THOMAS CLARENCE ("SI") EVANS, 1891-1988

This tape was made in 1978. The interviewer is Leonard Morgenstern, Si's son-in-law. Transcribed October 2000. Also present are Mary Lou Morgenstern, his daughter, and Mil Evans, his second wife.

The tapes are abridged to include only material pertinent to Venedocia, plus a few sidelights that relate to Si's career and personality.

L: The first thing I am going to ask you, Si, is, how old are you?

Si: March the 28th, I was 87 years of age.

L: Where were you born?

Si: Venedocia, Ohio, in Van Wert county.

L: Tell us a little about what it was like when you were a boy. How big was the town?

Si: The town consisted of one street, running north and south, and two streets crossing it. The cross streets were very short, and the main street would probably take about five blocks in an ordinary town, city today.

L: Your father was postmaster, is that right?

Si: That's right. He was postmaster in '96 until about the time that he passed away. It was a Republican town, and we had two Democrats living in it, and <laughs> it was easy to make sure that it was a Republican postmaster.

L: Was that his only job?

Si: No, he also. When he came to this country, he went, he expected to go into farming. And, early on the first year that he was here, he had an accident cutting corn, that made him stiff legged, and he couldn't do the

work that would be required on that leg if he were a farmer. And he took up harness making.

L: Is that why they called him “Saddler” Evans?

Si: That’s right. And I was Little Saddler. That was my nickname.

L: Wasn’t there another Thomas. His name was Thomas also, isn’t that right?

Si: Who, my father?

L: Right.

Si: No, David.

L: There was another David Evans in town?

Si: Oh, several of them. Yes. He had no middle name, so he was David Evans, and he took the name Jennings. He was living in Jennings Township, and he took the name Jennings, so he became David Jennings Evans.

L: How many of you were there? You and your sister?

Si: That’s right.

L: What kind of school did you go to?

Si: We had a grade school that was located right by the house, practically in our yard. There were two fences that I had to jump over to get into the school yard, with an alley between those two fences.

L: How many students in the school?

Si: That I don’t remember, but it was a two room school.

L: Did they have a high school?

Si: It became a high school about the time that I was <text missing?> stayed in the eighth grade for. They didn't have grades in those days, but you took the grade school branches and after I had completed what would be the eighth grade two or three times, they had high school, a two-year high school.

L: And how old were you when you left for college?
Si: I left Venedocia when I was about 16 years of age to go to a third grade high school. By third grade, I mean junior.

L: Yes. And from there you went to college?

Si: That's right.

L: How did you pick Park College?

Si: My father's cousin was a professor at Park College, and he wrote my dad and said it would be a good place to send the boy.

L: Who was that?

Si: Silas Evans. Dr. Silas Evans. Later became president of Ripon College.

L: So that's how you got the nickname, Si?

Si: Yes. I got off the train, asked my name. "Evans." "Are you related to Silas Evans?" "Yep." So, from then on, I was introduced as Si, Si Evans.

I think you would be interested, maybe, in the fact that everybody in town [Venedocia] was a member of the Calvinistic Methodist Church, that later became a part of the Presbyterian Church, and there were, wasn't anyone in town that wasn't a member of that particular church. And they all went to church on Sunday.

L: The services were in Welsh, is that right?

Si: Yes, 100 percent. Until about the time that I was probably five or six

years of age, my mother's brother, who was a school teacher, formed a Presbyterian English-speaking Sunday school, much to the dissatisfaction of many of the people. They didn't want English taught. Everything was Welsh. Conversation between people was Welsh. When my sister started school, she knew no English. The conversation at home was all Welsh, and her conversation with the teachers was, she was forced to talk Welsh with her because she knew no English.

L: The teacher knew no English?

Si: Oh, no. The teacher was Welsh. You couldn't get along with a English-speaking teacher there, that wasn't acquainted with Welsh, because many of the kids were just like my sister. They were brought up in a Welsh home, and all of their conversation, parents and children, was Welsh.

L: Did you sing a lot? The Welsh are great singers.

Si: I'm not a singer, no. I <inaudible> not a musician, and I enjoyed the music all right, but I wasn't one of the singers.

L: Did they use to have these big songfests, what do they call them?

Si: Yes, eisteddfods. That was the name of the affair <?> in the community. Then it was the one in the state, where the various choirs would compete, and the big affair, the orwell <?> for the church was the gymanfa ganu which was held on Labor Day, when three services on Sunday, plus the one Saturday night were given over to religious singing. People came from all over the state to Venedocia or Vaughnsville and conducted that big service. No sermons, just singing.

