

Transcription of the interview with Charles Greene

Date: September 12, 2019

Interviewer: Richard Leavy

Location: Log Cabin at the Delaware County Fairgrounds

Leavy: Thank you very much for being willing to do this.

Greene: You're welcome.

Leavy: Let me just start by asking how old you were when you first attended the Jug?

Greene: Well, the first time I attended the Jug was 1965. That was the first year. I came up here to see Bret Hanover and when I left Xenia it was pouring down rain. It rained all the way. When I got here, I was sure they weren't going to have the races. I had taken off of work to come up here to do it. Well, I came to the fairgrounds, I was standing by myself and Curly Smart (was) standing there. I was wondering what they were doing because they had these machines that were taken and rolling the mud off the track after the rain had stopped. And I asked him and he said that they were getting the track ready for racing. He said, 'we'll have it ready by the time we get ready to race.' Sure enough when the race time came the track was actually dusty.

Leavy: Isn't that's amazing?

Greene: Yeah and I couldn't believe it. There was all these rows of mud all along the fence. That was my first year. Then I came back the second year because I enjoyed it the first time. I was down by the fence and I heard someone saying, 'Hey Butch, hey Butch.' And I said, 'Who in the devil is calling me, it might be somebody from Xenia that I know.' So anyway, over in the infield somebody was saying, 'hey.' I said, 'what?' Come to find out it was my brother. Well I didn't know he was coming up to the races but he knew a friend of ours named Herb Wilson. He was the one, at the time, was in charge of the guys that worked in the (Log) Cabin and on the racetrack, raking the track. He said, 'let the guy come across the track.' And the guy let me across the track and he said, 'do you want a job?' He said that the one guy that was supposed to work, he didn't show up. I said, 'what do you want me to do?' He said, 'we're going to rake the track.' He gave me a rake and he, my brother, showed me. He's younger than me. He showed me how we rake the track and everything. Herb said, 'if you want the job come back next year. You can have this job.' I said, 'good.' That was in '67, that same year in October, after I had left here, General Motors called me to come to work. So I wasn't for sure that I was going to be able to get off, you know, to come up. Come to find out I did. Me and my brother raked that track from 1967 until he passed away in 2006. He passed away in...he came up here that year and he passed away that April in 2006.

Leavy: So the tradition of the Green Family actually starts with your younger brother.

Greene: My younger brother was the one that got me the job.

Leavy: Gotcha.

Greene: I continued after that even though he wasn't raking. His nephew started raking with me. He raked with me for, I don't know how many years it was, but then I got to the place where my grandson asked me...because I had to have a surgery done on my aorta where I had an aneurism. He's been raking ever since. So now, instead of me and my brother, it's my grandson and his nephew, grandson. My grandson, his grandson. There still doing it and, like I said, I continue to come up and help out. That's all in the future. In the past, when we first started...if you want to get to another part, I'm telling you a story or history that you ain't get to your other part. Anyway, we would always...we stayed down by the blacksmith's shop. We stayed in our car because there was nothing but a small cabin and you couldn't stay in there. There was no place for you to stay. It was just one room, one big room. There was another man, his name was Dave Decker he used to part the cars and things. I'll let you get to your think in a minute. We would walk up and we would go over to the track and we would get the infield judges stand and everything ready. Anything had to be done inside the cabin, we would do. In the evening, a lot of times, we would, I would clean up the cabin and everything. Whenever they would get ready to the drawings and things, we'd get everything ready. Actually, we worked for the Thomsons, Hank Thomson and Tommy Thomson. They were really good friends to us. We got along with them real fine. Hank was a nice guy. I used to have to take papers down to the fair office. He's be sitting in his office and he'd say, 'Charles, get on in here and sit down you don't have to get back to the track right away. Sit on down here and talk to me.' Tommy was real nice to me and my brother and he would invite us to different things. We had a very good relationship with the Thomsons. I enjoyed it so. My wife didn't have any problems with (me working). My wife and me got along real good about that. My wide and I have been married for 65 years.

Leavy: Congratulations.

Greene: That's a long time. You can get started on your...I just wanted to give you the color, the history. (My brother) didn't like to stay in the cabin as much as I did. I used to stay in here and I used to help this lady named Rachel. They had a big 'ol coffee pot and I used to fix the coffee for them, for all the guys and everything, when they came in. One of the things I really enjoyed about them, I got the chance to meet a lot of the older trainers and drivers. The one driver that I really met and became kind of good friends with was Frank Ervin, the one that drove Bret Hanover.

