



Billy Hammond

Interviewed by Tom Cowan

1. Hammond and his wife Mary offer some biographical information (01:28)

Cowan: Where were you born?

B. Hammond: Edgefield County.

Cowan: And, uh, when were you born?

B. Hammond: Oh, at [Crider's [?]] Community, they call it, over at- right about, uh, it's about five miles from here.

Cowan: And when were you born?

B. Hammond: 1911, uh, April the third.

Cowan: Alright. So let's see, now that makes you....

B. Hammond: 76, I'll be 77 on my birthday.

Cowan: And, uh-

B. Hammond: No, next year I'll be 77, 76 my birthday I reckon wasn't it?

M. Hammond: Uh-uh.

Cowan: So, so, Mary, you- your father was a basketmaker as well, right?

M. Hammond: Yes.

Cowan: Alright, ok. And his name was?

M. Hammond: [Eulie [?]] [unintelligible [?]], Benjamin Dunn.

Cowan: And where was, where were you born? Were you born here?

M. Hammond: I was born in Edgefield County, the little town of [Modock [?]].

Cowan: In [Modock [?]]. And-

M. Hammond: Oh, our address was [Modock [?]], it wasn't in [Modock [?]] <laughs>.

Cowan: You're out in the country?

M. Hammond: In the country.

Cowan: Billy, was your father a basketmaker?

B. Hammond: [Unintelligible (?)], really not a basket- he just made what baskets he used for himself, you see, only used [unintelligible (?)] all the baskets he made. He didn't make for no public.

Cowan: I see.

B. Hammond: He just made his fish baskets. [I have]- didn't have no wire back then to make them, but he just made them out of white oak splits. I had a uncle was a doctor, and he lived right close and he got [most oak (?)] over at his place, he had good oak on his place, and he got most oak off his place. Cause we had- he had a place, wasn't much oak on- his place like it was this place.

2. Hammond discusses the work of his father, Elisha (01:52)

Cowan: So, when you say "basketmaker," you're actually referring to the person that just makes, uh, like market baskets or something, but your dad, would you call him a fish basket maker or....

B. Hammond: I reckon he made, uh, he could make a cotton basket too, but he didn't.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: He didn't really have time to fool with them, you know <laughs>. Folks had to make a living back then, and he, uh, made fish baskets [unintelligible (?)]. He sold fish.

Cowan: Oh.

B. Hammond: He bought- I mean he caught fish and sold them, but he caught them in the basket. He didn't have no way of going, you know, then, but a buggy and mule and he put them in a wet sack and brought them home, put them in a [Iye box (?)] we call it, [comes a spring down (?)], it's a 4x4, four foot deep, four foot each way. And they'd come back too, [half cut (?)], then they'd jump out.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: [They'd jump out the ground (?)], you'd go back, find them dead if you had covered up. Yeah.

Cowan: <Laughs>.

B. Hammond: So, [unintelligible (?)] carp we caught, they was [jumpier (?)] than a catfish was.

Cowan: So you caught both catfish and carp?

B. Hammond: Yeah, yeah.

Cowan: In the fish basket?

B. Hammond: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah.

Cowan: The, uh- so what was your father's name?

B. Hammond: Elisha.

Cowan: [Unintelligible [?]].

B. Hammond: E-l-i-s-h-a, Elisha Hammond.

Cowan: And when was he born, could you-

B. Hammond: I couldn't tell you his birthday.

M. Hammond: I got it in the Bible.

B. Hammond: [We ain't got his birthdate [?]].

M. Hammond: Um-hum.

Other voice: I don't know how much....

Cowan: So, so, uh, did you ever make a fish basket with him?

B. Hammond: Yeah, oh yeah.

Cowan: Did he actually show you to split oak or-

B. Hammond: Yeah, yeah, he showed me how. Yeah. But, you don't watch them, [unintelligible [?]] didn't have to show you, you learn yourself by watching if you paid attention close. That's where I learnt what little carving work I know by [unintelligible [?]] things, is watching people, not asking questions. You know, you learn more by looking and being quiet than you do asking questions.

Cowan: Right, that's right.

B. Hammond: So that's what I done, I looked but didn't ask questions <laughs>, so I learnt [unintelligible [?]] ask questions.

3. Hammond recalls how he began making smaller baskets after retiring (02:09)

Cowan: About- did you ever make a basket, or a fish basket, with- with your dad or did you make fish baskets when you were young?

B. Hammond: Yeah, yeah, I made them when I was young. I made them when I was in the teens, I reckon.

Cowan: Really?

B. Hammond: Yeah.

Cowan: But then, uh, the basket that we have in the exhibit was, um, we figured it was made around 1940. Is that- now is that, uh, the first one of the little baskets that you made?

B. Hammond: You mean the fish basket?

Cowan: No, it's, uh, the, uh....

B. Hammond: Oh, no, no, no. I've been- I've been making them for years.

M. Hammond: The little egg basket.

Cowan: Oh, I see.

B. Hammond: [Unintelligible [?]]. No, the first basket I made, uh, after I retired, I tried to think of what I was going to do to make a living.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: You know, make a little extra money, not living.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: But- and I made these things first, I made [unintelligible [?]], but they don't- they don't sell good.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: You know, they ain't good for nothing, just for [unintelligible [?]], you might say.

Cowan: Yeah.

B. Hammond: And so I made all my daughters-in-law- I got four daughters-in-law- I made them all a basket like the small one.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: You know, [unintelligible [?]]. But, uh, I made them all like that and everybody got to like them so much, I just started making them. That's how I got started. Everybody wanted to know where they got the baskets from, where they got the basket from, so I just got to making them and selling them. I set my price on them, I think I've gone up on the twelve dollar one twice, I've gone up on the little ones too.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: But, [unintelligible [?]], I never have gone up on them. That's about- I figure that's about as much [unintelligible [?]].

Cowan: Uh-huh. So you have to sort of, uh, be careful with the price.

B. Hammond: Sort of feel your- sort of feel your way. [I think I'm going back to Charlotte], and I'm going up again on the small baskets, cause, uh, they sell better there than they will around these small places like where we live.

Cowan: Wow.

B. Hammond: Yeah. Cause if I- if I'd got twenty dollars for the small one, I expect I coulda sold just as good down there as I could for ten dollars.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: But I ain't going up that much but I'm going up some on them [I'll go back down there [?]].

Cowan: Right.

B. Hammond: We supposed to go back down there in May.

Cowan: Alright.

B. Hammond: They made a, uh, of course it's not going to be free this time.

Cowan: Uh-huh.

B. Hammond: We will have to pay for our stand and lodging and everything this time ourselves.

Cowan: Uh-huh. So it seems like you've sold enough baskets that it's worthwhile going?

M. Hammond: Um-hum.

B. Hammond: Oh yeah, uh-huh.