L: I'll bet that was something to hear.

Si: It was (laughs). I don't know whether they carry on now or not, but until a few years ago they were having national gymanfa ganus. I went to two when we were in Billings, from Billings to Salt Lake City where the international conferences were held. Quite an event. For the Welsh people.

L: And then, after you graduated from college, you became a school teacher for a while, didn't you?

Si: No, I stayed out of school between my sophomore and junior years and taught country school for one year, and then went back to Park. When I left Park, I went immediately into YMCA work.

L: Did anything interesting happen while you were a school teacher?

Si: Well, just like all schools at that time, it was the McGuffey readers and I had students from five years of age to 21, and the primer before that for the five year olds. And they had one little fellow, he was sharp, he came across the word *cream.* And he couldn't figure it out. And I said, "Luther, what does your mother find on top of the milk when she goes out to the milk house every morning?" He paused a moment, and he said, "Ants."

Yes, in the olden days, it was customary to toss the teacher out of the window during the school year, especially if it were a man teacher. And my sister came home from church in tears one night, and said, "They're going to throw Clarence out of the window." And she was scared. I thought a lot about it during the night, "Now, how I was going to handle this thing."

So, I got a letter during the few minutes before I went to the school, and there was a letter from some whiskey company with a coupon in it, on *She Was Bred in Old Kentucky Whiskey,* with a coupon of a reduced price. It was yellow colored, a yellow color. And I held that card up when school started, and I said, "I got a peculiar correspondence from the county judge, and he told me that if anybody raised any trouble in school, and I wanted to bring charges, all I had to do was bring this, and they would certainly see that they were punished." And there was nothing done. I wasn't tossed out.

Then, one kid came in, and he threw his dinner bucket at the window sill. He came in late, and did that. I paid no attention to it. Nothing happened. I wasn't thrown out, and it was the first time there wasn't a teacher

thrown out of that window.

L: Now, what was your first job in the Y. That was in Toledo, right?
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Si: ...A fellow rooming in the building that had the nickname Terrible Turk because he just had everybody that watched him fight as the dirtiest fighter that they had ever seen. And they used to practice every afternoon on the gym floor. And the people that would come there to see it. And they thought they were putting on the dirtiest scrap. One fellow was just gouging the other guy's eyes out, and then they stopped, and rested a few minutes. And then they said, "Let's go through that again." And the same thing repeated. And you would just think they were dirty players.

And this fellow was able to make the audience at the fights hate him because they just *knew* he was dirty. Yet the judges never stopped him. And one night at Erie, Michigan, they were going from the fight, and someone in the aisle stabbed this fellow twice. And it was a question for a while he would live or whether he could fight again. But he got back.

L: Was he actually a Turk?

Si: Yes, he was. He was as fine a fellow as you would find anyplace. It was all put on. A good actor! <laughs>

L: Dangerous work, too.

Si: Yes.

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Si: When I was five or six years old, I took part in the first parade in town. We had a "Vote for McKinley" parade from one end of town to the other. Lighted torches, a brass band, <bad tape>

L: What's your first memory, the first thing you can ever remember?

Si: Oh, I don't know. It seems to me I didn't. I just knew everything when I was born. <Laughter>

L: You probably did, too. <Laughter>

Si: Oh, I couldn't answer that question.
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Si: I don't remember what I said.

L: We were talking about the switches.

Si: In country schools back in those days, it was customary to have young fellows as old as 21-22 coming to school after the harvest. They wouldn't start in the school until some time in December. And, they would probably not do much of anything, except mathematics. That was their big subject for the kids in those days, for the older ones. And some of those fellows used a little roughness in their school. The teacher got disgusted one night, or one day, and he sent one of the fellows out to the willow patch near the school to bring back some switches.

He brought back a dandy looking bundle. The teacher grabbed one of them, and struck it across the kid that he wanted to punish, and it cracked. He grabbed another one, and the same thing happened. He grabbed a third and a fourth, and they all cracked just about a foot from his hand. And he examined the bundle, and every one of those switches had been cut by a knife around it so that nothing would happen. And every time one of them cracked, why it was a nice chance for the students to encore the act. The teacher was very much disturbed and I've forgotten the punishment he gave that fellow, but he gave him, I believe it was extra hours. He had in conference <?><tape unclear>.

L: You say the emphasis was on mathematics for the older boys?

Si: Yes.

L: How far did you go in math?

Si: Oh, they went to algebra. Just to algebra, yes.