Leavy: All those years back?

Greene: All them years. When he would come to the races, ever after he retired, he would always have me sit down and talk to him. Like I said, I met a lot trainers and drivers, the older ones. I was talking to Billy O'Donnell last year and he said, 'yeah, I remember you guys.' I talk to Ron Pierce and all the ones like that. I'll let you get back to your questions. I was just going to give you a little.

Leavy: That's OK. You have seen a lot of races.

Green: A lot of races. I have met a lot of drivers, and trainers and owners.

Leavy: Is there a Jug that, for you, stands out...it's really memorable?

Greene: They were all exciting. There was one horse, just one, that me and my brother didn't have very (good luck). It was called Nero. He was a horse that was afraid of everything. He had more shadow rolls and things on his face. He'd be running along and he would look at you. So, whenever he would go to train, or anything like that, they would have us go over to the track and make sure everything was off of the track and that nobody was around to bother him, because everything bothered him. He was the favorite to come in (first) and he didn't win.

Leavy: About what year was this?

Greene: I forget exactly what year it was but, like I said, I saw about, over fifty. I just can't remember all of them. All of them were good races, we saw some that we thought were good enough to win, but didn't win. I've enjoyed every bit of it. It's like anything else, in my opinion, you have good times on jobs and bad times on jobs.

Leavy: So you have more than 50 years of experience. What are some of the big changes, you would say, have happened with the Little Brown Jug?

Greene: Where you are sitting at right now. The change from the little, small cabin to this big, nice cabin. One of the changes that happened was...it wasn't long after the cabin was built the man named Dave Decker, he passed away. So, Raymond and I asked Tommy, 'hey, Tommy, lookie here. Would it be alright Raymond and I stayed in the cabin at night?' We stay here all day and all night. Rather than stay in our car, we would stay here and watch the cabin for you. He said, 'would you do that?' We said we would be willing to do that. That way, we wouldn't have to drive back and forth. So that's what we do now. What I do...we stay here at night and kind of keep an eye on the cabin. We open it up in the mornings, get the guys ready to go.

Leavy: So, it's a change for the better?

Greene: The other change is, over the years, they built the Juliette Barn, they built the Jug Barn, they have improved the track, to where it is one of the fastest half-mile tracks in the country. I've seen a lot of changes, most of them have been good, as far as I am concerned. I could remember when back in the back (parking lot), there was a fence and there was some apple trees and such back there and that fence didn't go further back than, I don't know maybe 100 yards at the most. They took the fence down and every year the parking went farther and farther back. People started to bring in all those motor homes in. It's really been a big change. Over here [pointing over his shoulder], same thing with the motor homes. It really has progressed into one of the better places. I've give you an example of something that I've seen. One year went down to DuQuion, Illinois to the Hambletonian because I wanted to see Flower

Child. I drove all the way down there by myself to see it. I was amazed at the track. It was big mile track and it was really nice. It wasn't too long after that they moved it to Meadowlands up in New Jersey. I've heard, maybe they will, maybe they won't, I hope they don't, that someday that they move this. But, I hope they don't. If I live another 10 years, I would come up here another 10 years. But if they moved to somewhere else, I don't know whether, you know....

Leavy: You are how old now?

Greene: Well, I am 83. I'm 83.

Leavy: Congratulations. What would you say makes the Little Brown Jug special? There are a lot of other races.

Greene: Oh yeah there really is. It's more of a close knit atmosphere here. It's not like when you go to a large racetrack where the biggest majority of the people are about betting and things like that. This here is more about seeing the races themselves. Like last night, a lady called and I answered the phone, everyone had gone home, and she asked me the question of what were the dates they were going to race. I told her they are going to race on Sunday at 1 o'clock, Monday at 3 o'clock, and Tuesday at one and then on Wednesday and Thursday the races start at 11. She said, 'I'm not concerned with those two, but I like to come to the races but sometimes I don't like to come when there is a large crowd. I've been to a lot of fair races, around in Ohio. There're none that compare to here. A lot of people say that the races at Greenfield compare to it. I've been there, it's a nice...they have nice races. I've been to a lot of race tracks. I used to go down to Latonia Racetrack down in Kentucky when they had the old Latonia Racetrack. They would race thoroughbreds and Standardbreds. I've gone...we used to go to the Red Mile every year...we enjoyed going down there. I met a lot people down there. The people that we met down there say, 'I see you guys there raking the track, why don't you rake the track here?' They do it a lot different down there.

