



LITTLE BROWN JUG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
The Reminiscences of Sheldon and Carolyn Ross
January 10, 2020

Delaware County Historical Society
Delaware, Oh

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Sheldon and Carolyn Ross, conducted by Richard Leavy on January 10, 2020 at the Delaware County District Library

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been created by Jay Wolf and has been edited for clarity only.

Transcriptionist	Jay Wolf
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Interviewee	Sheldon and Carolyn Ross
Interviewer	Richard Leavy
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Sheldon and Carolyn Ross Transcript

Leavy: We are going to start this in the very beginning, which was when you saw the Little Brown Jug race for the first time, how old you were and what year that was.

Carolyn: The year was 1946. I was 13 years old and I had come to the fair with my dad. My school had a tent that served food, which was situated right were the Merchant's Building is now. I was to help do dishes at the tent. I was also on the Junior Fair Board which was, at that time I think, they chose people from each school to be on the Junior Fair Board. I don't think it had anything to do with 4-H at that time, which it does now. I was there and I knew that the Little Brown Jug was running that day and I had heard that there was a movie star that was going to be there. I was great into movies and it was Charles Coburn and I wondered if I could go up there and see him. So, I was in front of the grandstand, which at that time was just grass from there to the track. There were no bleachers, just the grandstand. I went up and as a young person, I could walk in and out and it didn't matter. I saw a bunch of people and I happened to see Charles Coburn. When everyone else moved away, I sort of went up and I asked him if I could have his autograph and he did give it to me. So that was the first Jug. I really didn't – my dad knew Wayne Smart, "Curly" Wayne Smart, was running in the race, but that didn't do much for me at the time, but I was up there and I did watch it. I don't remember if my dad got to see it or not – I think he probably did. So, that was the first time that I saw the Jug. I don't think I saw it for quite a few years afterwards.

Leavy: Do you still have the autograph?

Carolyn: I do, but I can't find it. I know where it is, it's in a little box, now if I could find the box [chuckles].

Leavy: So your first impressions were there was a movie star here and, by the way, there is also a race?

Carolyn: Right. I had heard – I knew it was going to be the first Brown Jug race and all that. I was after the autograph more than anything.

Leavy: Well Sheldon, what was your first experience?

Sheldon: Well, I am trying to figure out when my first experience was because I was there for the first Jug but I didn't see it. At that time I was interested in horses, I was showing cattle, but I loved horses. They didn't make as big of a deal about the Brown Jug as they do now, because it was the very first one. I did try to sneak back to the racetrack. We were supposed to be on the other side of the fence on the backside. I had heard of Curly Smart. I didn't know Curly Smart well, but I had heard my dad talk about him. I don't recall even seeing the first race. The first race I could actually recall watching was I was probably – well, it was when I came back from the service – it would have been in the late fifties, early sixties. I was with the fire – a Tri-

Township volunteer and we would have to take a truck up to stay at (the fairgrounds) during the race. As soon as the race was over, the races were over, then we'd leave. That was probably the first Brown Jug that I saw.

Leavy: So, when you came back from the service and you were back in Stratford, I guess, did you continually see the Jug? I mean, was that something that was a tradition for the two of you?

Carolyn: Yes, because the fire department had the truck and my dad was the fire chief. We got to go up and my uncle was the superintendent of the barns. The truck parked right in front of that barn where he was. The outrider was my cousin. It was her father that was superintendent of the barns, so we were all collected right in that one little area. We could see well from the seat of the fire truck and up on the back of it. That was probably in (19)59.

Leavy: You had mentioned to me that before this interview started that you camped out at the fairgrounds. About when did you start doing that?

Carolyn: When our children, our boys, were in 4-H. They had horses in the 4-H horse classes. It was allowed that we could camp out at the fairgrounds. We had a camper and we'd take it up and stay all week. Then we graduated to a trailer. They made places for the campers and the trailers after so many years and we had one every year.

Leavy: So starting when? What year you would say?

Sheldon: Probably the early (19)60s.

Carolyn: (19)62 or (19)63).

Leavy: And continued to do that for how long?

Carolyn: I am trying to think when we quit. It was in the (19)90s.

Leavy: That was a long stretch.

Carolyn: Oh, yeah.

Leavy: So you have a lot of history. I am wondering if there are certain experiences, or certain races that were, are, most memorable to you?