L: <inaudible>

Si: The fellow who did this knife cutting later developed into a very fine dentist. Probably had some practice on wood. <Laughter>

L, Si: <Question and answer inaudible>

L: Did you ever meet any famous people, famous persons?

Si: <inaudible> all those people, their names don't mean anything to me now on them. Yes, we had a chance to get acquainted. I shouldn't say "get acquainted" but to meet those political people. They all came to Venedocia, because as one person voted in Venedocia, they all did.

My grandmother's brother, was a very strong political man in Ohio, and he was active in the county politics, and they were organizing the first Prohibition ticket. And they were meeting, he was chairman of the group that was planning the Prohibition ticket. And he had the meeting at his home. And it had a nice crowd, and he decided to give the crowd a little refreshment, and he sent his two boys out to bring in some cider. They went out to the ice house and, or the, yes, the ice house, and brought back the cider. And when it was served, why, they thought it was very fine. The boys had gone out to the plant, and the cider was frozen stiff, and they used pokers to melt it. It so happens that when you take cider, hard cider, and melt it, the alcohol comes to the surface. And that was what they brought in to the party. And they all got a little bit soused <laughter> and my mother's brother had no more to do with the organization of the Prohibition Party. He was still a strong prohibitionist, but he didn't use his name because of the jokes that were circulated through the county on him on that occasion.

L: Did the boys know what they were doing there?

Si: Knowing the boys, they did.
L: I know that you have a reputation of being a practical joker.

Si: <laughs>No

L: I guess it may run in the family.

Si: I think they knew.

<Some tape inaudible. Si is coaxed to tell the story of a joke during his Park College days.>

Si: Well, by the calendar, it was April the 1st, and time for a little action, and there were about eight of us discussed what would happen, what we should do, and we decided that the chaplain every time sat in a particular chair after singing a song and a prayer. And I don't know who in the world suggested it, but the screws were taken out of the chair, and match stems held it together.

And it so happened that the acting president was the one who was conducting chapel that day. He sat in that chair, and his feet went skyward. And the audience just yelled. And he got up and he started to speak, and an alarm clock went off. And a second later an alarm clock went off in the belfry, and another one behind the organ. And altogether there were eight alarm clocks went off.

And the following Monday, he called for all the men of the college to meet with him in the auditorium. He went over, and he wanted to know who those boys were that had committed that dastardly offence. And eight of us stood up. And as a result, we had to give up all offices that we had, we weren't allowed to leave our rooms after 7 o'clock the rest of the school year. That was our punishment.[1]

Included in that was all the officers of the college, the student officers. They were, I'm not speaking for myself, but the rest of them were pretty

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[1] Si did not mention here an amusing part of this episode. When the President asked, "What should be done to someone who is responsible for this?" a student said in a questioning voice, "Crucify him?" That student managed to remain anonymous.

good guys.

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Si: About 1891. When I was a baby, about 1891, my father and another man in the community, who had.. He had a brother in the hospital who had lost a leg in a railroad accident. They went to Chicago to visit this man. He got on a train Saturday night. He didn't arrive in Chicago until Sunday morning. Sunday night, they got on a train and came back home. And the same Sunday, they <?> two men from the community got on a train and went to Lima, Ohio to call on their sick sister who was in the hospital.

The following Sunday, the four were excommunicated from the church. And my father would not have admitted that he was wrong, and gone back into the church, had it not been that he didn't want to embarrass my mother, and have her be pointed out as a lady in the community whose husband had been excommunicated.

There was no newspaper read in our house on Sunday. There was no work done of any kind, except my mother would see to it that maybe it would be all right to make banana pie for the boy on Sunday, because the bananas would discolor if they stood over Saturday night. And no meat would be put in the oven, nothing done of that kind. No stories were read, unless they were stories from the Bible.

I got caught one time Sunday morning with *Peck's Bad Boy*, and wham! It was a bad Sunday morning for me. No games of any kind were played on Sunday. The only recreation would be a walk, you were allowed to take the walk. Two of the boys, one of them the doctor's son, took the old man's horse, and drove to Delphos, about seven away to see a ball game on Sunday. And on the way home, the horse slipped and broke a leg. Everybody in the community realized that was punishment to the boys for going to a game on Sunday.

L: When you were a boy, did you do a lot of work around the house, that kind of thing?

Si: I was an expert dishwasher. And the only fights or scraps I can remember were between my sister and me as to which one was going to

wash the dishes. Neither one objected to washing the dishes or drying them, but we did to monkey with the pots and pans, and if we could shuffle it off on to the other, that's what we did. Of course, we took care of a lot of things, like preparing kindling, everything was burning wood at that time, wood or coal, and it required kindling every day.

