

Nancy Loncaric
Civics 9
Miss Lozosky

"Interview with Mr. Albert Miller
at Meadowcroft Village"

This is Nancy Loncaric interviewing Mr. Miller at Meadowcroft Village.

O.K. When was Meadowcroft founded?

Meadowcroft uh, as a foundation was founded in 1969.

And um, what are some of the things restored?

We have uh, two country stores, we have a covered bridge, a school house, several log homes, a cobbler shop, a chair shop, three barns, one's a carriage barn, we have a trapper's cabin, we have a nature center, a lamp house and other things.

Um, what kind of crafts are demonstrated at Meadowcroft?

Uh, we have demonstrated candle making, uh, cornhusk dolls would be our principle craft and uh, I can't think off hand what other type of dolls, some blacksmithing, and on special days other type of crafts.

Um, how big of an area does it cover?

The village itself would take in probably less than 20 acres. But it's on 200 acres of land that my brother and I gave the Meadowcroft Foundation. Now, to explain to you, we uh, developed this years ago, my brother, Delvin Miller and myself and we decided it was so good that we wanted to see it perpetuated for future generations. So the only way was to do that and make it a non-profit set up, to keep it out of any estate if anything happened to either he or I was to set up a non-profit foundation. So we gave 200 acres of land and all the buildings to the Meadowcroft Foundation. Now the Meadowcroft Foundation operates Meadowcroft Village. This means if anything happens to us, this goes on, it's controlled, people say, "You own Meadowcroft don't you?" I say, "I used to, but I don't now." A board of directors controls it, actually nobody owns it. It's controlled by a board of directors. And the law says if for any reason it ever ceased to exist, it would have to be given up to another non-profit educational institution. But it is controlled by a board of directors. So any of the board of directors own it, would own it just as much as I do now. However, I operate it, being a member of the board as executive vice-president, and a executive means, vice-president means that I actually operate it.

Um, how much does it cost to operate?

Uh, we probably have figures somewhere, but we're expanding all the time and I would say probably \$100,000 a year.

Um, where do you get the skilled people, you know, that demonstrate the crafts and stuff like that?

Well, we generally have to train them. They're not skilled, they really aren't skilled when they come to work for us. Once in a while we get somebody who comes in with a skill.

But do you interview them and that?

Yes.

Um, were there any kind of fossils found here, a you know, artifacts? Artifacts, yes; fossils uh, well I can probably say that there were fossils found in the area especially in the Pa. prairie, carnivorous age of about 250,000,000 years, but they're found along the railroad and uh found and some places where the coal is stripped. And uh, this is in the time when, when coal was formed. And we do find these

fossils in some of the shales. But in Meadowcroft there are, have been artifacts found, but of course we have the Meadowcroft dig, and um, the name of it is The Meadowcroft Rock Shelter. The designated number is 36WH297. Thirty-six is Pa. alphabetically. Districts start in Alabama and go down to Pa. be the 36th. state, uh, alphabetically among the 48 states. WH means Washington County and this is site No.297, recorded in the Carnegie Museum records, so it's a national system of marking archaeological sites. So our site is right turning out to be one of the most important, important archaeological sites of the United States.

What kind of artifacts were found?

Well, mostly the remains from Indian firepits, going back all the way to about 13 over 13,000 years before Christ, from at least 100 firepits uncovered at the present time. And a the term artifact, I think would be a tool or something used. I don't know how many been found, quite a, quite bunch of them, some artifacts, some bones, some pottery, fragments of pottery, and yet there is over 100,000 bones found or pieces of bones, maybe 150,000, uh baskets, oldest baskets in the Eastern United States may be the only ones they've found in the nation. And the oldest make tools, I think that were found in the United States were found at Meadowcroft. In the Rock Shelter dig. It's so important the Smithsonian Institute has carbon-dated about 30 samples and they 're going to do that much this summer.

Really !!

