



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Transcript of interview with Jesse Howard

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# **Transcript**

## **Preface**

### **Tape-recorded Interview with Jesse Howard**

**at his Home and Studio in Fulton, Missouri**

**March 14, 1975**

**Willem Volkersz, Interviewer**

#### **Editor's Note:**

This transcript is from a series of recordings made by Willem Volkersz over a number of years. They are not formal interviews, but rather records of conversations, often taped during photo-taking tours of the artist's studios or home collections.

The naive/visionary artists in these interviews have unique verbal mannerisms, many of which are difficult or impossible to transcribe accurately into written form. Thus, for grasping certain nuances of speech, researchers will find it advantageous to listen to the original tapes.

Our intent in transcribing these interviews was nonetheless to translate as accurately as possible the spoken word into a comprehensible written form, making changes to clarify but not to interpret. Thus the speaker's grammar is unedited. For example, "them" for "those," "theirselves," and "gotta" were all transcribed as heard. On the other hand, certain changes were made for clarity: " 'cause," was transcribed as "because," " 'fore" as "before," " 'yo" as "your," etc.

Other editorial notations are as follows: Bracketed words are of two types. Those with "[—Ed.]" or "[—WV]" are inserted by the transcriber, editor, or Volkersz. Other bracketed words indicate uncertainty: Two or more words or phrases indicate possible alternatives; "[unintelligible]" and "\_\_\_\_" indicate words that are garbled or incomprehensible on the tape, the former being a much longer phrase than the latter; "[noise]" is self-explanatory.

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 365 version 1908. Some formatting has been lost in web presentation.

#### **Interview**

**JH: Jesse Howard**

**WV: Willem Volkersz**

#### **[Tape 1, side A; Volkersz' No. H4-1] [45-minute tape sides]**

[Volkersz was accompanied by a group of students. Rather than try to differentiate each voice, all females are designated as FV (female voice), and all males as MV (male voice).—Ed.]

JH: I wanna show you what I aim to put on that canvas. [WV had just mailed JH several yards of canvas—WV.]

WV: That's the front of the other shed there.

JH: For you.

WV: And that's right in here. You're sitting on this table right here with that McGovern sign, huh?

JH: (laughs) Yes sir, that's mighty good. Now I just fixin' to make a card here. I want you to sign it, and all

your people, so's I can put it up here where I can see your names.

WV: Oh, that'd be nice. That'd be fine.

JH: How many are there of you?

WV: There's about eight or ten of us.

JH: Eight or ten?

WV: Uh huh. Let's see, let me. . .

JH: Well. . .

WV: Let me count 'em. Let me tell them to come over in here.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: Nope.

WV: You've been doing some work?

JH: Oh, I work all the time.

WV: That's really nice.

JH: (chuckles) And I wouldn't be in this Fultonite gang's shoes for all the money there is in Fulton.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: I wouldn't.

WV: Are you gonna make as many lines there as there is people?

JH: Huh?

WV: Are you gonna make as many lines as there are people?

JH: Yeah, aiming to.

WV: Okay. We'll count 'em. Let's see. There's one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. . . There's nine of us, Jesse.

JH: Nine of you?

WV: Nine of us all together. I guess they won't all fit in here, will they?

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .another spot like this in the world. (chuckles)

WV: We know that. That's why we came. Let's close the doors.

JH: I was thinkin' to make a. . . How many of are there of you?

WV: Well, let's see, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine of us, Jesse.

JH: Well, make nine lines there, and I want each one of you to sign your name and address, and we'll put it up there on this card.

WV: Oh, that'd be real nice.

JH: One of you people make these lines for me, will you?

WV: Okay. Somebody make those. . . Jim, how would like to become a linemaker there?

JH: And let's see. . .

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .the Bible, how many times?

Group: (chuckles) I never counted all of them. . .

WV: A lot of times.

JH: Yes, a lot of times. You follow the word dog through the Bible, why it'll take you through to heaven. (group chuckles) That's right. And of course the little old squirrel [deal], and the fish they're just. . . Looking up some of this scripture, it takes a lot of, it takes a lot of time, you know, to try to half way get this right, through the scripture. It takes a lot of reading.

WV: Have you been reading the Bible for a long time?

JH: Not too long.

WV: Not too long. How long would you say?

JH: Oh, some twenty years.

WV: That's a pretty long time.

JH: Been a long while, anyway.

WV: How many times. . .

JH: I been reading the Bible since they throwed me in this jail down here, an innocent man.

WV: Why were you thrown in jail, Jesse?

JH: Huh?

WV: Why did they throw you in jail?

JH: No cause, whatsoever.

WV: Oh.

JH: They lied and said I was cutting up and raising hell.

WV: This is here in Fulton?

JH: That's right here in Fulton.

WV: How long did they keep you there?

JH: Well, they throwed you in there one night about eight o'clock, and it came to me the next day about two o'clock. . . Well, they come to me the next morning about ten o'clock with two old runny eggs on a platter with no spoon, knife, or fork to eat 'em with. Had to lap 'em up like a little dog.

WV: Huh.

JH: Come to me and just opened the door just big enough to shove a plate in there.

WV: Did you have a lawyer?

JH: I went and got a lawyer, yes, and he's taken \$160 of money, and quit. That's right here in this town.

WV: Hmm.

JH: Then I was to Paris, Missouri. Here's this Bible right here, where I went to Paris. . . You folks sign this, will you? Each one of you. (chuckles)

WV: Sure. Go ahead.

JH: Your name, address, street. . . Now make them bigger letters. (chuckles)

WV: You won't be able to read it.

JH: I've even been to Washington, D. C.

WV: Oh, there it says, yeah.

JH: Let's see.

WV: It says right there.

JH: Paris, Missouri, isn't it?

WV: Yes, that's right. October 11, 1933.

JH: Well, I went up there, and I was kidnapped in Paris, Missouri, right over here about 35, 40 miles from here, 50 miles, something like that. I went over there to a big church gathering. I seen an old police copper—of course, I was a stranger—seen an old police copper settin' out there in the shade, you know, and he. . . I asked him where the church was, and he said, instead of showin' me the church he'd take me down there and throw me in the cooler. On this date, right here.

WV: Yeah, October 11. Huh. So they threw you in the cooler again, huh?

JH: And then one night, the whole night. Never did get to see the church people at all.

WV: Huh. Was that the sheriff who did that?

JH: Well, he was a police copper.

WV: Just a regular police cop. Did they have any cause for that at all?

JH: Huh?

WV: Did they have any cause to put you in the cooler?

JH: Well, of course he didn't have no cause; I had this Bible with me.

WV: I didn't think so. Hmm.

JH: And the name of the church, and everything, where they were havin' a great, big gathering here. And over here a little bit further is where I had this Bible in Washington, D. C.

WV: Now what. . .

JH: Can you read it?

WV: Yeah. What were you doing in Washington, Jesse?

JH: Well, I went up there to see if I couldn't get something did about this crooked Watergate Fulton gang. And I was lucky to get out of Washington, D. C., alive.

Group: Oh. (chuckles)

JH: It's a fact. I went up there to see Dwight D. Eisenhower, and supposed to see, uh, a representative here. . .

WV: Symington?

JH: Symington.

WV: That's right, Senator Symington.

JH: Yes sir.

WV: Did you get to see him?

JH: Didn't see nobody. They take me through that place in a ole wheel- like chair thing.

WV: Why in a wheelchair?

JH: I don't know what. I don't know where. I was. . . I'm telling the truth. I was lucky to get out of Washington, D. C., alive.

WV: Huh.

JH: And I've never got nowhere with this Watergate gang here in Fulton.

WV: Just as bad as Watergate, right here in Fulton?

JH: Right here in Fulton.

WV: Hmm.

JH: That's right. I've known these people, Fulton here, for over eighty years. Better'n eighty-eight, better'n eighty years. Lived right here around Fulton, in ten miles of Fulton, practically all my life. I've been out of the state. I lived out of the state two years, was all over the west, northwest, in 1903, '4, and '5. '2, '3 and '4. [correcting himself—Ed.] Nineteen hundred and two, three, four, and five.

WV: Why did you leave Fulton?

JH: Well, I been working here for people for, seein' thirty cents a day, back in fields, and something told me, "just get up and go." My father was getting old at that time. I'd never been back here in this country a'tall, if it hadn't been for my father. Had a wonderful father and mother. Let's see. Pick up this board right down here.

WV: One of those?

Group: Which one?

JH: Next one. The next one. That one, I think.

