

**Interviewee:**                   **Rentz, Ronald**  
**Interviewer:**                 **Jackie Uhler**  
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**Uhler:**                   Mr. Rentz are you aware that this is being recorded?

**Rentz:**                 Yes, I am.

**Uhler:**                 And is that okay with you?

**Rentz:**                 Yes it is okay with me.

**Uhler:**                 Okay, if you could start just by introducing yourself with a little bit of background.

**Rentz:**                 My name is Ron Rentz, I was born in 1948. I went to Oklahoma horse-shoeing school in the '70s, early '70s and got a degree in farrier science, also got a degree from Stanford University in education. I went to Auburn University for my internship and I worked under two Auburn University farrier's, Hank Joseph was the first one and Joseph Painter was the second. I learned a lot of horse-shoeing tricks for horses with broken legs and broken feet, how to repair 'em. I was teaching school at the time and after I got out of horse-shoeing school I was making more money on the weekends shoeing horses than I was all week teaching school, so I decided to give up school teaching and go by and do horse-shoeing full time. So when I moved from Alabama to Florida that's what I did. I choose the area around Tallahassee because the, I did a horse census and the choices were between Tallahassee and Pensacola. I went to Pensacola first and I found a piece of property and I called the owner and he told me, why sure I could put a bid on it, but the Holiday Inn has put a bid on it also. To get to this person I had to go through about seven or eight secretaries. I didn't know this person at all, but his name was Ed Ball and he owned quite a bit of property, he donated Wakulla Springs to the State and Ed Ball was probably the largest land owner in the state of Florida at the time. Anyway, I didn't get that property so I moved to Tallahassee and started my business here. Charlie Knott called me up one day and wanted me to come do some work on his walking horses. Charlie was a very - a very small man in stature, he was in his late eighties when he called. The year was middle to late '70s, I don't remember exactly. Well I did Charlie's horses, and when I say do 'em, I put shoes on their' feet, I padded them up. He liked to, walking horses was his enjoyment

**Uhler:**                 Is that the same thing as gated horses

**Rentz:**                 Yes, a walking horse is a gated horse. They pad up their feet to situate their front

leg movement, to make them pick their feet up very high. Now Charlie did not like pads but he liked the weights. When you put a weighted shoe on it accentuated the movement of the front feet, but not as much as pads did because pads elevated the foot approximately six to eight inches so the horse, this felt peculiar to the horse so he'd raise up his foot extra high. And this high front foot action is what the people desired in this breed of horses. The pads, putting pads on the horse was a very tedious job and they were constantly coming off. So when you had a horse, when you had a shoe horse that you took every weekend or once a month to a horse show his feet had to be right and the pads had to be right. But fortunately Charlie went from pads to just weighted shoes so this made, this effort a whole lot easier. At first, when I first worked for Charlie he, he would meet me where his horses were and I don't remember what it was called then but now the place is called Falls Chase and it was some property that he owned part of and a friend of his owned the other part and I believe today they're developing that place now. They developed half of it and had a big rock gate around it and that's where I went in to get to his place. It was about fifty or sixty acres and he had a makeshift barn on there, nothing fancy cause he knew it was not permanent it was temporary. And he had about four to five horses there at farm: And I remember he had some college girls in their early twenties who would come ride the horses and exercise the horses, and take care of 'em in exchange they got to keep their horse in his barn and ride on his property. So it worked out for all, for everybody. Now when I met Charlie, Charlie Knott, he was not in good enough health to ride a horse, he could walk fine but he was just very fragile, he was a very small stature man, small bones. He probably was 5'7, 5'8, 130 pounds something in that, with a suit on. And he always wore a suit! Very seldom did he ever take his suit coat off. And I asked him, I said, "Charlie aren't you hot?" And he said, "No, I'm not hot at all!" And I said, "Why do you always wear a suit' And he said, "Well, I'm just so used to it I feel uncomfortable when I'm not in my suit." I said, "Well, I'm glad you like to wear 'em." And he always wore a tie, and sometimes he wore a hat, a felt hat. And it didn't matter how hot it was. So when I would go do his horses, which was about every six weeks, he would meet me there and these young ladies would bring the horses out and he would sit in the shade and tell me things about his horses and we'd talk and probably after a year or two he invited me over to his house, which was in Tallahassee. He was, that's where he lived. Well he told me some interesting facts about that house. One of the things I remember he told me that that's where the Emancipation Proclamation for the state of Florida was decreed by the Yankee soldiers from the North. That was their headquarters when they invaded Tallahassee, now Tallahassee never surrendered, or the state of Florida never surrendered to the North during the Civil War. The Battle at Natural Bridge prevented the North from getting to Tallahassee because they were stopped at Natural Bridge. The governor had sent the state militia which was old men and boys to go protect Tallahassee. He thought they were going to get beat bad so he killed himself, committed suicide the governor did because he didn't have any faith in these boys and yet they held back the north and they came in at St. Marks and they hid at the light house and they hid the glass from the mirrors from the light house in the sand so the north couldn't use it. Anyway - Charlie's house was where the north had confiscated it and used it for the headquarters for the officers. And he showed me all around the house, at that time all the furniture was covered up with sheets. And I said, "Charlie how come all this, all your furniture's got sheets on it?" And he said, "Well my mother wants to make a museum out of this place and she don't want it to get