Also today a filming crew started taking movies before the leaves come out showing the setting, the relation to the creek, the rocks, the grass etc. to make uh, I'm not sure what type of movie, whether it's a documentary movie, a scientific movie or for promotion I'm not sure, probably a story of, of the archaeological dig.

Um, why was Meadowcroft restored?

To preserve the old buildings that were once taught in the rural sections and on the farms. You go to the jointure schools, and it's so entirely different from the old country schools where one teacher taught eight grades. She taught the little beginners, she also taught their older brothers and sisters up through the 8th. grade. One teacher in one room. And people, if it wasn't for places like Meadowcroft that are here now, people just wouldn't understand what the schools were like, what books they used, uh, the teacher's desk, the potbelly stove, of course the blacksmith shop, the blacksmith is practically gone, the old blacksmith has been gone, pretty much, because for the last maybe 30 years, 40 years anybody wanted to put two pieces of iron together, would weld them, but the old blacksmith would do it by heating and forging to put iron together, but uh the old blacksmith had to do it in the old way has been gone I think a good many years. A few people do practice blacksmithing pretty much as a hobby. I guess in the nation there are very, there are few, but very few old men that can still do blacksmithing and do it on occasion. And of course the covered bridges are almost gone until it was realized it was very important to save them for tourists uh to bring tourists in to admire them. People were passing admiring them. So uh, we were interested in saving them now with many people are interested in saving our covered bridges and old buildings.

Where did you get all the buildings at Meadowcroft?

What?

The buildings and sites and stuff like that?

Two of them came from the farm; The Miller School House, The Miller Lamp House. The rest of them I got elsewhere. Uh some of them we got quite a little bit, uh distance. The covered bridge came from down in Greene County and it was one of two bridges on the little run, Tom's Run. It was near the village of Pine Bank and it was the oldest bridge on the State Highway System. Uh around 1960, when I got the bridge, and of course if I hadn't saved them it would have been impossible to get, to have gotten a 100 year old bridge, but now it's 105 years old. Henry Ford had the foresight back maybe, 25 years ago to have gotten a bridge in Greene County. It was built in 1836, the Heckley Bridge. I say Greene County, it was on, between Washington and Greene County. And they moved it to Greenfield Village in Michigan where millions of people have seen it. Because Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum attracts, perhaps a million people a year. So that's one reason we think some of these old things saved, our coming generations would never know what they were like if it weren't for people like ourselves who are interested in preserving them and moving them in to where school children could see them. And all ages of people, infact.

Um, when was Meadowcroft, you know, first begun to be restored?

Well, we started in, I'd say about uh, 16, 17 years ago, when we first got the idea. Then we did it as we had time, along with the farm work. And a for a while we didn't know what we were going to do, exactly whether we were going to build a camp or what, some recreational set up. And I decided maybe the village would be the best way to utilize the land. Of course if we'd have built a camp, it'd just been another camp, but we are, we are becoming nationally known. Because of it's publicity.

Is it open all year round or just part time?

No, it's open from May 1st. through the last of November. I'd say roughly about Thanksgiving time and when the weather's really getting bad then we close it. But we've been open generally through Thanksgiving. We say, advertise December 1st. and we're open everyday, everyday of the week. First year, first 2 years I believe we were open, closed on Tuesdays. Then we learned that people heard of Meadowcroft and had traveled a long distance, maybe come a hundred miles or couple hundred miles to see it and come on a Tuesday and were highly disappointed because we were closed, so uh it's hard for people to remember just what day you're not open and so I figured the best thing just to be open everyday, and then the people would'nt be disappointed.

Is it open on Sundays too?

Yes, Sunday afternoon, but the long afternoon, one through six, five hours Sunday afternoon. This lets everybody that wants to go to church go, I go myself but . . .

Is there a lot of people that visit this, you know, from far away places?