WV: Let's see. Ah, the Howard family, there it is. Let's see, "Fulton, Missouri, May 9, 1974, free thought, free speech. And Jesse Howard is my name. Yes, a name that I'm not ashamed of, Yes a name that father Lawson Thomas Howard and Martha Elizabeth Hunt Howard gave to me over 88, almost 89 years ago. If all the people in the whole world were like the Howard family of twelve, why you could lie down assured of quietness and loving peace. Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." You're really proud of your parents aren't you?

JH: How was that?

WV: You're real proud of your parents.

JH: Proud of 'em?

WV: Yeah.

JH: Why, I'd say I am. (laughs) I had a true father and mother.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: Never knew one of them to ever go to the bad in any way, shape, form, or fashion, [as them is]. I'm not getting along very much with your names.

MV: Right, why don't you guys come up front here and sign that. Whose army jacket is that? Whose jacket is this?

JH: How's that?

MV: Is this yours?

JH: No. No, that jacket went through Pearl Harbor. My neighbor gave me that jacket. At Pearl Harbor, terriblest, murderous thing that ever happened to the United States. And the Bay of Pigs, why is it the people won't back these people? The Bay of Pigs wasn't backed by our government.

WV: Um hmm.

JH: If we'd a-let Richard Nixon alone, we'd a-been out a whole lot bloody, corrupted place: North Korea. We'd a-been out of it.

WV: Yeah.

JH: These people wouldn't back him.

WV: Do you think that our government should not be involved in other countries?

JH: Well, we've got to defend ourselves.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: I'll just answer it that way.

WV: Um hmm. Do you think we have to defend ourselves from the Vietnamese and from the Russians?

JH: Why sure. I had a sign out here on my fence, where a feller the name of Sellers wrote—he's a big man and lawyer from D.C.—I put that up there several years ago, where it said, "We have 25,000"—I believe at that time; you might have 100,000 at this time; I don't know. We had 25,000 hard-core Communists. What does that mean? That means not just ordinary Communists, but big ones, the way I take it.

WV: Right, right.

JH: "25,000 hard-core Communists," I put it down as it reads in the paper. ". . .planning to overthrow our government, right here." Well, they pried that off of my fence out there several weeks ago.

WV: Oh, really?

JH: It stayed up there till just a short time back.

WV: Huh.

JH: I'm actually not getting any support from these people right here in old Watergate Fulton.

WV: They don't understand your message at all.

JH: (laughs)

WV: Who is it town that gives you the most trouble? Is it the kids that give you trouble?

JH: Huh?

WV: Is it the kids that give you trouble in town?

JH: Not all together, no. Oh, no. No, I've been puttin' that stuff up, I've been here on this old hill thirty long years. And they come and saw me the day I moved here.

WV: Hmm.

JH: It's a fact.

FV: Jesse, how long. . .

JH: I've given 'em \$10,000 worth of dirt, to build their roads with. Then they had the guts to take my old age pension away from me. And because I'm putting the truth out on 'em. . . Well, they want to behead me, that's what they want to do. I thought I had a little jar out—I have so much stuff, you know, wrote down—a little jar with fragments of a cherry bomb where they throwed in my. . . The window screen saved my head. Right over there.

WV: Whew!

JH: Right over there.

WV: You think those were people from this town that did that?

JH: Why I think so! Sure!

WV: Yeah, um hmm. Hm.

JH: I don't know how many times. . . Their favorite way is to run you down with a car. I don't know how many times I've jumped in the ditch just to keep them from running me down with the car. Hundreds of times, pret near, as often as I to go up and down the road.

WV: Didn't somebody hit your fence once, too?

JH: Huh?

WV: Didn't somebody hit your fence once with a car?

JH: I've got the picture of it here.

WV: You've got a picture. I saw that the last time.

JH: Right here. (chuckles) Never even offered to put it back. Went down there and told two of them. They come up here and pulled the wreck out with a wrecker. And they knew who did it, and they won't do nothin' about it. I had to. . . I don't know whether I could find that picture right here right away or not. As I said, I have so much stuff, it's too much. . . Here's some pictures that've got \_\_\_\_\_. . . I don't remember who got these.

WV: There's the. . . Yeah, that. . . Nah, the other way around, Jesse. That's it, that's it.

JH: Yeah, this is the picture of the fence that I just put up, just lately. That man absolutely run that truck into that fence just a-purpose. Knocked down about 35, 40 feet of it.

WV: That happen during the night, one time, or. . .

JH: I can't never tell, sometimes, you know. I think it was one night. Called 'em up here. . . I was just lucky to pick this up, right away. (chuckles)

WV: Yeah, you found it quickly.

JH: This is out here on the road today.

WV: Yeah, I saw that one.

JH: I tried to get the paper man to pick this up, take this up, and he wouldn't take a picture of it. And he wouldn't even do that. Let's see.

WV: There you are.

JH: I'd give a [pretty] if I had all of my writing in one book. I certainly would.

WV: That's an awful lot of writing.

JH: Yeah. All of my writing in one book. Yes.

WV: It's the other way around.

JH: The other way around?

WV: Yeah, uh huh.

JH: I'm a-losin' my eyesight, pretty much.

WV: Boy.

JH: I don't see hardly how a. . .

WV: See, this is the top here.

JH: I don't see hardly how I get all this for myself.

WV: Oh, that's from the Columbia Daily Tribune.

JH: Yes sir.

WV: 1971. An obsession with signs, it's called.

JH: Now they can come up here, and taking all these pictures, and just went home, \_\_\_\_\_\_. And I've never seen or heard nothing of 'em since.

WV: Uh huh, yeah. Did you ever get any more of those books from Minneapolis? [Referring to Naives and Visionaries exhibition catalogue, which included JH—WV]

JH: Um hmm.

WV: Did you get some more?

JH: Uh huh.

WV: Good.

JH: Got a couple more.

WV: Good, we have, you asked us, and. . .

JH: I wished I had enough just to pass 'em around. I don't think, I don't think this studio, this bookstore down here, they. . . You've seen that book, you know, that Ricky Rhodes wrote [Richard Rhodes: *The Inland Ground*, 1970, with chapter on JH—WV].

WV: Right, I've seen that one.

JH: And they sold that for a little while. I was in there the other day and I asked him if they had any more of 'em. I don't know why they won't keep my work.

WV: Hmm. They don't sell it anymore.

JH: They don't sell them anymore.

WV: That's a good book.

JH: Now this whole thing.

WV: [To a member of the group;] It's called *The Inland Ground*. It has a whole chapter on Jesse. I'll show it to you sometime. He's a Kansas City writer, writes a lot for. . . Is he at *Atlantic* [*Monthly*—Ed.], or one of those. All the things in that book first appeared as [articles—Ed.]. . .

[*Interruption in taping*]

JH: [Check me.] Thank you, people, all of you, for what you did, all of you.

WV: Well, it's always real nice to come down here and talk to you.

JH: \_\_\_\_\_, will you, please? I'll look these over when I get a little more time.

WV: Sure.

[*Interruption in taping*]

JH: Hi. I want to, I went, started to Washington, D.C., several years ago to see Dwight D. Eisenhower. Every word I'm tellin' you people's the truth. Every word of it. And I got as far as St. Louis and a bunch of police kidnapped me there, and threwed me in an insane asylum, and held me there four days and nights. I had this Bible with me.

MV: Why did they do that?

JH: Huh?

MV: Why did they do that?

JH: I can't understand it. I can't get nothin' out of the crooked gang. They ain't nothing but a gang of crooks, that's all I can say about 'em.

WV: Sure.

JH: I like to not got out of that place. Alive. It's a fact.

WV: Do you always carry your Bible with you, Jesse?

JH: Pret near always, yes sir.

WV: That's a good idea.

JH: Yes sir. The Bible's been in Los Angeles, Californy.

WV: When were you in Los Angeles? A long time ago?

JH: Well, yes. I had a boy and a girl that was down there.

WV: Ahh.

JH: I've always had friends pret near everywhere I've ever went. I had people. . . That's more than I can say about this corkscrew gang here in Fulton, they walk up and tell me, and say "Go get you what you want to eat, and I'll pay for it." This corkscrew gang never said anything like that to me. (chuckles)

WV: Hmm.

JH: It's a fact. Yes, I've. . . I have. . .

WV: "Governor Bond."

JH: Governor Bond.

WV: Did you write something to Governor Bond?

JH: Yes.

WV: Oh, I'd like to. . .

JH: I sent him a great, big, long letter.

WV: Can we see it?