dirty." And so everything had sheets or plastic on it and everything had a name tag telling where it came from. And some of the furniture was very fancy, it was French and English, I mean brought from England and France over to Tallahassee. But the place that we stayed the most, I never spent the night there but I spent some time there, was uh, I guess it'd be either the bottom floor or the basement, but down there, I remember had a concrete floor

**Uhler:** That's the basement.

**Rentz:** and Concrete walls and on one side of the wall, that'd be the west wall he had a gun rack where he kept his shot gun. Now Charlie was a big, when he was younger, was a big bird hunter. Quail. And in the backyard he had dog pens, of course his dogs were all dead and he didn't have anymore dogs but at one time he had a nice pack of pointers, English pointers and a couple setters. He had pictures of 'em on the wall at that time and he preferred a twenty gauge shot gun because the twelve, he said, kicked too hard. So he, he said he liked twenty gauges and he used double barrels. And I believe he still had the dog pens in the back, yeah they were there when I'd go visit him, of course there were no dogs there and he had something in the back that he'd call his buggy house, or carriage house. Now the house was gone but that's where he kept his hunting buggy which was just a trailer that he pulled behind his suburban with dog boxes in the trailer and when he'd go hunting that's where he'd put his bird dogs, go into the field in his trailer. And he showed me his shot guns and we'd talk about different, different guns and his different loads that he used for shooting quail Different places he had been quail hunting and he told me about turkey hunting. He liked to turkey hunt.

**Uhler:** What were your, when you first met him, what were your impressions of his personality wise?

**Rentz:** Oh Charlie was very talkative! He would talk to you about anything and everything. As a matter of fact, if you had listened he'd just keep talking, you didn't have to say anything, you just had to nod your head every once in a while. And uh, he'd talk away, he was a very happy fella. Don't think he ever married, I don't remember he ever talked about a wife.

**Uhler:** He didn't.

**Rentz:** Well I., I he commented about his, a number two on his tag, I don't know if its his tag or his daddy's tag, but he was real proud of it being a number two. He said the governor had tag number one and either his dad or he had tag number two. So that put him right up there with the governor he felt. He'd talk politics - he'd talk about a sheriff of Leon county that he knew, he was the sheriff at the time his name was Raymond Hamlin and turn it off.

**Uhler:** Alright it's back on.

**Rentz:** Charlie told me about this story when Raymond Hamlin was sheriff, I don't know if it was true, but this is what he said that it was time to vote, voting day and Raymond Hamlin

was at the polls, he was the sheriff of Tallahassee, Leon County. And this young black man came to vote and Raymond handed him a ballot and he said, "Son you can't vote unless you can read this." And the black boy said, "Alright let me see it." So he handed it to him and Raymond Hamlin said, "Well what' does it say?" And he said, "No black people gonna vote today." And Raymond laughed and said, "That's right." And what it was, the ballot, what he asked him to read was in Chinese, he had to read that before he could get a voting ballot, of course he couldn't read Chinese but he knew no black man were going to vote today. And that's what, I don't know if there's any truth to that, but it was a story he told me. About politics and Tallahassee in the day of Raymond Hamlin being sheriff. When we would go, he would ask me to go to these horse shows with him just for company and he would take, he wouldn't ride the horse but then he'd get these young girls to ride it, those young girls that would exercise the horses for him would ride it for him. And they'd have a suit and a helmet, their little costumes to look pretty for the ride and it was hot as blazes and he'd have his suit on - and he drove a big Suburban, a Chevrolet Suburban and he'd pull his horse trailer behind the suburban. I don't think he could see real good because he was all over the road and he was going about twenty-five miles an hour and so either I would drive or that girl would drive. I don't remember the girl's name and it changed periodically I think when a girl would graduate he'd get another one to come, to come work his horses for him. So over the ten years that I knew Charlie he was a very happy man. He never complained about his health, which was not real good. He never complained about hot days, he never complained about anything that I can remember except not winning his horse shows. And he blamed that on the judges being partial to a different color horse. His horses were mostly black, walking horses, long manes and tails. Some of them had a little snip, a white snip on their head or a star. But mostly they were solid black and he'd have 'em shined up, looking real pretty. He'd oil their feet. And he always wanted me to carry extra stuff in case they lost, extra equipment, in case they lost a shoe. They never did, but I took it for him anyway.