Sheldon: I think the most memorable to me was the year that it rained so hard they had to scrape the track. They scraped the track clear down to the base and rolled it clear to the top. There were row after row after row of strings of mud piled up in front of the grandstand, well clear around the track. We never thought that they would race, but they did. They got the race off and I think they set a (world) record. Of course they set a record every year up there (chuckles). I can't tell you the horses name that won.

Leavy: Well, I think it was Bret Hanover and I think it was 1965. A number of people have mentioned that, sort of miracle because it was raining so hard and yet they had a suitable track by about 4 o'clock in the afternoon...remarkable.

Sheldon: Yeah. It was up to Curly to...

Leavy: Yeah, he figured this out?

Carolyn: He and Wayne Byus.

Sheldon: They said it was (Curly's) decision whether we'd race or not.

Carolyn: I think the one that I remember was it was so cold it snowed.

Leavy: Really?

Carolyn: Well, it didn't cover the ground, but it was snowing and I just remember how cold it was and I was glad we had that firetruck to sit in.

Leavy: I can imagine.

Carolyn: There are others that I remember, but those are the two that I remember.

Leavy: Sure. Both of you have some history with Curly Smart, right?

Sheldon: Yes, very definitely.

Leavy; And I haven't spoken yet with anybody who described his personality, his quirks, his habits or just the way he was. So, I would be delighted to hear any story you can tell.

Carolyn: Well, you probably should talk to our daughter-in-law, who is his grand-daughter. She has lots of stories about him, but he was a funny gentleman and very easy to talk to, I think.

Sheldon: Good humored. He loved kids. I can remember, one of the first memories I had of Curly was – and this was several years later – they had a picture of him, an oil painting, and he was talking to this young boy and he was demonstrating to him how driving a horse felt in races. That little boy – it was a terrific picture, terrific story. That was Curly. I don't think Curly ever knew a person he didn't like. He could talk to anybody. When I worked at the newspaper, the (Columbus) Dispatch, we had parties, we had a press night the week before the Jug to get everybody tuned up and Curly was there. He would tell stories and everybody just (sat there) and could listen to him all night long. I remember my daughter-in-law talking about her grandfather when she was little. Something came up about eating oysters and she said, "Grandpa Curly taught me how to eat oysters. I didn't want to try it but I'd do anything for him." That's just the way the kids thought of him.

Leavy: Sounds like a very warm...

Carolyn: I think so. I really didn't know him that well. I met him and knew his wife (better). Of course, knowing his grand-daughter, our daughter-in-law. She's very much like him. She's very outgoing, a great person to talk to, very warm.

Leavy: We ought to include her in the interviews, yes?

Both: Yes.

Carolyn: Both her and our son said they would.

Leavy: They would be willing?

Sheldon: Their family still have a box seat on the front row of the grandstand on the fifty yard line, the finish line.

Carolyn: Our daughter-in-law's father was Jim Hackett, who also (won) one of the Brown Jug races. I think there is a picture of him in there to (pointing to a book).

Sheldon: That's him right there. The top one (pointing to the book).

Leavy: That's Jim Hackett?

Carolyn: Yeah. He won that one – Best Of All – in 1967. Best Of All was his horse. The Hacketts are still around and they are a great family.

Sheldon: I don't think there is a person in Delaware County that has ever been to the fair and you mention the name "Curly" they know who you are talking about (laughing)

Leavy: So with a long history of seeing this race, what would you say are some of the changes you've seen over that time and if you have an opinion about what you think was for the better or what you think was for the worst. What changes would you say have occurred?

Sheldon: I would say the biggest thing would be the size of the crowds. When the first Jug was there, you could walk up to the fence and stand there and watch the races, but now you can't get anywhere near the fence. They tie the chairs up to the fence. Some of them leave them there year-round. The backstretch – you could have driven a truck through the backstretch originally, but now you can barely walk through there. The crowds have changed so much.

Leavy: It's a big event.

Sheldon: It is.

Carolyn: I think a little bit, everybody from the county used to rush in and be there. I think some of that is gone a little bit now. Maybe some of the older people think, “I don’t want to go on Jug Day because it is too crowded.” They think – and some of them aren’t interested in horse racing, but it’s still a county togetherness thing...connection.

Leavy: When you put together your two answers though it increased in attendance, it may have decreased. I don’t know when you considered the peak.

Carolyn: I don’t know either, probably in the late (19)80s, I’d say was the peak maybe. It hasn’t gone down that much I am sure. Maybe for the locals it’s old hat now.

Leavy: Have you folks missed the Jug, sort of intentionally, at all? You decided that “we don’t want to go.”