JH: I think it's in there. I think it is.

WV: We'll look in that. We'd like to see that.

JH: Yeah, that's a copy of it.

WV: Did you ever. . .

JH: I printed that in one-inch letters. Pret near all of my works in. . .

WV: Did you make some. . .? You made some signs for 'em, huh?

JH: Yes.

WV: It says, "I appreciate the signs."

JH: Well, I'll ask you people. What place in the Bible do you find the word, "president."

FV: I've never seen it.

FV: Where is it? Tell us.

JH: Then the next thing is what place in the Bible you'll find the word "governor."

WV: Was Daniel the first president?

JH: Yes sir. I don't know why preachers don't preach it. I don't know.

WV: Have you ever, did you ever think about becoming a preacher, Jesse? Did you ever think about becoming a preacher yourself?

JH: Well, I should be. But then they turned me down every shape and form that was ever, ever walked in.

WV: Who turned you down?

JH: Well, this crooked gang. It's all I can say. I don't know who it does.

WV: Hm. Did you use to go to church a lot?

JH: Oh yes. Yes.

WV: Do you still?

JH: I was taken to old Liberty Church, out here about 35 miles from here, when I was about 18 inches long—two of us.

Group: Ahh.

WV: That's right, you were twins, weren't you.

JH: We were twins.

WV: You were baptized right here?

JH: Baptized in the old [Vault, vault, Walls] Creek down here. Let 'em read this, will ya'?

*[Interruption in taping?]*

JH: Quite a little space to print all this in one-inch letters, pret near.

WV: Did you make big signs for Governor Bond?

JH: Yes, yes!

WV: How big were they?

JH: Oh, they was big enough to all this did put on it in one-inch letters.

WV: So like that size letters there.

JH: Something like that.

WV: Did you mail them to him, or how did you take them to. . .

JH: I've taken 'em to him.

WV: You went out there? To Columbia. . .

JH: He came to Fulton here.

WV: And then you gave 'em the signs.

JH: Yes.

WV: I wonder if he has them in his office.

JH: He's s'posed to have. (laughter)

MV: [Reading:] "The word "president" is found five times in the sixth chapter of the Book of Daniel. . ."

JH: Read this so they can hear it, will ya' please?

WV: "The word 'president' is found five times in the sixth chapter of the Book of Daniel." Want me to read it? "Three presidents, Daniel. Daniel was preferred above. . ."

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .it's all right here in this Bible.

WV: Jesse, what made you first decide to make your first signs? Do you remember?

JH: Well, after they'd throwed me in this jail down here, an innocent person. This is the only way that I had to gettin' back on 'em. I own this property.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: And I can say more than two-thirds of the people can say, I reckon today. I don't owe anybody a dime. And where I've ever lived, I've made good neighbors. Did you read that whole thing?

FV: Not yet.

JH: Another thing I wanta ask ya'. As long as Governor Bond was governor, who was the first. . . Who was the

first. . . Oh, I can't speak that now. . . Well, I got that wrote down here. The next one was. . . President and governor and. . . Oh, what else? Why can't I speak it?

WV: We'll find it.

JH: Ohh.

WV: What's this piece about that you're writing here, that's lying down here?

JH: This?

WV: Yes.

JH: Oh, I was fixin' to write and send that man that gave me the canvas. I want you to read that after a bit.

WV: Do you. . . Are you using that canvas that I sent you?

JH: Using it? I'm fixing to use it.

WV: Good.

JH: I've been laid up.

WV: Oh, right.

JH: You see what kind of place I've got to work in here.

WV: Right.

JH: You know what the weather's been.

WV: Yeah, that's true. Now, did that canvas seem all right to you.

JH: Yes.

WV: Was the weight okay?

JH: Um hmm.

WV: 'Cause if I ever send you some more, I'll send you the same kind. Is that okay?

JH: Who was it now sent it?

WV: Me.

JH: You.

WV: Right. Is that all right.

JH: Now you put your name down there as one who sent the canvas. (embarrassed chuckle)

WV: Okay. I'll add that. (group chuckles)

JH: See, I meet so many people actually, I can't get 'em all in my mind, you know, as to who they are.

WV: Sure.

JH: Because I've got four register books over there where people come from all over the whole nation, pret near. I understand down here I helped the Peacock boy put this great thrashin' bee show [an annual event bringing together steam threshing machines—WV] on for twenty years. Show 'em how to saw lumber and thrash grain and all like-a that, you know.

WV: Did Peacock put that on every year?

JH: He did until. . . He's dead.

WV: Uh huh, until he died, uh huh.

JH: When he died the show died.

WV: That's too bad.

JH: And I met thousands of people, you know. Understand Peacock was standin' there one day when two men walked up there with a camera in their hands, said, "Get over there Mr. Ed, you. I wanna take your picture." Well, I got over there, and they're taking our pictures, and I was more thoughtful than Mr. Ed Peacock was. I said, "Where you folks from?" There's where I started my register book. I have their names today. From London, England.

WV: Oh, they were from London.

Group: Ah hah. Ohh.

JH: And their address. There's two ladies came in there the same day and signed my register book, from Paris, France.

WV: Oh boy.

JH: There's a little lady goin' to this college here, William Woods. She's been up here visitin' me twice—twice or three times; I've forgotten now which it was—signed my register book, from Cairo, Egypt.

Group: Oh. Uh huh.

WV: Long ways away.

JH: And to show you, prove to you, do you see where all my work's going. Going all over the whole nation.

WV: Did you send each one of those people something?

JH: Huh?

AM: Did you send those people something?

JH: Do what?

AM: Did you send those people something? A sign?

JH: Some of the signs?

AM: Yeah, the people in Cairo and. . .

JH: No.

AM: I mean a letter or something.

JH: No, I didn't. Or, yes, I did. Yes, when I was puttin' that big, helpin' put that great threshing bee show on, about two mile out o' town here, why I sent that man a show bill. . .

WV: Oh, right.

JH: . . .and asked him if he could come to our show.

WV: He used to print these bills for the show.

JH: And they \_\_\_\_ 'em, we used to just \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ around, but they got to puttin' up great show bills, you know. And they gave me the job of sending these show bills. And like you had visited a show, attended a show, and signed my register book, I'd send you a show bill.

WV: Oh, that's real nice, yeah, I see.

JH: And you'd put that up in your place of business wherever you was.

WV: Sure.

JH: So I sent these all over the whole country.

WV: Did you use to show some of your wagons that you made, at the Peacock show?

JH: Yes, yes.

WV: 'Cause you have some real nice wagons that you built.

JH: I showed a lot of that, you know.

WV: They're real beauties.

JH: And. . . Did you ever hear of a place called Hell, Michigan?

WV: Hell, Michigan! (group chuckles) No, I've heard of Hell, Missouri. That's right here, right?

JH: Here. . . (laughs uproariously) Thank you, thank you! That's right. Well, there's a little place called Hell, Michigan, and I sent them some show bills, you know. How it got its name, they had a great, big whiskey still down under a hill. And they'd go down there and fill up on that booze, you know, and it was hell gettin' back up the hill. (crowd laughs)

WV: How do you know that? Did you read that somewhere? How did you know how Hell was. . .

JH: Yes, I have the names and the town! Yes, I do. They tried to get a post office down there, Hell, Michigan. (laughter) I wrote some of 'em, told 'em, "Hell, Fulton's got a post office hundred years ago—Hell Fulton has." (chuckles) Who got the sign? Where's it at, where I had 'em to sign my register book and make a statement, that read like this: "Keep on givin' 'em hell, Jess, the \_\_\_\_\_ is comin'."

WV: Yeah, somebody did that.

JH: Huh? That's in Kansas City [collection of the Kansas City Art Institute—WV].

WV: Is it somebody in Kansas City?

JH: Yeah.

WV: It might have been me, I don't know. (laughter)

JH: It's in the art deal.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: You've heard about my big artwork, haven't you, in Kansas City. [In 1974 the Kansas City Art Institute purchased close to a hundred works by the artist—WV]

WV: Sure have.

JH: Going all over the whole country. And, let's see. . . [looking for something—Ed.]

WV: Do you like Dear Abby?

JH: Huh?

WV: Do you like Dear Abby?

JH: Can you read this?

WV: Mitchell. . . That's it. There's one about [Attorney General—WV] Mitchell and one about Hitler.

JH: Yes.

WV: Which one?

JH: Well, the top one's about Mitchell, I think.

WV: Uh huh, right.

JH: And this is about Hitler.