**Uhler:** Did he have a favorite horse that you remember?

**Rentz:** No I don't remember one particular favorite horse, he like them all. He thought they were all winners. His trailer could only hold two, of the four or six horses he had in his barn he always carried two whether, even if only one was going to be showed, he thought it balanced out the trailer better. And he'd say it'd be good experience for the young horse. Well he was in his late eighties and he's trying to bring up a young horse to go to horse shoes that he knew he'd never go to. But that's what he always looked ahead with a positive attitude. That's what I remember most about Charlie Knott, he had a positive attitude. About everything that he did with me.

**Uhler:** When you went to his house did you ever, I know he used to cook quail dinners a lot, did you have, partake in any of that?

**Rentz:** When I went to his house it was usually in the eve, not at night, it wasn't dark, it was between meal time so I never had a meal with him at his house, we ate at the, on those horse shows. Oh an he'd always pack a lunch, he was big on that, he didn't want to eat any strange

foods he said, so he'd pack a lunch and he'd pack enough for all of us to eat. And it was, it was a well done lunch, it wasn't just a sandwich. When it was a sandwich it was a well made sandwich, he was real proud of his cooking abilities, though I never had a whole meal from him, that he had made.

**Uhler:** The house, have you been back to the museum since it's become a museum?

**Rentz:** No I haven't.

**Uhler:** I was just wondering if you had seen any, if they had changed it a lot.

**Rentz:** No I haven't been and when I did go to the house, I remember going to the living room but we'd stay there for a short time, go into the kitchen and then take some snacks down to the basement, that's where he liked to hang out. I think because all his hunting stuff was down there and that's what we talked about most of the time.

**Uhler:** I think he lived down there too, I think his bed was down there.

**Rentz:** It could have been.

**Uhler:** He urn, the people that I talked to before said that he lived down there, he even used to raise quails when he did his quail hunt, he raised 'em down there.

**Rentz:** Yeah, not in the basement. It was in, he had a little back yard, and he had a pen back there and that's where he raised his quail with his dogs, when he had dogs. And I, I came in right at the end of the dogs, he might have had one or two the first year or two I knew Charlie, but he didn't raise, he never had quail, but he told me, he never had quail when I was there, but he told me that's where he raised them. Said they were too hard to find out in the wild, but he raises 'em, give his dogs something to find. He lost interest in those quail, he said they're too easy to hit, the pen raised quail they didn't fly like a wild one. If he can him 'em they're too easy. He uh - I think he stopped raising those quail in the late, or early '80s.

**Uhler:** Did he ever talk about his family? His mom or dad?

**Rentz:** He talked about his mother, when I'd asked him about that furniture all covered up and tagged. He said, "she's labeling everything, I can't sit in any of the chairs cause she's got labels on all of 'em and plastic on it." And then one evening, he gave me a book, on poems that his mother had written. He read some of the poems to and then gave, autographed the book and gave it to me. And, but he gave it to my wife, told me to take this home to her, so I did, a book on poems. He didn't date it though he did sign it.

**Uhler:** So it was a good experience working with -

**Rentz:** Yeah Charlie was a lot of fun. I enjoyed going to his barn, doing his horses and enjoyed the Saturday trips to the horse shoe with him. He was always a happy fella, easy to get along with, he didn't have a bad word for anybody. He was an easy man to know. And always a joy on the telephone. Except you didn't want catch him at supper, when you were eating, cause he'd talk to you thirty minutes just to set up an appointment. That's about all I can remember.

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