kinda remember John D. Rockefeller coming to visit Long Ridge. We had the pottery on show for parents and people of the community.

" I have one of the teachers' pictures: Sallie Ledbetter Davidson., who taught my second year. She was born May 19, 1895, to William and Anna Logan Ledbetter and graduated from Johnson C. Smith University. We went to see her in a Charlotte convalescent home on September 11, 1977. We were so proud to see her, and she was proud to see us, too.

"Daddy played the guitar--religious songs and the old-timey hoedowns. John Hanson, my mother's daddy, played fiddle for both whites and blacks. They'd play long into the night. Mother did the cooking, and Daddy would call all the children around for prayers. We sat around a square wooden table, and he'd return thanks. I enjoyed being with other children in the community. Oh yes, we'd walk to school; there was no other way. When I finished Long Ridge I went to work for Dr. Willard Robinson--cooking and house work. I'd read to little baby Ray-- little red hen and the sky is falling and three little pigs. Daddy was wanting to send me to Johnson City to his sister's so I could go to school, but you had to have clothes. He was share-cropping and he had to work hard. He had to clear off a field, go in and grub it. He'd start in the fall of the year to burn brush, and then he'd plow for summer. It was hard work."

Shirley Sewell

Interviewed in her home by Pauline and Edwin B. Check

June 9, 1983

"I will be seventy years old on June 27, 1983. I started school at Long Ridge at age six and finished the seventh grade. Our teacher, Mrs. Fortune, from Old Fort, taught us to make shuck dolls, whisk brooms, and pottery. We'd take a certain kind of red clay from the bank near the school, get it wet till we could work it good, and shape it any way we wanted. We'd put it on racks, two layers with bricks to hold the heat, and then build a fire. It was just a one-room school; so we had to make it outside. At special events our parents would come and look at our pottery. Some would buy it. Mrs. Fortune was real good at all different crafts. We made shuck rugs, picture frames; we took pictures from magazines and folded

These 2 paragraphs are paraphrases; the rest direct quotes.

them to make pretty belts. With clay we made jugs, vases, large, small, even water pitchers. As good as any you buy in a store. People from Mars Hill College and everywhere came to buy them. It was something to see.

“John D. Rockefeller came to visit Long Ridge School, and we had an “exhibition” for him. We had pottery on display, and also we took pretty flowers. The teacher told all of us to get dressed up. It was like an outing. We carried our lunch and baked a cake. We were told he was the richest man in the world and we were going to see him. He came in a model T Ford and wore a Stetson-like hat. He stayed a couple of hours. He was impressed with the rugs, and more so with the pottery. He got some. He appropriated money for a new room. I was eight or nine when he came. I graduated in 1929, and the second room was built in 1927. Miss Lucky and Miss Davis were my last teachers. They would take time with you and tell you how to look forward to the future. “

(On the tape recording we made she talked about the race question, home remedies, class, Madison Co. School, and her father's spar mine.)