Both: No.

Sheldon: Never. When it first started, the fire department being there, we just take (the truck) up on Jug Day and just be there for all the races on Jug Day. Like a said, it started to get crowded on the backstretch and you couldn’t drive a truck around. If we had something happen in the grandstand, we couldn’t get to it with the truck. So, we invited four departments from around the area that joined us and stationed their trucks so that they could protect that area if we had a heart attack or whatever to get to them. We were there every year. I don’t remember when it was, but they gave us a tent to park the truck in up there and we stayed for the whole week during the fair. We lost a horse barn one year. As we were taking the truck back to the station, one of the stall barns burned. Of course all of the traffic was bad from the Jug leaving and we couldn’t get back to it and it burnt down. They replaced it and no horses were in it. All of the horses were gone, but that changed – so every year we’d have different departments come in and stand by. We’d have one at the grandstand, one in the far corners and that made it a lot simpler. Another thing that changed is they used to allow, during the Brown Jug, people would be on top of the barns, standing to get a better view. It got to a point where they were afraid someone was going to fall off the top of the barn. First of all, and it wasn’t safe so they made them stay off. But everybody had, if you had a big truck, you could take it up there and park it and they’d got to where they were making seats on the truck and people would take their whole family and go up and have a truck parked up there and give them a good place to watch the Jug from.

Leavy: One of the things that was tradition, I guess, at the Jug, was people bringing in their own beer.

Sheldon: Yes (laughing).

Carolyn: And other things.

Leavy: And so you had some heavy drinking going on and some intoxicated people?

Sheldon: Yes.

Leavy: Can you talk a little about your role in, what can I say, evaluating the intoxicating state?

Sheldon: Well, one thing, there were a lot of concern from the community about alcohol mixing with the Junior Fair. The kids are there for the fair and they didn't want to...so they kept it pretty much to the back. When they...

Carolyn: Before that.

Sheldon: Before that, yeah. It was concerning. When we had that tent in that one parking area and of course all of the firemen where there, we had a full crew there from our department and we had families, that was the meeting point. The crowd was starting to leave and they had their beer wagons – they would pull little wagons – and they were pretty well consumed and they'd come out. The women, they got out – the women from our fire department - would go out and sit and judge the limits of what the guys would drink (laughing).

Leavy: Carolyn, what was that like?

Carolyn: (Laughing) Well, it was fun. It shouldn't be that it was fun, but there were so many of them. You could see them go in the morning with their wagons of beer and all this. (They'd be) carrying their beer and their bug pouches and all this. Of course during the race they drank it all and they had a wet t-shirt contest in the back, on the backstretch, and everybody had a good time, I guess. We didn't go back there, so what was fun was when it was all over, we would sit out on front of our tent or whatever in our chairs. We knew to bring our chairs and line them up out there and watch these crazy people come back and go to their cars. Some of them could make it and some of them couldn't. They were fun to watch, but it shouldn't be that way.

Sheldon: They rated them.

Leavy: How drunk?

Carolyn: Yeah (laughing).

Leavy: Was there any connection then to the police or where you just doing this as a voluntary...?

Carolyn: Oh no, we were just observing (laughing).

Leavy: Part of the entertainment?

Carolyn: Yes. We couldn't go anywhere because of the crowd and of course the fire truck couldn't leave so. We just amused ourselves by watching and some of them we'd try to help if they...it wasn't so funny that we didn't help them if they were down or needed help.

Sheldon: I will say that most of them didn't drive. They'd get to their cars and wait until the traffic cleared out, that gave them time to...

Leavy: Yes, get a little more sober.

Sheldon: Sober up. But it was fun to watch.

Leavy: I guess so...Again, you have seen lots of Jugs and I guess a question that we've asked people in the project is, what do you think makes the Jug special? I am just curious about your take on that.

Carolyn: Well, I think it's more, like I said, a connection, it's a county thing. You know it's Delaware County (thing) and that's our county and it started out, maybe years and years ago, that's the way it was, too. Just the idea that we had something that big, that was such a monetary thing, too. It was important to all of us. Maybe because Curly Smart was a county person and won the first Jug and maybe that drew us all in? And the fact that the fair, our fair, was there - the kids, the parents and everybody showing their vegetables and all this - and this was part of our fair. Just a connection, I guess.