Leavy: I wanted to ask you is there a special way that you and your brother, now grandson and so on...is there a special way to take care of the track.

Greene: Well, I talked to Curly Smart about it and why. They said...the way they do presentations here is on the infield. So what happens here, the people come from the grandstand over to the infield. So what they do they track up the track and he said basically horses are like people...if you were going down the (track) and saw a path and you weren't sure if it was a path or a ditch, you would either step over it or jump over it. A horse looks at it the same way. If the tracks are going this way [motions left to right] it doesn't bother them. But he said that tracks coming across, they want to jump over it and I've seen a lot of them do it. They hesitate and jump over it.

Leavy: So in a way, you are showing them the right way to go.

Greene: Right. With all the people running back and forth across the track and just before the race starts, my brother and I would rake the tracks up. We came up with a system. He was always in the back and I was in the front. We he rakes this way [motions side-to-side], I rake that way [motions side-to-side] we cover it up. We got into a rhythm. That's how we did it. Believe it or not, a lot of the photographers would come out and take pictures of us doing that. It was almost like we were dancing.

Leavy: That is exactly what I was thinking. So you have passed along the dance to your grandchild.

Greene: Yes, my grandson. He pretty much (has) it down.

Leavy: One of the things that you mentioned was that Delaware might not have the Jug in the future and I am just wondering what do you think that would mean.

Greene: I think it would take away a very good tradition because of how long the Jug's been (here). I don't know if it made a big difference when they moved the Hambletonian to the large city. The Hambletonian was at a small DuQuoin, Illinois. It wasn't like there was people coming from New York and Jersey...It would be an impact because actually, where would you move it to?

Leavy: Good point.

Greene: I've been to Northfield, it's a nice track and everything, but it is still not the setting like this is. If I had a vote, I'd vote to keep it right here.

Leavy: I bet you would. I think a lot of other people would as well. Are there some other topics, some other sorts of things that you would want to share? Again, the goal of this oral history is to record stories of people that have loved this race for a long, long time and I am wondering if there are any memories or any other topics that we ought to hear about.

Greene: I can get into one. I had an incident that happened to me years ago. I don't mention it too often. I was working in the old cabin...there's two instances, two of them and I'll give you both of them. I can't remember what year but I was in the cabin cleaning up and this car pulled up. A guy runs up and knocks on the door. I said, 'can I help you?' He said, 'yeah. I've got an entry here that I need to leave. I'll got to leave it because it has to in in the morning and I have to leave to go somewhere else.' I said there was no one here right now to do it. He said, 'I have it all filled out. Can I leave it?' I said that I was just a caretaker and I don't know if I should do or not. He said, 'I sure would appreciate it.' I said, 'well, OK.' He said, 'here, just put it'...he gave it to me. I took it in the office and I put it in there for the guys that take the entries. The next morning, the first time they came in there, I said, 'hey, this guy stopped by here and left this paper her for ya'll and told me to give it to you when you first come in.' So, I gave it to them and come to find out that it was an entry for one of the Jug horses. Well then my heart really started beating then. I'm glad I gave it to them. Lo and behold, the horse that he gave me ended up winning that race, end up winning the Little Brown Jug. Ben Webster was the driver and the horses

name was Seatrain and Seatrain won the race and I said to myself, 'I sure am glad that he won and I got that paper in.'

Leavy: So you're the reason that horse was able to win the Jug.

Greene: I never...as a matter of fact, you are only about the second person I ever told that (story).

Leavy: Well, thank you very much. That is an important story to tell.

Greene: Then, the other one...I was in the old cabin and Bob Steele, the judge, he and two other judges came in, 'Charles, there are some guys coming here. When they get here, you get them in here and you shut the door when they get in here.' I said, 'OK.' So the next thing I know a limousine pulls up and they guys went in there and one guy said, 'you stand here and wait with him. Don't move.' They went into that little back office and boy, I'll tell you what, there was more H E double L being raised in there. [laughing] There was something about a fight that happened on the racetrack years ago, two of the drivers...something happened and they got to fighting. I'll tell you what, Bob Steele went up and down those guys. Those two bodyguards or whatever they were or who they were but that was the other memory. I've had a lot of owners that were real nice to me. We used to have to take a lot of their stuff back and different things. Another individual that was really nice to me and my brother was Charlie and LaVern Hill. I was talking to Charlie and come to find out, Charlie Hill was from the same place as my father was from and he knew...he didn't know my father, but his father knew my father because they were both from Wilmington, Ohio. Charlie Hill's father had a store down there. We got to talking and I told he who I was and he said that my father and grandfather used to come in his store.