Well, among the last people we had last fall, were two busloads of Russians. These Russians incedently, came in two buses, they had heard of Meadowcroft, they were being hosted by an engineering firm in Pittsburgh. They went to the engineering firm and they told the lady will you get us reser, will you reserve two buses to go to Meadowcroft, our people have heard about it and they 'ould like to see it. And the lady didn't know a thing about Meadowcroft, she hadn't heard of us so she sent them down on a Sunday morning and some of them were playing

soccer until we found out who they were and we let them in. But it was interesting, two busloads of Russians. The only American on the bus, was the bus driver. He said I don't know who they are and I don't he says I didn't know where we were going. And this wouldn't happen in Russia because I'll guarantee you if you were over there and group of Americans would say we'd like to go somewhere they wouldn't send them unless they knew all about where they were going. Furthermore, there'd be some Russians on that bus. But this is America. And before we opened this spring, the Russians came in November and it was snowing the day they came. Part of them took the tour, the other part played soccer out here. They had soccer outfits but before we opened this spring we had a some people from a from Taiwan isn't it uh China and uh, they were here at Meadowcroft before we opened up. These people were sponsored by International Rotary and there I think were Italians. And so we do get them from all over the world. We've got a American Field Service coming. A group of young people from Europe, and I know we had one group once in which I think they represent about twenty-six nations. And we've had people from most of the countries. Lot of Europeans, lots of them, people from Europe.

How is Meadowcroft financed?

Meadowcroft is financed through the ticket sales, through profits made in the gift shop, and in the canteen, however this, what we take in, in these sources probably wouldn't keep Meadowcroft open during the summer and our people would have to be laid off all winter and then we probably if we had to depend on that alone, we probably couldn't pay all our liability insurance and everything like that. But we do have a few friends who have contributed money to us. Because we are a non-profit foundation, the government says; for setup for educational purposes. We are like a museum. And very few museums can ever break even unless they have help. And we're in about the same boat. Because we are continually doing more than just operating, we're acquiring and adding buildings making it better every year. And uh, this is true of most of them. You've heard of Williamsburg. It was Rockefeller's money that built Greenfield Village by Henry Ford. And uh, so it takes a lot of money to operate a place like this and uh, but uh, we hope that the public will support us, we have never gotten any tax money, this does not cost the taxpayer anything, not like national parks, or public parks or state parks; where your tax dollar helps maintain it and this is no, does not affect the taxpayer.

What does dispersed rural community mean?

Dispersed means that there are villages that were built along the common green where the militia practice, this was true of old New England back in the days of the Revolution and before and uh, I know a lot of other villages were cross road villages. Where two roads cross and you have a place to put a store, maybe a blacksmith shop, a school house, and then later on people start building around it, cross road villages. But Meadowcroft is uh, almost a village without a plan in uh, we propound a building and matched plots and figured out a building and we put it in there. Homes are built that way. Many homes today are not planned along an avenue or a street. People build their home, later roads and streets come to them. Sometimes they're not parallel either, in a sense they are dispersed. And this is true of many, many more areas, true of lots of our towns. So dispersed means that it uh, doesn't mean broken up of that but it's somewhat just scattered. And uh, it makes the village unique and we're probably, there's hardly any buildings like this

in the United States.

What other loans perpetuate Meadowcroft?

Well, as I said before, the fact that my brother and I have set up this foundation to keep it out of any estate, if we die, this goes on. And of course we're trying to uh, through one means or another setting and uh, we hope that people in time will endow us, trust funds to us and that to help perpetuate it. But we're doing what we can and I'm pretty sure that Meadowcroft is going to continue operating long after I'm gone, because it's going to be more and more valuable as the years go on. We are acquiring artifacts, buildings and in a few years you'll never be able to get and to buy the artifacts you would pay tremendous sums of money, but people do give us collections. People have donated things to us.

