

Buxton Project

Interviewee: Carl Kietzman

Tape 43B

Date of interview:

Place of interview: rural Albia

Interviewers name(s): Joe Hraba

A: And I learned the music and I, well I thought I'd just go in and see what was going on and Ed _____
 "What are you doing here? Oh, I just wanted to see the music. "Well, you gotta pay _____ fee. Oh, I'll pay the _____ fee.
 Well, I knew practically everyone that was in the dance hall. I'd eaten in their homes and I drank with them and I worked with them.

Q: Who are some of the black people you remember knowing?

A: Well, George Woodson, he was an attorney, Dr. Carter was a black doctor, his father was a coal miner.

Q: Okay.

A: And _____ Dr. Willitsen, the dentist. He was black. And the school teacher.

Q: Um-hmm.

A: Postmaster. He was a black.

Q: Who was that? Who was the postmaster?

A: Mr. Mills. His son Eddy was the secretary at the YMCA. Tub Carter, Dr. Carter's brother, he was a maintenance man for the mine committee.

Q: But you would go as a spectator, huh?

A: I'd go as a spectator and I was the only one who'd go. Hell, if I went in there, them guys had prohibition days, most of them had a bottle, they didn't get rowdy, no fights or anything like that. I'd go in there, had a little ant. room, come on in and have a drink. I been down there with a white man and I'd be settin' in there by myself and they'd have a bottle of moonshine. Eric Brown was the Paymaster for the coal company.

Q: Eric Brown?

A: That's right. And that man could handle money. He actually paid out \$90,000 in cash on payday. Counted it out in about three hours.

Q: Mmm-mm.

A: He was the manager, well, Eric thought he was hot stuff and he told one of his friends how he was going to tangle with me.
 Well, I was raised up in Buxton. Hell, when I was 18 years old I was 6'1", 185 pounds, and I was hard. I didn't back up to anybody, I didn't give a damn who they were. I didn't go looking for trouble but I didn't run from it. And this fella, he was roommates with _____
 his son got busted up with a tractor and he was in the hospital and my son got acquainted with him. _____

went to the door and said, "If you want him throwed out, you go ahead and throw him out." "I want no part of him." So I had him _____
I never had no trouble.

Q: Um-hmm.

A: I never had no trouble.

Q: You never saw much trouble at the dances.

A: Oh, no, no, no.

Q: So people who say Buxton was a rough town, you think that's pretty exaggerated.

A: Oh, that's purely out of sight. There's nothin' to that.

Q: Okay. Was it pretty much a family town, then?

A: Yeah. We had our roots, all nationalities, even had one Jamaican and one Cuban.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember those people?

A: I remember 'em well but I don't remember what their names was.

Q: You remember Slavish people, don't you?

A: Oh, there was French and German and Austrians, Belgians, Italians. We had a bunch of Italian bachelors lived next door to us and they had bocci ball, you probably seen that, wooden balls?

Q: Yeah, do you remember their names?

A: Oh, I don't remember their names, a few of them.

Q: They played bocci ball there, huh? Was it common when walking around Buxton to hear a lot of different languages spoken?

A: Well, you could hear some German, Austrians and French. My dad could speak German, Austrian, Italian, French, Dutch.

Q: Okay.

A: He was quite a linguist.
I was proud to be a part of Buxton.

Q: Yeah, well, people say it was really a good time in their lives. Would you agree with that?

A: Yeah.

Q: Why is that?

A: Why, I don't know. We just got along fine and people in Buxton would give you their shirt _____

Q: They're really friendly people. Helpful.

A: Absolutely. Absolutely. I read an article in, well, I don't know if you saw that on TV, the program I was on, and that Gus Frazer.

Q: Um-hmm.

A: He said there was three meat/ markets in Buxton. And there wasn't. They had three meat markets, but there was two of them outside of Buxton. One at Scharff Inn and one down at Cooper Town. Baxter had the one at Scharff Inn, right?

Q: Baxter had the one at Scharff Inn, right?

A: John Baxter, he had the one at Scharff Inn. Yeah, he was married to Laurie _____

Q: Who had the one out at Cooper Town?

A: That was John Black, he's a one-armed butcher.

Q: John Black?

A: Um-hmm. He had his arm off.

Q: What happened to his arm?