That was about the extent of it, until I was about 15, 14 or 15 years of age, I went out and worked on a farm during the summers, and received a man's pay for it. I did a man's job, too. <Laughs>.

<End of tape>

This tape was made in June,1984 in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. The interviewer is myself, Leonard Morgenstern, his son-in-law. His daughter, Mary Lou, is also present.

L: Si, I want to ask you about some family history. I have a picture here that looks like your mother[2] and two of her brothers, that was taken in Cincinnati <tape interrupted> ...say they did live in Cincinnati.

Si: Yes. The father was a tailor in Cincinnati

L: And you were telling me about one of her brothers... <Tape interrupted> Mary Lou says that the brother on the left, actually on her left or on the right of the picture, looks like Mary Lou's uncle John. Sorry, Si's uncle John. What do you know about him, Si?

Si: What he did?

L: Yes.

Si: Well, he became a school teacher, and he organized the.. Venedocia was a Welsh town, and there were some English people coming into the suburbs, and he organized a church for those people. First it was a Sunday school class, or a Sunday school, and then later he gave a sermon each Sunday.

L: In English, Mary Lou says.

Si: Yes. With the iron-clad Welshmen, they kind of disliked the English activities coming in to that Welsh community.

L: You say that you had an uncle Tom.

Si: Yes, he was a doctor in Cuba City, Wisconsin, which was a mining town. He was the youngest of the four brothers that Mother had.

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[2] Sarah Edwards Evans.

L: Then, he is probably not on this picture. You were saying that he died young of cancer.

Si: Yes. I don't know what age. I know that his son was very young, and his wife was a milliner in Cuba City, Catholic, while Tom was a Mason, and had the high degree.

L: The 32nd probably.

Si: Is it the 32nd?

L: There are two other brothers, who were they? You said she had four brothers.

Si: Let's just wait just a minute, here, let's get this straight. There's going to be <interruption> You haven't John, have you?

L: Yes, we have him.

Si: He's the school teacher?

L: Right.

Si: And let me get this... The one in Chicago was...

ML (?) That was Dave.

L: Dave was the one in Chicago, you say.

ML: Dave was the one in Chicago, yes.

Si: Oh, Dave was in Chicago with, was it Marshall Field?

L: What did he do?

Si: In the book, in the office.

L: And then there was a fourth brother.

ML: Uncle Reese.

Si: Uncle Reese. He was the Presbyterian missionary that went to China. His wife's name was Eunice. Her father was one of the preachers in the Welsh community around Venedocia. You see, they had a circle around Venedocia, churches about every four miles, and a pastor would take care of two or three of those each Sunday.

L: Now, what happened to him, the missionary in China. Did he stay there all his life, or did he come back?

Si: He came back with, I have forgotten what the disorder was. Some disease that he had taken, they had given him certain medicines to relieve, and in the meantime, some medicine had been discovered that would cure what was wrong with him if he hadn't had this other treatment. With the treatment that they had given him previously, it would just be poison.

L: Do you know what disease that was?

ML: Malaria. I understood that he had malaria, and it was of the brain.

L: Yes, there is a very severe form of malaria that does affect the brain.

ML: That's what I heard.

L: Did it kill him? It probably did.

ML: Yes, he was in a nursing home the last two years of his life.

Si: They had two daughters and a son. The son died about the time he would enter college, and the two girls graduated from Wooster University at Wooster, Ohio, a Presbyterian college.

L: You say one became a nurse and the other became a librarian.

Si: They both died about the same time with cancer.

ML: And another thing, Aunt Eunice, when she came back ill too. She had sprue.
Si: Eunice was a daughter of one of the Presbyterian ministers of that time.

L: A question. I have heard Mary Lou mention Saddler Evans. Now, who was that?

Si: Oh, Saddler was my dad.

L: Oh, that was your father.

Si: Yes. First, he was David Evans. And there were so many David Evanses that they said, “You will have to add something to it.” So, he put J. For Jennings. He was living in Jennings Township, and he knew he could always remember Jennings Township. When he’d use his name as David Evans

L: So, he called himself David Jennings Evans?

Si: David Jennings. But the community, because he was a harness maker, and the only harness maker near there, they called him David Saddler Evans. And later, they just called him Dave Saddler.

L: Dave Saddler. Yes. (Laughs). Now, how many were in his family?

Si: Whose family?

L: Oh, before I forget, your mother’s maiden name was...

Si: Sarah

L: Sarah what?