WV: Uh huh. What about Mitchell?

JH: Mitchell? (chuckles)

WV: Do you think he's okay?

JH: You know what Mitchell did. . . I wished I could talk to Judge what's-his-name, I'd. . .

WV: How about the other one? It's flattened out a little bit.

JH: Sirica, isn't it?

WV: Sirica, yeah.

JH: Um hmm.

WV: What would you like to ask Sirica?

JH: I'd like to ask him what part the 25,000 hard-core Communists played—has played and is playing—in Washington, D.C.

WV: Um hmm. Hmm.

JH: I'd like to ask him what part old Satan, the Devil, has played in Washington, D.C. I've been wanting, when I painted this big sign here. . . \_\_\_\_\_ children kinda see it.

WV: Move back, Vicky.

JH: Will ya'?

WV: That's a real nice one; it's for McGovern.

JH: That one. [shuffling noises, chuckles]

WV: Are you going to send that to Mr. McGovern?

JH: (chuckles) I'd like to, or I could just mail that whole thing to him, make him pay the postage on it. (chuckles)

WV: Good idea.

JH: A dollar a pound, that. . .

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . . get Mr. George McGovern and Mr. Nixon across the table from each other, and ask 'em fifty questions on the Holy Bible. They've spent all this money. . . I wish you had a tape recorder and take down what I've got to say. [JH apparently doesn't know he is being taped—Ed] They spent all this money, by the thousands, millions. . . To see who was the best politically fit to run our country, haven't they? All of you?

Group: Uh huh. Yeah. Um hmm.

JH: Haven't they?

Group: Yeah.

JH: I got a nod from all of you. (chuckles) I'd like to ask these two people which one was the best spiritually fit to run our country.

FV: Beautiful.

JH: And ask them fifty questions out of the Bible. I don't think they can answer the first question I would ask them.

FV: What do you think of Ford?

JH: Huh?

FV: What do you think of President Ford?

JH: What'd she say?

WV: She want to know how you like President Ford? What do you think of him?

JH: Well, I have a brother-in-law that was a. . . He's a school teacher and a well-read man. He's run a store,

and he's met many people and all. And he said Ford was a fine man. And he is.

FV: Did you know he reads the Bible?

JH: Huh?

FV: Ford reads the Bible.

JH: I don't know.

FV: He does.

JH: He does?

FV: Uh huh.

JH: Um hmm. I've got a whole bunch in these rolls I'm gonna send to Washington, D.C.

WV: Who are you going to send them to in Washington? To the president?

JH: To the president.

WV: He might really appreciate that.

JH: I have his writing. Here is a piece that I was fixin' to put on your canvas. Let's see. . . One of you read that off, will ya'? I have never seen anybody, heard of anybody, ever, put in a piece like that.

WV: Jesse, when you make a sign do you first put it on paper, and then you put it on canvas?

JH: Oh, I have to. (chuckles)

WV: Why?

JH: Huh?

WV: To work it all out?

JH: So's I can work it all out, you see. It takes. . . As I said, it takes lots of time to read this Scripture.

WV: Right, uh huh.

JH: I want to put on this piece here. . . I think that writing's in. . . Oh. Anyway, where it gives the names of people that put the foundation of Jerusalem in.

MV: You want to put that on the sign?

JH: Huh?

MV: You want to put that on the canvas?

JH: Yes, I want that on this sign.

WV: What are you going to do with all the canvas signs? Are you going to send them away or keep them here, or what are you gonna to do with 'em?

JH: Well, I aim to make a copy of it, you know. I've got a copy of a number of 'em already wrote off, where I've traced the word "plow" clear through the Bible, the word "dog" clear through the Bible. I've got it down how many chapters, how many verses there is in each book of the Holy Bible. Each book, how many chapters and how many verses and how many words. They say, "Where'd you git that?" (chuckles) And. . .

WV: [Aside to someone: —Ed.] Careful.

JH: And it's all in your Bible. Huh?

WV: Who would you most like to have your. . . Huh. Who would you like to have read your messages? Who are your signs for, do you think?

JH: Well, I'm gonna try to make one for you. (laughs) How do you like that?

WV: That's fine.

JH: Why it tells you here about the city of Sodom, you know, [Saul, Paul], let's see, Abraham. Commence right down here on the first page to find the word "Abraham." Abraham and Lot.

WV: Um hmm.

JH: Remember Lot, his wife?

WV: Sure do.

JH: Lot. . . Abraham and Lot were cousins, I believe it was. You remember?

FV: Um hmm.

JH: And each one of 'em had big pieces of property like—I put it—cattle, sheep, and hogs, and things. And they didn't have places, you know, big enough to keep this stock. And one taken a piece of land one place, and the other one taken another piece. And they divided. One went one way and one went the other. Is that right? (chuckles)

FV: I remember that, yeah. It's coming back to me.

JH: And that's what I'm puttin' here. And Lot looked back and seen—it's wrote right down here—Lot went back after Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt, and he went to Sodom. And there's where he looked back and seen this great, wicked city of Sodom going up in smoke. Now that's all wrote down here. It says right here, "I'll not destroy this. . ." I can't quote all of this [handing book to group?—Ed.]

WV: It's right there. "I will not destroy. . ."

JH: But I'm gonna. . .

WV: "I will not destroy it for twenty's. . ." "For twenty's sake?"

JH: I never heard no preachers ever preach that: judges, or lawyers, or nothing. Nobody. I never did.

WV: Do you like the Old Testament the best?

JH: Why, yes! In a way, yes.

WV: Um hmm.

JH: Because God created the whole earth, heavens and earth in the beginning.

WV: Um hmm.

JH: In the beginning. We got to have beginning. [group chuckles] We've been taught, you know, we got to begin to go to school. Just little bitty tots.

WV: How long did you go to school, Jesse?

JH: Well, I had two or three of the [finest] of teachers. You'd have one, two, and we only had three months' term when I went to school. Had a little poem that one of the scholars wrote, you know. Kind of read like this:

Oh Lord, look down upon us poor scholars,

What a fool to have for a teacher,

Yet we have to pay her forty dollars.

WV: [all laugh]

JH: Now if I live, now you're gonna get this on your canvas.

WV: Wonderful.

JH: If I live.

WV: You'll live. You're gonna live a long time.

JH: Huh?

WV: You're gonna live a long time. That's beautiful.

JH: Well, I hope so. I hope I live long enough to get some of this out. Another question I wanted to ask you, too. I haven't ever seen this anyplace, this: What big wicked city, and what country, was Jesus Christ crucified in?

FV: Well, he was crucified in Jerusalem, wasn't he, on Calvary?

JH: I can't understand her.

WV: She said he was crucified in Jerusalem.

JH: [shakes head no—Ed.]

FV: No? Where?

WV: Where? [group chuckles—Ed.]

WV: It's on there [pointing at sign—WV].

JH: I've never heard anybody, as I say, I still say it. I've never heard anybody. . . You people can read. Turn to Revelations 11:8, will ya?

WV: Sure.

JH: Revelations 11:8. I am, I'm losing my eyesight pretty bad. 11:8, I believe that's what it is. I could be mistaken.

FV: Ah. . . "And their dead bodies shall lie in a street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom in Egypt, where our Lord was crucified." Ah hah!

WV: That's right. Egypt.

JH: Those old \_\_\_\_ always, all through this Holy Bible have been hell- cats, I put it. [group chuckles] All through the Holy Bible. You remember even in there where old King Pharoah, you know, made the people make brick. They was making too many brick, you know, out of long straw and mud on clay. And then changed them and made 'em make brick out of just, just the stubble.

FV: Yeah.

JH: That's all right here in this Bible. Clear through there. Who taken little Moses? And where did he take little Moses? They been on the shore, and all the boy—boy babies—didn't they?

WV: Um hmm, that's right.

JH: Who rescued little Moses? How old was Moses?

FV: He was an infant.

WV: Here you go. She's gonna look it up.

JH: Well, I've got it all wrote down here.

WV: She brought her own Bible.

JH: Moses died at 120 years old.

FV: That's old.

JH: And the Lord God buried Moses, no monument, no person knows where Moses was buried. He died at the age of 120 years.

FV: [Who] buried him?

JH: And he's buried in a city of palm trees. The Kansas City Art's [Kansas City Art Institute—WV] got a whole lot of my writing up there on that.

WV: Uh huh, that's right. I've seen it.