A: Up at Scharff Inn there was a livery boy in there _____
And down in Cooper Town the _____ had a livery barn. And Hayes Town

Bill Hayes had the land down there and he put up a bunch of houses. And Joe Hare, that was Archie Harris' Dad, had the livery barn there. And there was one delivery barn back north of us in Section 4. That was _____ Stewart's.

They could make a living at it. You see, Buxton took care of their town. They had their own machine shop, power plant, and telephone houses, their own cemetery and can't get to the cemetery. There's no road into it now. _____

_____ He called me from

He come down and spent an evening and said she wanted to come back. And bring some hamburgers. There was three of them came back, they come back in a station wagon and wanted to go to the cemetery. Well, you can get to the cemetery in a pick-up but you couldn't get to the cemetery in a station wagon. My family, we had a pick-up so we just got the pick-up and we went down _____

and we circled around and I showed 'em where the coal mines was at. _____
_____, you're on TV. That's the first I knew I was going to be on TV. _____

We had an interview there. And the daughter-in-law, she was bowling, and her night to bowl so we had to leave so we had some coffee and doughnuts. Them

Them folks didn't eat until 7:30 or 8 o'clock at night. They wanted to come back but I don't suppose they ever will. I enjoyed visitin' with them.

Q: So, it was a good time. Buxton was a happy place for most people.

A: Oh, absolutely. It was a mining town, some of the biggest _____ from Belle Plaine to Buxton. A baggage car and _____ Some of the biggest _____ in the country was made at Buxton. Now you can be certain _____ and they had to cross the bridge to go across the creek back to the park, there was about a five-acre park back there.

Q: Back where?

A: Well, it would be north of the cemetery. The cemetery's right on the county line.

Q: Okay, So north of the cemetery.

A: There's about five acres in there. And there was a kind of a ditch and _____

and the cemetery back there. After I saw my first elephant and had to plank the bridge to get the elephant.

Q: It was across Bluff Creek then, of course.

A: Yeah, that's where the township gets its name from.

Q: Okay.. Anything else, Carl, that you'd like to say at this time, that we haven't covered about Buxton?

A: Well, I can tell you that was some damn hard work cleanin' it up. You see them houses set on rock foundations. And after them houses all _____ Mr. Armstrong bought some land up in the center, I think it was a 170 some acres and the _____. All that rock had to be cleaned up and put back into agriculture. So I lifted thousands of tons of rock. I worked for Mr. Armstrong. I lifted thousands of tons of rock down there. some hauled _____ . We cleaned up Buxton. Now his son and _____ farm it, after Mr. Armstrong died and Emery inherited it. He moved up there next to the sale barn at Albia and I farmed it. Course I farmed it _____ and all those cisterns have been broke down, filled in and all those wells. I know I plowed it, disked and harrowed it, planted it and went down there to cultivate and and a front end cultivator and 'course I was always in there cultivatin' and looked up just in time to drive in one of thse wells we'd settled down. I think it'll all eventually settle down solid now.

Q: Think the archeologists are going to find much?

A: Well, I don't think they'll find too much down there. I know I read where they found some old rags or bones or something like that. The only thing I knew they ever find down there, these people that bought the farm from Emery, one of guys found a 20 dollar gold piece. I suppose you could take a metal detector down there, you could find a lot of crap and that down there. You may go down by the Pay Office, _____ you may find some cash or coins down there. It's always burnt me up the town had such a hard name; didn't deserve it. It didn't deserve it. I was over in Illinois, my wife and I went over there. We met a lady and she asked us where we was from and we was from Ioway and what part and

oh, around Albia. She wanted to know where we lived and we said close to close to Buxton. Oh, that's the town you go through with a gun in each hand and a knife in your teeth. Well, where in the hell did you get that idea? Oh, we had two, three characters down there.

Q: Who were the unsavory characters?

A: Well, we won't mention any names. One of them finally got stabbed. He _____ abandoned bakery shop and they used to go down and shoot craps in the bakery shop. This one joker he _____ his money _____ and he was losing his money and he grabbed the money up and he started runnin' and _____ so _____ got his knife _____ into him, and happened to be I was settin' on the steps by the telephone office and _____ went right around the corner of the telephone office and _____ did too. This guy was layin' in the grader ditch and couldn't see - he was covered with blood. And Dr. Custer was the last doctor that the company had down here. Just a short ways up to the doctor's office, and somebody went up and got him. _____ "The guy's dead, P____. I don't know how in hell that guy lived. He was stuck right here in the hollow of his throat. He had 4 or 5 stab wounds in his back, and he lived! Well, the guy that stabbed him, _____ he expected this guy to shoot him or something like that. He _____ Well, he _____ He got two years and went down to Ft. Madison. He got TB and they released him. He come back here to Buxton and died.