If artifacts or money are given to Meadowcroft what are the benefits? If a man would give us a thousand dollars cash, he can write, when he fills out his income tax report; gave Meadowcroft, The Meadowcroft Foundation, thousand dollars, deducted. If he gave us some artifacts worth a thousand dollars, he or we can have them appraised by a certified appraiser and we give him the information, the value or he can do it himself and he can take it off. Because the government has approved us as a tax deductible foundation. A lot of non profit groups like historical groups that have never gotten that far, and uh, you might give them something but uh, it might be a little bit of a problem to tax deduct it because some of them haven't gone far enough just to clear it through the government, and like uh, a number and uh, clearance.

Is Meadowcroft a museum?

Yes, definitely. It's an outdoor museum. It is uh, a open area, it is also called open area museum. It's a museum complex, many, many buildings and they're all museums.

What is the period of Meadowcroft?

We say from uh, probably the beginning of our country, that is Civil, I mean Revolutionary War time on. Maybe 1776 I don't, we don't have anything specifically in buildings that go that far back. We have some buildings that would go back to 1780, 1790. We, I'd say I'd rather say we go back to the latter part of the 18th century, and through the 19th, and uh, probably some of the early 20th century.

Can one buy anything at Meadowcroft?

Yes, we have a gift shop. We try to sell craft items or Americana items and a we sometimes sell things that are made in the village or things that other people have made. And the store is a very popular place with the school children.

Do schools come to the village?

Yes, we have over 8,000 reservations for this month and the first week of June. Which is really 300 a day.

Oh my ! Is there wildlife in Meadowcroft?

Yes, right outside of my office we saw this spring a pilated woodpecker working in a white pine tree. This is a bird that wasn't here when I was a boy. And going back to wilderness this bird rarely seen, I mean an awfull lot of people have never seen, a lot of people today been out in the woods haven't seen the pilated woodpecker. We have seen deer here. I've seen a deer from inside of my

office.

Ya, when me and Marsha were coming up here we saw this deer running through the woods.

And we have grouse. When I come in to the village I know where there's a log where a grouse drums in the spring and fall. And a one fellow yesterday on tour said Oh I saw two ground hogs and two rabbits on my tour through Meadowcroft. There's lots of birds and things, we are emphasizing the wildlife. We have a nature center in which we're gonna have wildlife exhibits. We've already started some.

A that's O.K., O.K. how do you acquire the artifacts?

We buy some although, we don't have the funds to buy them, except sometimes there's something that we just want badly and we may, may buy it. But a lots of things are donated. Occasionally I go to a sale and then buy something that I think Meadowcroft should have. The thing I like to buy more than anything else is pistols. That is records, too.

How does one get around through the village?

Walk. It's about a mile to see everything. But we, when we were developing I think a President Kennedy was President, somebody wrote a piece about Meadowcroft's cooperation with the President's physical fitness program. Walking's good for people. And it's the way to get around the place.

Are there tour guides or something?

Yes, we have tour guides for all the school children, we have tour guides on week days and big Sundays. We have put people in different buildings, then people get a map and go on their own, but this time of year, we take them on tours. Incidentally, yesterday we had an old automobile club from western Pennsylvania and I think about twenty-five old cars came in. And I jokingly told some lady who drove in a nice, new car and I said, "all these people have these cars here, they're pretty poor they can't afford to," she laughed and she said, "well, I know it costs a lot of money to restore these old cars" and she knew that I was kidding.

Do you ever plan any railway equipment?

Yes, we had a 1926 private railroad car and a caboose at the Meadows Race Track. The private car was given to us through Gabriel Harriman and his brother, Rowland. Of course Gabriel Harriman is well known. Ambassador Harriman. But their father was president of Union Pacific Railroad and a this was used in Union Pacific. It was a very luxurious car, built in 1926 when a large quality was built into a car. These were what the president of a railroad or maybe a wealthy man might own to travel, had his own private railroad car. Hook it on any place he'd wanted to go. And we have it over there and a to show it as a piece of railroad Americana. The caboose has been given to Meadowcroft.

Does Meadowcroft Village benefit the community?