**[Tape 1, side A; Volkersz' No. H4-2]**

[Note that this portion of the recording is on the reverse side of Volkersz H4-1 furnished to the Archives, but as it was of poor quality Volkersz dubbed it onto a second tape which is labeled "H4-2 (dubbed)"—Ed.]

WV: Jesse, did you always grow up on a farm?

JH: Oh, \_\_\_\_\_ born on an 80-acre posthole farm my father owned down here in the Shamrock \_\_\_\_\_, about 35 miles from here.

WV: You were born in the town of Shamrock, or near Shamrock?

JH: Um hmm, um hmm. Went to old Liberty Church, that's still standin' there. They destroyed all the school, schools. Let's see, Hazel Dell was the name of the old school, I think it was I went to. And the old [Pill, Pilt] School was where I. . . My father moved there, he moved out here four miles southeast of Calwood, and that's where I grewed up, all of my life, you might say, except the two years I was out West.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: All over the West—Northwest—and I've been back there several times since. I had to work my way through everywhere.

WV: What kind of jobs did you have when you traveled?

JH: Oh, feeding cattle and puttin' up hay and. . . I sat up on an old hay rake, and. . . I got that in writing, raked four hundred ton of hay.

WV: That's a lot of hay!

JH: (chuckles) That's in the Big Hole Basin, Montana. I followed a threshin' [He pronounces it "thrashing" which for clarity will not be transcribed according to our normal folk art transcription policy—Ed.] machine through, clear through North Dakota, two different years. There's where I met the hobos. Do you read about them? (chuckles with group)

WV: Yeah, you have a sign about the hobos, uh huh.

JH: I've seen some of 'em actually so daggone lousy, you know, that they had to pull their clothes off just to clean. And I told this, you know. And I told this. . . A lot of my worst people that I knew, my neighbors, you know, you might say, which this is actually a fact. They said when Jesse Howard went out West and come back home and got to be the damndest liar you ever heard talk. [group laughs]

WV: They don't believe you, huh?

JH: No, they don't believe you. I rode a big high-wheeled wagon through the Yellowstone Park, clear through it, six days and a half. I have the pictures of that, the old mud pots and Old Faithful Geyser. It's changed its time—what was it?—several minutes, I believe it was, lately.

MV: Oh really?

WV: Oh, has it changed?

JH: Used to be just as regular as your [clock].

WV: Real regular. . .

JH: What's said. And Job, the book of Job here. . . I'd like to put all of this in the book, you know, that I have. The book of Job. . . One thought makes me think of another one, you know. The book of Job says "The pot boileth deep." Well that's Yellowstone Park, one of the greatest parks in the world.

WV: What was your job there, in the Yellowstone Park?

JH: Huh?

WV: What was your job? Did you have a job there?

JH: Oh, washing dishes and a little of everything. We rode through there. . . We camped out. The old bears come up, you know, and git into our grub box and turn the stove over and \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. [group laughs] Now, that was in 1905. In nineteen hundred and five I spent a great big part of the winter in Little Shasta, California, just a store and a post office, several miles out from a railroad. Walked out there through the mud and everything, you know. I heard a fellow wanted a hand. Walked out there, and all day long, through the mud and. . . Mountains out there, you know, foothills of Mount Shasta. And I looked for this fellow, you know, and I walked up to a nice lookin' place, and then peeked all around there, and hollered around, and couldn't find anybody. Gettin' dark then, pret near. And [they had—Ed.] several chickens, and I went out there then and picked me up some eggs and an old tin-like can, walked down the prettiest rock fence—lots of rock fences out there.

WV: Um hmm.

JH: You know it?

MV: I know about rock fences. They're nice.

JH: Well, I'd like you on my route, some day. Of course I never will. And I couldn't raise anybody, and walked up aside of that old big rock fence and built a fire and cooked my eggs up there, no salt or nothing to eat 'em with, you know. I don't didn't know where I was gonna stay or spend the night. It just happened, I looked down from the hill down there and I seen another big house. I went down there then and asked that fellow if he wanted to hire a hand. Well he said, "I just hired one." Of course that put me lookin' down my nose. [probably meaning feeling sad, not disparaging—Ed.]

WV: (chuckles)

JH: After walking about a fourteen, fifteen miles out there, through the mud and all. And I said, "Well, I'd like to stay all night with you." Well, out there in the bunkhouse they treat everybody, the hobo, out there; don't make any difference what. And he said, "Well, you can sleep out there in the bunkhouse with the rest of the hands." Went out there and they didn't have nothin' to sleep on, only an old coat I threwed down. Got up the next morning; they did give me a little bite to eat. And I reckon that is where I got the [\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_] of body lice, you know.

WV: Ohh.

JH: Of course, I didn't know it that minute. But I went on down the road and asked a fellow about who wanted to hire a hand. He said, "There's a widow woman down the road here," he says, "they bring a big herd of cattle into her place and they feed these cattle hay a certain length of time."

WV: Right.

JH: Went on down there, and sho' enough, I hired [on with—Ed.] that widow woman, you know, to feed that hay to those cattle, seventy-five or a hundred head—I've forgotten—great big herd of 'em. They gave me warning, you know, and—a little bit ahead of my story. . . I looked down my old shirt collar, you know, and there was an old grayback on it. (chuckles) And I got rid of those graybacks, and that woman never did know that I had a grayback on me. [all chuckles] You can take a dime's worth of [sipadillo, Sipadillo] and keep the grayback off of you, and I didn't happen to put any on me during that time. But there in North Dakota you did have to. Because those people those days, you know, well, you can stand up there and count fifteen, twenty big threshing crews, is known as the Bread Basket of the World.

WV: Right.

JH: North Dakota. Fifteen or twenty great big threshing machines, you know, blowing smoke and thrashing, and they'd work you just as long as you could see, for—I don't know—a dollar a day or something like that, you know. Kind of like, when I was going in there one time I met a great big Swede. He and I. . . I talk to anybody if they'll talk to me. So I rode along with that big Swede, you know, and I asked him where he was going, and he says, "I'm going to Minneapolis, Minnesota," he says, "to work on the railroads for a dollar a day and eat myself." [chuckling at the Swede, who was not yet familiar with English (i.e., "feed myself")—Ed.] That's what he was doing, you know. He went down there and had of course [bought] hisself one dollar—a dollar a day, at that time. And anyway, I fed that hay out and [to] those cattle—getting a little ahead of my story—as I was going out to this place, there in Little Shasta, California, I was gitting pretty daggone hungry. I walked to a fellow, you know, and said, asked him for a handout, had a little something to eat. Old man, gray-headed and beard, looked down his beard like, and he says, "Gosh. You're a pretty lookin' fella," he says, "husky lookin' fella to be asking for

something to eat." I always got an answer for anyways. I said, "Well, I might be, but I says, "I get hungry just the same as anybody else." [group laughs] So he set me a little something to eat. Now that was before I went down there to ask this fellow for the job. Well, I come back there then and fed those cattle out, and they gave me warning. I had to hitch up a team and had a horse there—saddled horse—and these people that owned the cattle said, "Don't you ever git off your horse, leave your horse, while you're feeding these cattle." Because they don't know a man from a bear or dog or anything else. They never see a man off the horse."

And I had fifteen, twenty—ten or fifteen racks where I had to throw this hay in, and he says, "These cattle will knock a flat off these racks, pret' near one or two a day, a night. You take your hammer and nails and nail you [right sides] back, but don't get off your horse." [group chuckles] The old cattles were all up one side one day, and it was on a four- or five-acre lot, and all of 'em going from the racks. And I thinks, "Well, I want t' get off my horse to go to the next rack to nail these slats on. So I went over there, you know, and them darned old cattle, you know, seein' as I had left that horse—now \_\_\_\_\_ I'm telling you the truth—one old cow threwed her head up and comes here straight to that rack as she could come, and here come the whole herd. They had me treed up there like a daggone possum, or 'coon, you know, to that rack. [group chuckles] And they held me there for about two hours. Finally, one. . . There I was up on the rack and the horse tied to the other rack. Well, I finally got down there and I wouldn't got ten feet, 'cause those cattle would have just killed me. That's all there was about it. And pretty soon one old cow looked up, you know, throwed her head up and went away, you know, and here come the whole bunch, and up to the rack, you know. Believe me, I never left my horse anymore.

WV: Ah hah, you learned your lesson.