Q: I heard about that guy yesterday. He died taking a turn behind some horses plowing a field, didn't he? What was his name? Who was the guy with TB? Remember his name?

A: He died _____

Q: Um-hmm.

A: Walker Reeseby.

Q: Walker Reeseby. And I forget the guy, yeah, Walker Reeseby. I know about the Reeseby family. The old man had a lunch wagon.

A: Oh, that was Willis Reeseby. I think he was a different breed than the others. He lived back, when we lived on Second Street, he lived right across the alley from us on Third Street.

Q: Okay.

A: He went to Waterloo. Willis Reeseby. And then there was a Noah Reeseby _____ and another Reeseby out there.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And they lived up on Thirteenth Street. Oh, they was a religious family.

There was no discrimination. That old tale about killing somebody every Saturday night - oh, there was nothin' to that. There'd be fist fights, maybe some guy'd take a shot at one of 'em; one friend of mine, a guy was shootin' at him. He ducked around the corner and there was a black commin' the other way. He got the bullet in this throat, kinda affected his vocal cords, changed his voice quite a bit but he lived through it. Once in a while there was one kinda cut up. _____ across the street from us on _____

He was a black boy, had a reputation of handy with a knife.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: He _____ my friend down across the street. _____

So I made it my business to tangle with him. Beat the hell out of him, took his knife away from him and broke the blade off told him if I catch him with another knife I'd really work him over. Wasn't bothered with him no more. There was one boy, one black boy, day after we moved to Buxton, we _____ down to the postoffice and they were married. He and I got into it, in the postoffice. I'd never been around black people. _____ Ever think of that? Oh, they make wonderful targets. Mr. Mills, the post master, had to stop it. I had him backed up again' a pillar and I was layin' it on, why I was scared.

Q: What started the fight?

A: I dunno. I was a stranger. If you was a stranger and you run, you kept on runnin'. The best thing to do was take a whippin' instead of runnin' 'cause if you run, some of them kept you on runnin' all the time. And that's where I learned to use my hands. _____ workin in the coal mine, he was workin' two days a week, _____ slate? top and if you worked two days a week, then that's how you'd fill their contract, and you'd work Monday or Tuesday, and then you'd work the latter part of the week.

Q: Yah.

A'' My home was down here, and my folks, and payin' board over there at the Boardin House, two days a week, and gettin' only about five cars, that's about what you'd average - five cars to a man. I just couldn't pay expenses. So I quit coal mining and went to Des Moines to _____ I worked in the _____ about three years _____, asked for a vacation and he told me to take it, take two weeks. Motor was organizing, they was going to go on strike, _____ to go ahead and take two weeks, thought the Motor strike would be over. Instead of taking two weeks I took four months. I went back to Des Moines and had a job offer in Milwaukee, friends up there had a job for me at Green Bay. _____ go to Des Moines and see some of my friends up there and I went down to _____ and they talked me into going back to my old job there. I was night foreman. And me and _____ got into it. It was right about the fourth of July, hot weather. I'd worked from 5 o'clock _____ to early in the morning. You've seen the sun go down, you'd seen the sun come up and then you couldn't sleep

during the day, it was so hot. I didn't know at the time when I went back to work, they give me a raise, in fact, I was back night foreman. I worked just the same as the men did. In fact, I worked harder and they laid off two men, two night men when they hired me. Hell, they figured I was doin' two mens work. Well, we had thirteen and a half hours work - that's a regular shift and that was always 60 minutes an hour. Only _____ some of the guys I'd worked with before I took my vacation, they went to moldin and I had a bunch of new guys they were willing to take a dollar and eight? cents if they'd put two men back on. They'd like to get out so they could get some sleep. It was just wearin' them down. Hell, it wore me down too. I went down from 185 to 165. I told them _____ gandys _____ they was willing to take a dollar and eight cut, and he thought that would just be a good idea. He was gone about 3 minutes at the front office and he come back and got on me about it. They'd put on one man and take a dollar a night off, well, hell, take a dollar a night off each one of us would more than pay for the other man. I said that didn't suit me so I _____ an old Irishman, he was retired _____ he'd better come back and talk to the boys and cool off a little bit. The foundry was hot, a lot of hot metal in there. He come back and talked to the boys and cooled off. He said he wouldn't be back. I said, "If you don't