Sheldon: I think that it was more of a family affair, like going to an Ohio State football game, you would say, 'I was there.' A lot of people went to the Jug and never saw it. What was the parking lot then is now a camping area on the east side of the fairgrounds and they used to be able to drive right up to the track and sit there. Well, now they put their campers up there - they got the big tent set up there now that wasn't there. People come in and they, all week long, they stayed at the fair and they have party after party after party at each campsite. They meet people coming in from other states, even other countries, and make friendships and that may be the only time during the year they see these people. They say, 'hey, we got to be there because this may be our last year, you know? We want to see those people.' Very friendly.

Leavy: So in a way you're saying not only is it a connection for the county, but for the people all over?

Sheldon: Right.

Carolyn: We met Canadians, who are in the box next to ours. When (Sheldon) was on the Fair Board, we had box seats in the grandstand. They had a lot of Canadian people around us. Really nice. Everybody was nice. It was just a good time from all over.

Leavy: In order for the Jug to continue into the future are there some things that you think, if any, that need to be changed or improved? What do you see as needing to be there in order for this to go into the future?

Sheldon: There have been rumors for years that the Jug was going to move out and go down to Scioto Downs. I think they made sure that it stayed here. It's hard to keep people from saying, "We can improve it and do anything better." I think it has improved so much. It has made changes moneywise that's helped out. The fairgrounds is...before it was divided, the Jug and horse racing was from the grandstand on out. The fair was – now it's all – when people come in for the Jug they bring their own food, of course. They have their big campers themselves. A lot of them come in, but they also go out into the fairgrounds – some of them come and see the Junior Fair and Senior Fair. It's all one big unit now, more or less. There are still a lot of improvements to make, but they are working hard on getting it (done). They want to keep the Junior Fair as it benefits from the Jug, which is good. There are some people that are concerned about having alcohol – which is not allowed in the Junior Fair area they keep it controlled up there – could be a bad influence on the kids.

Carolyn: They've worked to change that.

Sheldon: They've controlled it real well, I think.

Carolyn: I don't really...I'll leave that to the people in charge (laughing). There is only one thing that I have heard people, quite a few people, say: that they used to have the Junior Fair stay until Friday. That way all the people that came from around for the Jug and all, could see all of their projects and all that. Now they are to leave on Wednesday night. I sort of think that...I've heard a lot of people say that they wish the exhibits and everything were still there.

Leavy: I know that's how I feel. In between races it would be nice to see sheep.

Carolyn: Yeah, right, but everything is gone.

Sheldon: A lot of people come up and say, 'where are the (animals or) what happened to the fair?' It just stops on Wednesday, when the sales are over.

Carolyn: It's become more commercial. I think that even if they move it to Thursday night it would be nice, or Friday morning. That's the only...

Leavy: If there were no more Jug, if it really did go to another site, what do you think the effect would have on you, and what do you think the effect would be to the Delaware community?

Sheldon: I think they'd lose a...Delaware City would lose financially, because people come to see, come spend time there. Not all people camp out, they have places to stay, places to eat...financially it would be a big loss to the city of Delaware. Well, not only the city of Delaware but Delaware County.

Carolyn: I just think that it would probably hurt our fair. I don't know, maybe not. It's there and it draws, of course. The Brown Jug is one race, one day. They have races every day and that brings in a lot of people, too. But I really do think that it would...our people wouldn't look at it the same way or think we got to go to the Jug or whatever. I think it would just be a letdown.

Leavy: Sheldon, you spent years being a photographer and I don't know whether or not that included being the photographer during the fair.

Sheldon: Yes. I shot stuff and sent stuff in (to the paper). I took vacation during the fair and they always sent another photographer up to shoot the Jug. Until I got on the Fair Board, I sat in the infield working with and shoot pictures with the other photographers. You don't get to see the race because you are working. You see the horses coming down and you don't know who's what. It's a job.

Carolyn: You usually spent time on the backstretch with Diane (Winters). If something came up you were there to shoot it.

Sheldon: After I got on the (fair)Board a couple of years I worked on the (U.S.Route) 23 Gate helping people coming in. We ran the shuttle and the golf carts. People would come in and pick up their tickets at the Will Call department. You got to meet a lot of the people there. It was terrific to meet them. We would tell them where to park and we would shuttle them on the fairgrounds. You got to talk to people and they would say, 'yeah, we rode with you last year and we want to ride with you again this year.' They really appreciated the Jug and they say they wouldn't miss it. I think that is what has kept it there, the fair going. They would say, 'you're still having the fair, aren't you?' We could convince them to keep the livestock there. People didn't like the crowd and they wanted to get out. They wanted away from the crowded conditions. You got to meet an awful lot of nice people.