JH: And I went back there then, after I fed the hay out, the same neighborhood, where the old gent says, "You're a husky lookin' fella," he said, "to be askin' for somthin' to eat." I went back there and worked for that man's son. And they take me up there and put me in a nice bed and everything, you know. And during that time, they was some people visitin' that place that lived in San Francisco, and they says, "If you ever git on through to there, stop and see us." And so I did. I went in there then, and I've been through, oh, San Francisco, the slum gang through there, you know. I've heard of people bein', missionaries talkin' about these opium dens, and I wanted to go through there. This one man [and—Ed.] his wife, he'd take me through these parks and things, you know, in daytime, and this man would go out with me through old slums of San Francisco, of a night. You wouldn't think this, you know, goin' there; they had just as nice buildings and places anywhere. But you go in that place, it's a one-way trip. I said, "Well, can't you get a guard to go with you?" "No sir. That's the end of you. They've got chutes out in the ocean there. They just feed you to the sharks. Take your money, your clothes if you've got good ones. And that's the end of you." That man, you see, saved my life, because I wanted to go through that place.

WV: Good thing you didn't.

JH: And did you ever see a . . . I got a postcard the other day with a cable car—picture of a cable car.

WV: Cable car, sure.

JH: Did you ever see it?

WV: Sure. I've been in San Francisco.

JH: Did you see the cable car?

WV: Yes, I did.

JH: Well, I've been right there on that spot. [group chuckles]

WV: Oh, that's amazing.

JH: Yes, sir. Been right there on that spot. [turning to group—Ed.] Now what's the difference between a cable car and a trolley car? [silence—Ed.] They haven't heard a word from you.

FV: Well, if you. . .

JH: I don't mean to be harsh now. [group chuckles]

FV: No, no. I'm enjoying listening.

WV: A cable car has the cable underneath and a trolley has the wires overhead.

MV: They're electric.

JH: Yeah.

WV: That's right.

FV: I thought it was the other way around.

JH: That's the difference. And I've been right there on that cable car deal, in San Francisco. We got a picture just the other day of it.

WV: What year was that, that you were in San Francisco? What year, do you remember?

JH: What year I was there? Yes! I remember just as well as yesterday. It was nineteen hundred and five. The great earthquake was 1906.

WV: You got out of there in time!

JH: Yeah. (chuckles)

WV: You left just in time!

JH: The big hotel that I stayed in was shook down with the earthquake.

WV: Gosh.

JH: I've run old streetcars down here in Pine Bluffs, Arkansas. (chuckles) I like to have got killed there one time, too. I reckon the good Lord has been with me. I met several chances of just missin' death, you might say.

WV: Hmm.

JH: Painted bridges, railroad bridges, you know, hundred feet in the air. Pine Bluffs, Arkansas, I painted an old bridge down there. The highest part well over a hundred feet. We put thirty-two barrel-and- a-half of paint on it. I was one of the painters that did this.

WV: Really.

JH: So ever I die and go to hell, you know, I won't be kicked, I won't be kicked in hell because I haven't worked. I didn't quite finish out there in California. I drove six-horse teams, a big gang plow. They was talkin' about puttin' two more horses on there, eight horses strung out. Them horses knew more about plowin' than I did, pret' near. But then, a very dangerous thing, you know, if it jackknifed on you. You know what that is? You know?

FV: Jackknifed? Yeah.

MV: That's if the horses. . .

JH: Huh?

MV: . . .the horses are going one way and the plow's going another; they're twisted up.

JH: Turn around and come back on you.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: Why if you wasn't there to drive 'em and straighten 'em out, you know, why they give you the daggonedest mix up you ever seen. Heard of, pret near.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .into Montana, and through there. I first struck the coast in Everett, Washington.

WV: I've been there. I've been in Everett.

JH: You have?

WV: Sure.

JH: That was where I seen the biggest fish. I was in. . . I've forgotten now whether that. . . I believe that was in Seattle where I seen the big fish, big enough that a man could crawl in. And Jonah. . .

WV: Ah, the big whale!

JH: That brings me back, you know, to the Bible. There's only four chapters in the book of Jonah. And why was Jonah thrown overboard for the fish?

WV: [silence] \_\_\_\_\_ you? [Asking a member of the group—WV.]

FV: Why was he thrown overboard?

WV: Um hmm.

*[Interruption in taping?]*

FV: I'm sorry.

JH: Been here too long.

FV: Why?

JH: Why was Jonah thrown overboard to the fish?

WV: She doesn't know.

FV: Did God tell him to save the city?

JH: What'd she say?

WV: She asked, what, "God told him to save the city?"

FV: Um hmm.

MV: And he ran. He went away and got thrown over. . .

FV: He got scared so he went on the boat and \_\_\_\_\_. . .

JH: Well, God told Jonah, "Go to that great, big city, by the name of Nineveh, and preach to those wicked people." And instead of him going to Nineveh—I believe it was 120,000 people. I believe it is. Something like it—great big city. He went to a little place like Calwood down here. [group chuckles] Went to a little place called [Tarshish]—where the boat was, you know. Got on this boat. He went to sleep on the boat, Jonah did. And the old sea began to roll and toss, and they thought everybody was going to be lost. And anyway, God calmed the sea, and that's when the big fish got ahold of Jonah, and he's there in the fishes belly three days and nights, and he went. . . He did that because Jonah didn't obey God, you see. He went to this little place called Tarsh. Is that right?

WV: I don't know.

JH: [chuckling] Well, it's in the big Bible here, anyway.

WV: You're probably right, uh huh.

JH: Jonah, you'll find that in the last chapter of Jonah.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: In here, isn't it?

WV: Yes, that's the one. It's about the end.

MV: Toward the end. Not [the end, ant]. It's found. . .

JH: \_\_\_\_\_ those people that filled a canal full of that rubbish down there, even today, and have the wisdom and knowledge of the little ant. Today.

WV: Right.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: Jesse, do you ever sell your work to people? Do people come and buy your signs sometimes?

JH: Oh yes. Yes.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: I just printed a little picture of a fish here where. . . Here you are.

WV: Oh, that's nice.

JH: Where is it? I got a check for some lady in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

WV: She wanted that?

JH: She gave me a check for \$50.00. She wanted some of my work and so I sent her one of these [fish painted on a shoe sole—WV].

WV: Where did you get the footsole from? Where did you get that?

JH: Oh, they used to have two shoe factories here, you know, and I went to the dump and picked this stuff up.

FV: That's beautiful!

WV: Oh. It really is.

MV: I like that. Did you make a lot of these? Because you've got another one over here.

JH: Yeah, I've sold several of 'em. I just got to making some the other day.

WV: He wondered whether you've made a lot of those. Did you make a lot of them?

JH: Have I made a lot?

WV: A lot of the fish.

JH: Oh, quite a few, yes.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .there in my old shed, rusty shed up here, you know, three or four years or more.

WV: Uh huh. Yeah.

JH: . . .yeah five or. . .

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: [reading from a sign]: ". . .now I cannot print the whole Bible in one-inch letters on account of time and space, but here is a part of it. And if my spelling is bad, forgive me for I only have a sixth- grade education and my eyes are dim with old age, past 88 years. Now the next place that I have found the word sheep is in the book of Numbers."

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .\_\_\_\_\_ have 'em.

MV: Right.

WV: Do you think that President Ford's going to be a shepherd?

JH: Well, I hope so.

WV: I hope so, too.

JH: I'm going to send him one of these. . .

WV: This would be a good one for him.

JH: One of these. . .

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: Do you make copies of most of your work?

JH: Most of 'em. Most.

WV: Why do you make copies?

JH: Well, I want to keep one myself. [group chuckles]

WV: Right.

JH: Know what I wrote. \_\_\_\_ . . .

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: [Examining scrolls, rolled up and stored in an old refrigerator outside—WV] Where did you get this canvas? Did you buy it?

JH: Yes.

WV: Uh huh. That's nice canvas. That's about Richard Nixon. Let's see [reading a scroll]: "Free thought, free speech, and Jesse Howard is my name. Mr. President, Richard Nixon, to whom this may concern, I will state facts to the best of my knowledge and understanding, and the best of my memory. I have made three attempts to get this what I am writing to the President. Figure, will you please, just how long this has been going on. On a Sunday, December 23, 1951, I boarded a train out of Mexico [Missouri—WV]. There I bought a ticket to St. Louis. I was headed for Washington, D.C. I was followed all the way from Fulton, Missouri, to Union Station. There I was kidnapped by a gang of police. They threatened to throw me into the river, all of them with guns. I held up my hands and told them to shoot—yes, shoot. I took a Bible and also a Fulton telephone directory with me." [to JH:] Why did you take the telephone directory with you?

JH: Well, it's what saved me. I says, "I'm going up to, held that directory up there and I said, "All these people in Fulton's behind me."