_____ Don't do a damn thing, just walk out. You better come back and talk to the boys and see if you can't agree on something. Well, he come back on about 9 o'clock _____

and go up in the Foundry and call the boys together and he told them he didn't have no trouble until I come back, and I was trying to cause them to strike. Hell, I _____ and I'm single; I'm not married to this job so just take me off and I'll leave." Well, had some black boys working and everything and they said that if you fire Slim (that's what they called me - Slim) then they'd quit. Right now. Boy, I had one guy, he and I worked the crane _____ we worked together on that. He worked with me two years. We knew how to handle the heavy stuff that the crane had to take up. And he never got hurt. So, he hadn't had no vacation, his name was Johnnie Robertson. I told Johnnie, when you go home that morning, you better take your vacation. I'll work till the end of the week. Our weekend was Wednesday night and we got paid Friday night.

Q: Um-hmm-m.

A: So I worked till the end of the week _____

I said, "Now you call me when you get home and tell me what you decided to do. If you're in town, then you're going to have to come back to work. Now that's one black guy, he was kinda rusty brown when when they started workin _____ He actually changed colors. His hair was gettin' white, discoloring. He told me he might see Dr. Ames and then he was going to Minneapolis to see his wife. He bought a model T Ford and he come in and tell me about he bought a Model T and I said you check and see if everything's all right, eat a sandwich and drink some milk and go back to work. He said he had a Model T, had it about three weeks and I asked him why he didn't drive it to work. He bought it and drove it into a shed up there he had for a chicken house and drove it into the shed and that's where he let it set, nobody tried to teach him how to drive.

I drove a lot of Model T's, owned a lot of 'em. I'll come out and teach you on Saturday night and Sunday morning. I'd go out and teach him how to drive a Model T. His wife had gone to church and I went out there and well, had to climb over the back end of the Model T, touring car with the top down, and try to move it, you couldn't get to the sides to get in it. It was just that narrow. I'd back it out onto the curb and onto the street and took it up to the Fairgrounds and got him organized and come back and he and his wife and I had dinner. Took them up towards Ames on Sunday afternoon _____

Hell, they both learned to drive _____

Q: Nice.

A: Took his vacation and he went to Minneapolis. I worked till the end of the week. 'Course I had to wait til Friday night to get my check and went down Friday night to get my check, _____ wouldn't give it to me. Asked him, "How come?" He said McGinnis (we called him Mac) didn't figure your trick. So I went and called him up and said, "How's come I can't get my check?" _____ I said, "Well, I just been in Des Moines all summer." _____ My money's due. It's payday. Can't get it. Well, he kinda thought it over,

Give it to him. So he called his time to the and brung the check down to me. So I _____ been nice workin' for you. Good-bye. Good luck. God bless you. Go to hell, God damn you. I had some friends in Chicago, so I stopped in Chicago to see my friends there and worked in Chicago. Did a job there, worked for International Harvester. And that's where I really seen discrimination. I got disgusted. First they convince you, they had a sign on the door, Man needed. _____ Makes brass valves and that. I took the sign off and went in the office, "Do I fill the bill?" "No." "How come? You don't know how much experience I've had." "Your face is not black. It's a nigger's job. Brass valves, you're making brass valves, you know.

Q: In Chicago, black jobs and white jobs, huh?

A: Yeah.

Q: But that wasn't true in Buxton?

A: No, that wasn't true in Buxton. Went to crane company or went to International Harvester and they had a reception room, hell, as big as this house, there was probably 50 or 60 of us settin' in there. And they was doin' their hirin'. They hired a big black guy, probably 250. Then said, "Well, boys, that's all we got today." I said, "you ain't doin' any foundry?" "You got any experience?" "Three years." "What doin'?" "Well, I worked from the _____ to the shippin' office." "Mostly I worked nights." And he said, "We can use you." "But you go in to the head office, fellow named Mr. G _____ If he's not there, just set there and he will be there." I went in and talked to him and he said, "What do you like to do?" I said, "Hell, I'd just as soon form metal as anything else." Well, you can't form metal here. I said, "I can't. Why not?" "I've poured a lot of metal." He said, "Your face is not black." "That's a nigger's job." "And that's when I found out there was discrimination."