Leavy: Speaking of coincidences, it turns out that Roger Huston...

Greene: Oh here we go [laughing].

Leavy: In Xenia. How old?

Greene: Well, I was in my twenties.

Leavy: And he was about 16?

Greene: I'm a few years older than Roger. I'll get to that story and tell you what it was all about....I was driving this taxi cab for Homer Johnson. Roger, his mother, worked in this store called James' Supermarket. I drove this old cab and Roger working in the supermarket from the time he was in school...He worked as a sacker. I would always go down there and pick up customers whenever they needed a ride. I told Roger, 'hey, Roger lookie here.' I said, 'want to make a quarter or two? Anytime anyone needs a cab, let me know and I'll give you a quarter for every one.' Roger said that ain't given that quarter yet [laughing]. Roger tells that story and in his book it's in that book how he and I met. Like I said, I knew his mother because she worked in there and I used to do a lot of deliveries for her, from

the store. Roger and I have been friends ever since then. The same year Tom Thomson got inducted into the Hall of Fame up in New York, I told Tommy that my brother and I would ...GAP... right there and Roger told that story about me. I was glad that was able to get up to go to Tommy's induction into the Hall of Fame. I hated it when both Mr. Hank Thomson and Tommy both passed away. I lost a good (friend). A lot of the guys that I first started working with in the cabin have all passed away, except Roger. That was the early years. As far as I know, Roger and I are the only two (left). All of the other guys are mostly passed away.

Leavy: I really appreciate you doing this.

Greene: Do you want me to go any further? Do you have anything else you want to ask?

Leavy: I have just one or two, if that's OK.

Greene: I almost told you my whole story [laughing].

Leavy: That's what we are here for. That's what we are here for. I guess one of them is you mentioned there are certain races you remembered, certainly the 1965 mud. You remembered a horse that was really nervous. Do you have any favorite drivers, or favorite trainers that over the years you really admired?

Greene: I knew a lot of the drivers and I was friendly with a lot of them and they appreciated what we did. I'll give you a few of them. John Campbell was very nice. He would always talk to you, speak to you no matter where he saw me at. David Miller was like that. Dave Palone. I used to go to the Adios in Pennsylvania. One of the owners and trainers that I was...the man that owned the Adios. He would come in and he would always say, 'where's Charles? I got to see him before I leave.' One time he had to get to the main office over there [pointing] for something. Tommy said, 'Charles, get on a cart and take him.' He said, 'there's a big crowd out there. We can't get (there).' I said, 'I'll get you there right now.' So, I knew how to go out here and go all around the back and come out there and dropped him off right at the office. He said, 'Charles, I never would have thought about going the way you did. You didn't have to fool with no people.' Whenever we go down to the Red Mile, Tommy would always come and see if Raymond and I were there and he would come and sit and talk to us. A lot of the guys...I could sit here and name you different ones that I worked with and whenever I go somewhere....like Jason Settlemoir. He was a young kid when he came here and we've become good friends. There are so many of them. Sometimes I get a thought about them and I start talking about them but lose track of their names and things like that. I've met so, so many. I had a guy that I used to stay with. He'd always come up to the old cabin and his name was "Thin Dime" Murphy. "Thin Dime" Murphy used to work with Curly Smart. We stayed down there by him and he'd always come up to the cabin and we'd put two cans of beer in the little cooler and he'd come in and look all around and he'd give me a little sack. He'd say, "Hey Charlie' and I'd put his two beers in his bag. Oh "Thin Dime." He could tell you some stories. Like I said, I have met so many that I would never have I never worked here.

Leavy: Actually, that is the last question that I wanted to ask you. If you were going to suggest people for us to interview because leaving them out would be a sin. Are there some folks that immediately come to mind? You know, you really ought to interview a certain person or two...We want to get their stories recorded because they are, they have great stories to tell.

Greene: Right off hand, I couldn't...I've heard so many stories from different (people)...I saw Herve Filion he did that thing where he stood up in the cart. I asked him, 'what made you do that?' He said, 'oh hell, I just felt like it.' [laughing].

Leavy: It's famous.

...GAP...