WV: Ohh.

MV: See, "All these names are with me."

WV: Oh, I see.

JH: [I don't want to tell them about.]

WV: [reading:] "I said, 'See all these names are with me.' I don't know to this day where all they took me that night."

JH: I don't.

WV: "Anyway, I was locked inside their prison wall for four days and nights. I went to Mexico [Missouri] and turned this in to the FBI and they said that they would take care of it for me. They lied, for I never heard one word afterwards."

JH: I haven't. Not one word.

WV: "Even unto this day, July 1974, ask yourself, 'What kind of confidence do you, Mr. President, have in these people who would rather tell a lie than the truth? My Bible says that man will betray his brother clean to the end. My Bible also says, 'He who hateth his brother is a murderer. Yes, Cain slew his brother Abel. Read all of Chapter 4 and keep on and on. I hear and see over the radio and TV where some of the lawyers and reporters have prepared as many as two hundred pages to be read in the White House case. My advice to you, Mr. White House, is to prepare 2,000 pages of the Holy Bible. For you, yes. You are like a flock of lost sheep that or is [sic] scattered in the great Amazon River wilderness, the largest river in the world.'" There it is. "They tell me that there is two rivers as large as the Mississippi River that empties into the great Amazon River. Yes, Mr. White House, stop and scratch that pate of yours."

JH: I aimed to ask you that. What \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ . . .

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .some [foreigners] [live, see; OR left me].

WV: Yeah.

*[Interruption in taping?]*

WV: [reading:] "Yes, while on the subject of sheep and shepherds, my father, Lawson Thomas Howard, owned a small flock of sheep, something over one hundred head. The location Calwood, a general store and p.o. office. Our old home place is yet standing. Four miles southeast of Calwood. Father's land bordered the old [Oxvasse] Creek, which goes hog wild and pig-tail general. My brother-in-law, James Plyben. . .?"

JH: Plyben, yes.

WV: Uh huh. ". . .drowned in the Oxvasse Creek on Fourth of July. The drowning took place in the creek near where the old Oxvas Church stands today, eighty and ninety years ago. There are no roads, just trails across the country, and no fencing, only a few patches cleared of timber and brush, and fenced with rails like in Abraham Lincoln's time. There was no stock law. People would go out and find where their neighbor's cattle had eaten the whole patch, then would come the firebug and set fire to the old brush and rail fence. We had the firebugs in those days just like we have them today, only hundreds have passed on. They won't set any more fires. Along in the afternoon, father would say, 'Jesse, it is time for you to round up the sheep,' and if there is any young lambs, too young to walk, you will have to pick them up and carry them into the old mill shed.' I have had to carry some of the little lambs as far as a mile. Yes, there was always some ewes that would not own their lamb, or give enough milk to nourish them. Father would get me out of a good, warm bed and off to the old mill shed to feed the little lambs. That was eighty years ago. The old mill shed was about 200 yards from the house."

JH: That's about ten miles east of Fulton here today.

WV: Um hmm.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: [reading from a sign]: "On July 3, 1956, exact time 8:45 pm, a large firecracker or small bomb was thrown on my porch and some of the fragments went through the window. They were aiming at my head. I saw the lights of a car and heard it stop. I just had gone to bed. I got up to see what was taking place, and just as I had my head in the window to see what was going on, whatever this was exploded, I will say in less than six inches of my head. The screen on the window saved my head. I have the fragments of the bomb here in a jar."

### **[Tape 1, side B; Volkorsz' No. H4-2 (cont.)]**

[Note that this is the reverse side of a two-sided tape Volkorsz substituted for what was originally a single side. Some of the material at the end of the first side is repeated on the second side but was not retranscribed—Ed.]

JH: . . .square. [speaking of canvas—Ed.]

WV: Right.

JH: And I can't get 'em. You see, this is rolled up. Now just roll that one right back if you don't mind to.

WV: Sure.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: [Noise of hammer on metal, away from the microphone—Ed.] \_\_\_\_\_ it was good.

JH: Many's the \_\_\_\_\_ on this old anvil.

WV: Play us an old tune.

JH: It don't have any friends. [JH plays "tune" on the anvil and an old school bell—Ed.] That's printed on your record in Kansas City.

WV: Really? That's beautiful.

JH: [more tunes—Ed.]

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: Do you watch Eric Severeid on the news?

JH: Oh, yeah.

WV: Walter Cronkite.

JH: Oh, yes. I watch 'em all, you know, pret' near. I got a fairly good TV set and radio. [brushing/sanding? noises] He, I don't know, he kinda gets monotonous sometimes, the old \_\_\_\_.

WV: He does, I know.

JH: (chuckles) I'll bet he don't [know] this bottle like I do.

WV: Do you read the paper every day?

JH: Yeah, I take two.

WV: Which ones?

JH: Gazette and the new paper down here. Daily.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: I want to put this one out on the road here.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: [Away from microphone—Ed.; referring to a sign—WV:] There's just a partial list. I want to put that out on the road where they stole [a sign—WV].

WV: [Reading] "Shades of thievery and vandalism. Why would any person want to mar or disgrace their selves in this way. I cannot understand. First my fine colored pictures took lately. Wish they would return them. A pyramid made of seashells I got years. . ." No. ". . .160 years old, a number of signs, eyeglasses, hammer, letters, thermometer, all stolen January 14, '66. Sign said, 'Like a bat trying to get out of hell,' stolen January 7, 1966. Sign filled with shot, October 5, '54. We lost all of our meat from four nice-fed hogs; never did catch the thieves."

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .[there, terrible], gonna do a. . .

MV: Do you use this anymore? [Referring to a hand-cranked, table-mounted drill—WV]

JH: Huh?

MV: Do you still use this?

JH: Oh, once in a while. Not too much.

WV: Where'd you get it?

JH: Oh, I just pick up little, lot o' old stuff, and just make 'em, you know. That's where you pit your iron with.

WV: Um hmm.

JH: This is a pretty good board here, \_\_\_\_.

WV: Did you buy that part at an auction, or something?

JH: Oh, yeah, I buy this stuff here. Got another one out there. I'm gonna have a little sale one of these days, I will.

WV: And sell some of it?

JH: Um hmm. I won't sell much in here. Almost all of this [is] going out on the road, if I can get somebody to help me put it up. My little wagon's down there in that other shed.

WV: I'd like to see those. Those are real nice.

*[Interruption in taping]*

[From here to the end of the tape, tape speed is erratic, causing some passages to be obscured—Ed.]

JH: Well, I had 'em all. . . They [wagons with signs—WV] all went to Kansas City.

WV: Oh, I see. You had signs on them.

JH: Yes.

WV: Those are the ones that we got.

JH: Yeah, there's two down there that represents, oh, Goliath, whatever.

WV: Goliath?

JH: Goliath, yeah. Goliath, he was nine feet tall, you know, walked out there with his armor and everything.

MV: Did you have David there too?

JH: Huh?

MV: Did you have David there too?

JH: Yeah. \_\_\_\_ his [grave], of course, [this, just represents.

WV: Yeah, right. And Goliath's grave's down here.

*[Interruption in taping]*

MV: [You're right, though.]

JH: And this fellow, I was gonna explain [about—WV] this fellow here. Had a, lost his leg in a railroad accident. And this is his peg leg. I happened to pick it up. And here's one of the main people that wrote King [Rolf] about old Fulton. Old King Rolf wrote pret' near all about old Fulton on Watergate Fulton. Can you repeat that?

WV: Huh?

JH: Can you?

WV: No.

JH: Can't repeat Watergate?

WV: Impossible. What was this man's name?

JH: Huh?

WV: What was this man's name, whose leg that is?

JH: His name was [Dahl, Doll, Dall] Nivens.

WV: Dahl Nivens?

JH: Um hmm.

WV: Was that his name in the book [referring to Bellamann's King's Row, a novel set in Fulton—WV], or in real life?

JH: Oh, no. It isn't his name in the book. They don't give it.

WV: They don't give a name at all in the book?

JH: [Um hmm.] And the old doctor, you know, it showed a fellow down in, they aimed to save both legs, I think, and never gave him anything \_\_\_\_\_. That was done right here in old Fulton, old Watergate.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: \_\_\_\_\_, the boy is \_\_\_\_\_.

*[Interruption in taping]*

MV: Why are these triangles here?

WV: Is that to step inside?

JH: Huh?

WV: Why is this here? Is that to step inside? This here.

JH: Oh, it's just a brace for this corner.