Leavy: One of the things that folks have told (us) in these interviews is that unlike most sporting events, the average fan can get really close to the drivers, to the horses and to the trainers. I am wondering whether or not that made photographing the event easier, harder, different?

Sheldon: Every year you tried to find something different. You didn't want the same old winner's (photo) or winner's circle presentation. You always tried to come up with (something different). We were in a competition. All the photographers were in competition. Matter of fact, one of my first bosses was George Smallstreed. He was a well-known photographer. He went to work for the U.S.T.A. – United States Trotting Association. We all tried to beat George. George had a natural feeling for pictures and he was always coming up with something. I can remember one year, I don't know if Roger (Huston) called him out or not, George laid out on the backstretch, around the final turn. Laying on the track, underneath the hub rail, just inside the hub rail, shooting pictures. He was lying flat on the ground which was all right, but they didn't

like that and they sent somebody to get him out of there (laughing). Even from the infield, they are lined up on the outside and on the inside. You often wondered if a horse would come over, especially when they took away the (hub) rail. It was always exciting to see the big crowd. I got to ride in the starting gate. It wasn't during the Jug. That is an experience in itself to see those horses coming up and pushing on that gate. The drivers are sitting there talking back and forth like it's another day at the fair. 'What did you have for breakfast this morning?' (laughing). It was exciting as heck. I got to things that otherwise I would have never done.

Leavy: Are there any pictures that you are especially proud of, some angle that you got, that you were really pleased about?

Sheldon: I don't recall anything other than (Carolyn's) dad and Curly (Smart). Her dad got to present Curly with a trophy from the Elks (Club).

Carolyn: My dad was the Exalted Ruler at the Elks one year when Curly won. Of course, he got to present the trophy to Curly. That's always meant a lot to use since Cheryl is in our family now.

Sheldon: We are still meeting, just like that event at the (Delaware County) Historical Society, those two guys that swept the track? I remember talking to them. We'd take them Coke and they had sandwiches already. I was tickled pink just to be able to talk to them.

Leavy: Butch Greene is a great guy to talk to. I didn't know his brother. He passed away a while ago.

Sheldon: You know the rule, once they sweep the track you don't go across. Dumb ol' country boy me, I needed to be on the other side to see somebody and I started across there. I didn't get far (laughing). That's a rule and they very politely told me, 'don't even attempt to try that again.'

Carolyn: I remember when we first went to the fair they would have daredevil races and things right on the track. They had some guy that climbed to the top of a pole and dove into some water and different things like that, right out on the track.

Sheldon: Chitwood Daredevils? Was that one of them?

Carolyn: Joey Chitwood.

Leavy: Are there any other topics, any other subjects that you would want to bring up that you think is important for us to include in the oral history? I will give you one example of a question. There are people who make a point of not going to the Jug. They'll avoid it. They might go to the rest of the fair, but on Jug Day they will not go. I am wondering if you have thoughts on what is behind that.

Carolyn: A long time ago when it first started, when it got so prominent, I think the traffic was such a big deal. It really was, because people would cancel things going on, meetings and things on Jug Day because of traffic. It was kind of congested. Because people started coming real early in the morning, I supposed so they could get a place to see the race, to park and all this. That was a big deal, the traffic, for a long time.

Sheldon: They have really improved handling the traffic. I mean they move traffic in and out of there. It used to be that if you didn't get in by 9 o'clock in the morning, you'd have trouble getting to the fairgrounds.

Carolyn: There would be lines of traffic.

Sheldon: But now, I can go in at 1 o'clock and get there in time for the Jug. You have trouble finding a place to park, maybe. We had reserved (parking) spots. You learn to judge the traffic and know when you can go out. That's why we always waited for the traffic to die down before we leave the fairgrounds, if I had to go home to do chores or whatever.

Carolyn: You hear people say, 'I'm not anywhere near that place on Jug Day.' Just because of traffic and so many people too, it was crowded. I don't know of any other reasons.

Sheldon: Usually when the Jug ran, that was the end of the fair. Everything was gone. The (fair) Board decided to have some events to keep people there longer. A lot of people say, 'hey, the fair's over.'

Carolyn: Yeah, that's because they took a lot of the animals away. That's the only beef I have.

Leavy: Thank you. Thank you very much for coming in. I really appreciate it.

Carolyn: Thank you.