We were, before we opened I asked Dr. Granmetti, the director of Cargegie Museum could have been here, I said, "Do you think Meadowcroft has a potential?" He said, "What Meadowcroft is doing is going to pick up your whole area." He said, "It's gonna be the biggest thing around Avella," and we believe it has great potential. People are slow to realize it but already the road coming down here, I'm afraid wouldn't have been maybe touched if it hadn't been for

Meadowcroft. And we did get it widened, we had the bridge uh fixed, and a there was a bad slide in the road and it was fixed immediately and yet there's slides in the roads that I know aren't getting fixed because the highway system just doesn't have the money. But the highway system does realize that it's important for school buses and people coming in this important place.

What are the three big events of the year?

We have let's see, we have four I think, we have nature day on May 24th, that is this month. We're having Kenneth Cole, who is a boy scout executive in Pittsburgh. Kenneth Cole is one of the world's leading authorities on survival, he's probably knows as much on arctic survival as any man in the world, they tell me, he was parachuted behind the lines in Korea to show flyers how to get out, taught them how to survive if they're shot down and a he's going to be with us to show his slides and probably go around the nature trail and talk about using nature or surviving in nature. Probably give us some hints on how these people for 15,000 years camped under the Meadowcroft Rock Shelter. How they survived from tundra conditions, very, very, cold.

What do you predict for Meadowcroft Village?

I see I didn't answer the rest of your question.

Oh, I'm sorry.

That's alright, I paused. American Heritage Day is on September 6th. Last year we had the Royal Americans, Fife and Drum group from a Pitt Museum. Then we have the cornhusk festival in October, which we have an old cornhusking bee. We emphasize the corn craft. Then I forgot on August 2nd we have a concert on the green and last year on a concert on the green, last year we had a whole group of old time fiddlers, an organized group and they did a very fine job and they did some square dancing, we're going to elaborate on that this year and this is a lot of fun. And then we also, September 20th and 21st, our bridge is one of the bridges in the covered bridge festival weekend, and a which people go around that our covered bridge bus and we're going to be one of the bridges in that tour.

O.K., Um, what do you predict for Meadowcroft Village?

It's hard to say. We're a little bit off beat and track, economic situation in the future will determine, to some extent, but if we don't get into some very bad recession Meadowcroft should continue to grow, and the time will come when we'll attract maybe, 100,000 people a year or even more. But to depend just the economic situation, but as the years go on Meadowcroft will gain greater reputation, the gap between the present and the past will be that much greater and a you'll go along the country side and you'll no longer see some of the old spring houses and the barns will either be torn down or completely fixed up. And so if you want to see old log houses as they are pretty much you'll have to come to Meadowcroft. And so as we interpret we'll eventually be part of a collection that'll only be seen in museums. So I predict twenty-five years from now Meadowcroft will be far more popular than it is now because we're going in to the future and this has a very, very definite place and I hope that, see our family has been on the Hutton farm 180 years and I hope that 280 years, the farm won't be forgotten. We'll have long been gone, some of our descendants will also be gone, but the name maybe still very, very well known.

O.K. Thanks a lot.

You're welcome.

This interview took place on May 5, 1975. This half hour has been spent talking with Mr. Albert Miller at the office of Meadowcroft Village. It has been an interesting conversation. I'd like to thank Mr. Miller for giving of his time to allow us to better understand earlier periods of our country's development.

Prologue

The noise heard after the introduction was the tape recorder being turned on.

The squeak heard various other times in the tape is an easy chair being leaned on.

At the beginning of the tape a muffled noise was made by the shuffling of the microphone. Also Mr. Miller's pen dropped a couple of times.

A muffled noise was the microphone being moved into a better position.

The noise halfway through the tape was the tape recorder being turned off and on while Mr. Miller asked me how much tape I had left.

Mr. Miller knocked the microphone.

When Mr. Miller was naming the four big events of the year, there is a tinkering noise which is the calendar that was knocked over when Mr. Miller was checking the dates.

Microphone.

Squeak of the chair again.

Uh and Um was repeated throughout the conversation.