WV: Oh, it's just a brace. I see.

JH: Brace for the corner, there, you see.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: . . .[just, this] twice.

JH: I'm gonna get no help here from these, this Watergate gang. Oh, I expect to have a [call]. There's. . .

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: [far away from microphone—Ed.] \_\_\_\_\_ to have friends and neighbors went and got it, showed them where it was. That old plow. . . What do you see odd about the old plow?

WV: What?

JH: What do you see odd about the plow?

WV: It's all painted up.

JH: Hmm?

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: [Reading:] "' . . .law in court. Yes, these people have had the chance to go to school and to college and should have filled that head of yours to an overflow with wisdom and knowledge. But did you? The Bible says that Satan, the Devil, will deceive the very elect.' By Jesse Howard."

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . . \_\_\_\_\_ a corner up there. I know they did it a-purpose. They come in there and butted into it, and got the name of the people, lived up here on Bluff Street. Wouldn't do nothin' about it. I wanta wind this thing up, with my signs, one of these days, if I'm able.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: When did you build these windmills?

JH: Huh?

WV: When did you build the windmills?

JH: Oh, I built them quite a little while back.

WV: Uh huh.

JH: Pret' near all of my work. . . I go to these old cars, you know, and get that, where they've got good bearings and all?

WV: Right.

JH: That's really a good one.

WV: Is that the radiator fan?

JH: Huh?

WV: Is that the radiator fan?

JH: This, um hmm.

WV: Yeah, that works real well.

JH: I've got. . . Bible verses on every one of 'em. Some of 'em you can't read.

WV: They wore off, haven't they?

JH: That's really a good one. That was a fellow neighbor. Name Roy Tucker.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: [unintelligible] . . . names. This fellow went, this fellow said, "Well, we can expose these people." I understand they gave him a hundred and sixty cash dollars. Lot of money; it's hard to get to, earn.

WV: Right.

JH: He says, "I'll see that you don't get your case in court." Somebody said, "Well, you'll have to go to, get out old Fulton to find a lawyer that won't tell a lie and take a bribe." I went to Hannibal, Missouri, over here, and gave this fella two hundred and fifty cash dollars. He got sick. You know, that's one of the games of lawyers?

WV: To get sick, huh?

JH: You know that? Yeah! That's one of their games!

MV: They say they got sick.

JH: Yeah! He got sick and went home. I don't know whether he got sick enough to die or not. I've never hear from him since. See, all this happened way back yonder. That one's dead and gone. J. Howard Baker sent me a. . . He's a big lawyer they got, when they \_\_\_\_ supposed to be in Fulton. He said, "Old man Howard's lazy and crazy and wouldn't work." I gave him. . . He said—wrote me a letter—"Come to court." Called himself "Court." But I've nothing for court costs. Well, I did.

WV: Did you go to court?

JH: No. This fellow come over here and got sick and went home. As I said, I don't know whether he got sick enough to die or not. I've never seen him, heard of him since. And that's as far as I've got with the whole [business]. You've heard my story now all the way through.

WV: Right.

JH: And I haven't lied to you either.

WV: No, I believe that.

JH: Here is that \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. There's my latest register book.

WV: When did you start these?

JH: [Year I] forgot. I reckon it was \_\_\_\_\_.

WV: Oh.

JH: I told you that I haven't got my signs up. The register book here. Excuse me. I was telling you about Ed Peacock. I was standing there talking to him, Peacock, one day. These two men walked up there with a camera in their hands, and they was taking our pictures, and I asked him where they was from. You asked me when I'd started it. And they'd taken our pictures, and I asked these men where they were, where they lived. And what their names were. I have their names—and address. I got their names. And that's where I started my register book.

WV: Now sometimes you write in here yourself, don't you? You wrote that. It says, "'Jesse, I've had enough a nice visit with you on my 94th birthday and wish you good luck and prosperity.'"—Charlie Noble" It looks like you wrote that. Isn't that your handwriting?

JH: Um hmm.

WV: Did you copy it from somewhere?

JH: No, that's my brother-in-law.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: Charlie Noble, he's a fine man, dead and gone. I'm the only one that's still living, got all this history, you might say.

WV: Yeah.

JH: I'm the only one of the whole bunch that's still living.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: Why do you call yourself The Man with Signs and Wonders, Jesse?

JH: Well, isn't it a wonder?

WV: It is. I'll bet the "signs and wonders" appears in the Bible, too, doesn't it?

JH: Yes. Oh, yes. That's where I got a lot of this stuff, you know. I can't remember what we done with that thing.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: [looking at an sign with obscured lettering—Ed.] . . .that's a 'u'; that's an 'o'.

WV: Right.

JH: There's an 'x.'

WV: What's written on the side here? Somebody's. . .

JH: There's a 'y.'

WV: What does it say there?

JH: I just, that's where I picked that rock up.

WV: Oh! You carved your name in there, didn't you?

JH: Um hmm. There was an earthquake down here, just the side of Booneville, and I picked a lot of my rocks up down there. I've got a big rock up here, in another building. I call the. . . Moon, moonrock.

WV: Moonrocks? Yeah.

JH: Uh huh.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: Do you think the Lord intended you to make these signs?

JH: [I] think it come to me. [Still looking at sign:] See, there's another 'y,' and there's a 'v,' just as plain as you can make it.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .that was taken at the college.

WV: Yeah.

JH: This piece here had the name of each book in the Old Testament, each book and how many words and how many. . . How many chapters and how many words and how many verses.

WV: Right.

MV: Did you read to them?

JH: Hmm?

MV: Did you read to them?

JH: Read?

MV: Is that what you were doing? Were you reading?

JH: We'd taken that. . . Yeah, this fellow come down here, named Charlie Drace.

WV: Was he a student?

JH: Yes. He'd take me out there at the college [William Woods College—WV] one time. I thought I was gonna get a big start with 'em. It just all fell through.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: . . .like skunks, old skunks, staying with me, and. . .

WV: Huh. Does Charlie Drace ever write you anymore?

JH: He used to, used to come visit me very often.

*[Interruption in taping]*

JH: He worked here in town at a. . . What do you. . . Oh, I can't speak what I want to speak. These houses, you know.

MV: Oh, yeah, the new houses.

JH: These new houses. I knew a whole bunch down there, you know, and when they vacated, come along, and I had some good friends, old neighbors lived down there. And when. . . A lot of them left, you know; they didn't have no place [to] move a lot of their stuff. I went down there and picked up a lot of lumber and a lot of this old stuff. Pret' near all of these buildings I built here on this place was built out of old lumber.

WV: Would you help to tear those buildings down?

JH: Yes. That's how come that I find this peg leg, this fella [an itinerant—WV]. . .

WV: That's how you found that, huh?

JH: Yes. He used to sleep down there, just like a dog, you know. Eating a few bones, that's right. I knew him, knew him well. That's. . . I'm gonna try to get all this together some way, someday maybe. [reading:] "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for people to dwell together in unity."

WV: Um hmm.

JH: Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing?

WV: It sure would be.

JH: All over the whole world? It'd just be wonderful. We all got it. "And I'm ready to offer any time a departure." [It is Hamm], Second Timothy, 4:6.

WV: Um hmm.

JH: And I've fought a good fight.

WV: You have fought a good fight, Jesse.

JH: No, I'm \_\_\_\_ [gonna, only] get [started, tired of] these people to [climb]. I'm sorry that got wet. But I've just got so many buildings, you know. As I said, there isn't a building onto my place, but what the thieves and the vandals haven't been in. Even my backhouse up there. (chuckles) Smear'd all over.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: When was that? Just recently?

JH: Yes.

WV: I didn't know that.

JH: Last \_\_\_\_\_, [inaudible]. I'm just gettin' over it right good. I was workin' on this sign that fell off-a my bench out there, and fell across my big toe. Just smashed the whole toenail off.

WV: Oh no.

JH: Clear off of it.

WV: Oh, no!

JH: Here it is right here.

WV: Ah, geez! (chuckles)

JH: I'm gonna put this one out of the road one of these days. This one right here.

WV: That's the one that fell on your toe?

JH: That's the one that fell on it.

WV: Oh, that's a metal one, too. It's really a heavy one. Oh, yeah. [To someone in the group:]. He was working on that the last time I was here.

JH: That's the one fell on my toe.

WV: But you can walk okay now.

JH: Huh.

WV: You can walk all right now.

JH: Oh, yes.

WV: Good.

JH: But it really nicked it. Both toenails fell.

*[End of interview.]*