Si: Edwards

L: Edwards, right. And now let’s go back to your father’s family. How

many uncles did you have on your father''s side?

Si: Let's see if I had any. I don't know.

ML: I don't know either. Was he the only who came to this country?

Si: None of his brothers came. But he had cousins that came, and my nickname, Si, was one of those that was a cousin of my father's. And he was a teacher at Park College, and also he handled the chapel services each day at the college.

ML. And then he went to Wisconsin and became president of Ripon College, I think.

Si: He was president of, what was it, Occidental?

L: Ripon

ML: Ripon, Ripon College in Wisconsin.

L: His name was Silas, is that right?

Si: Yes, well, wait a minute here..

ML: After he went to Park

Si: What was it that he had in, I've forgotten the name of the college. It wasn't Ripon.

ML: Wasn't it? Some town up in...

L: It wasn't Beloit?

Si: No. It was a Presbyterian school. I don't know. I can't remember.

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L: Here's a picture of Ruth. Who is Ruth? Ruth was your sister's daughter,

right?

Si: Yes.

L: And her name was...

Si: <inaudible>

L: She’s not married, is she?

ML: Yes

Si: Yes, she’s still living.

ML: She married...

Si: Ed Williams

ML: That’s her father. She’s the one who married David Hugh.

Si: Wait a minute. Oh yes.

L: Was that his last name? Or was it David Hugh Evans?

Si: David Hugh Evans.

L: But he was no relative.

Si: No. He was a grandson of the Evans who got the land around there from the English government to settle, to develop a settlement.

ML: He’s the one you called Squire Evans.

Si: Squire was the man who founded it, founded Venedocia. They gave him a big area to a man by the name of Jones, I’ve forgotten his given name, and this Squire Evans, he was called Squire, but his name was, oh, what was it? I don’t remember.

L: Now, this was the English government. That would be before the Revolution. Or was it the American government? You call him “Squire” so he must have been English.
Si: Oh yes, Squire.

L: In that case, it was before the Revolutionary War, because after that it was American.

ML: But I don’t think Ohio was settled back then, was it?

L: Well, you see the United States annexed that territory from France, that’s the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.[3] <inaudible conversation>

Si: By golly, I’ve got a paper at home, I believe, that gives the history. Just a newspaper on Venedocia and how it was founded. I think that I still have it, if I haven’t lost it.

L: That would be good.

ML: Ruth had two children, a boy and a girl.

Si: I’m trying to think who the girl was.

ML: Was it Ruth’s son that had the ants <?> that the teacher asked that time, “What do you find on the milk in the morning?” Was that Ruth’s boy? Or was that Dorothy Lee’s?

Si: I’ll think on that.
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L: You were telling the story of Luther, who was Ruth’s son, is that right?

ML: Luther was Ruth’s uncle. He was Uncle Ed’s brother, and he had a farm near Uncle Ed’s.

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[3] This is incorrect. Ohio was already part of the United states in 1803. The Louisiana purchase included territory west of the Mississippi.

L: Ed is Alma's. Ed is his brother-in-law, right?

ML: Ed was Dad's <?> brother.

L: All right, fine. And his son was..

ML: No, not his son. His brother was Luther.

L: All right. And, what happened to Luther?

Si: I taught school, and Luther was in the, what was it, McGuffey's Second Reader class. And he came across the word... He was bright, very bright, but he came across the word c-r-e-a-m. And it stalled him. He couldn't figure it out, what it was. And I asked him, "Luther, your mom has built a milk house behind your home, and is running a tube of water into a trough there, and each day, to keep the milk cool. And when she goes out in the morning, what does she find on top, floating on top of the milk that has been cooled during the night?" And Luther answered, "Ants."

<Problem with tape here. Volume very low>

I wanted to get the inscription on a certain widow's tombstone for her son when he died. It read, "My life has been full of trials and tribulations. As for my future, God only knows." And I made the trip, I was going to have a picture of that, because I knew the boy, he <inaudible>. But the tombstone was weathered, and you couldn't get a picture of it in any description. It ws soft stone that had been worn away by the sands beating on the tombstone.

Q: <inaudible>

Si: Yes, because they didn't <inaudible> didn't treat her son right. And that where she got the idea.

L: What did she mean by that? She thought they didn't treat him right. What did she mean by that? What was the situation?

Si: Nothing. <Inaudible>. He was a little... Well, I won't say that. I was going to say that he was a little off the path, but I don't know.

I don't want that to get out, you know, in Venedocia, because some of his relatives may still be living there. I don't know. (End of tape)