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Interview with William Frank, newspaperman, in the News Room of the News-Journal Co. in Wilmington, Delaware, March 15, 1974, by Steven Schoenherr. (This is the second interview with Mr. Frank.)

Q I have a list of questions here, if you want to first of all more or less amplify on some things you touched on in the last interview. First of all, how many times were you sent out of town on assignments in the '30's and '40's? In other words, you talked mainly about your assignments in Wilmington, and I just wondered to what extent the reporters from the paper, the Every Evening and...

A Yeah. Well, just familiarize me with the questions, and then I'll...

Q Well, I have a list of questions and we could just take them one by one.

A Oh, O.K. How many times was I sent out of town--were reporters sent out of town in the '30's and '40's? They were sent rarely out of town. They were sent mostly--if they were sent out of Wilmington, if that's what you mean--they were constantly being sent downstate, down to the Legislature, to Georgetown and down through Kent and Sussex County. But actually rarely did we leave the state. They left the state to go to national political conventions, that would be the Republican and the Democratic conventions. They never went abroad. I think I may have been the first reporter who was ever gone abroad on any kind of assignment. So it was really parochial.

Q Where did you go on that assignment?

A Well, I went to Vietnam, and then I went traveling with the National Guard--that's after World War II. With the National Guard I went to Tokyo and Panama, to Germany....Up until the last ten years, let's say in the Sixties, up until then, through the 18, 1950's, rarely did a reporter ever go far afield. The only place he would go would be to a national convention. And then in the '60's we began broadening out more. They started to send reporters down to Washington and then to New York more and more often--that would be a regular thing to go to New York, Washington, Philadelphia, in addition to the national conventions. And then they...then I started to go abroad in 1960. The first trip I made to Israel and came back and wrote a series of articles, and then I went with the National Guard to Tokyo, and then I went to Panama on a People-to-People's mission--to write about it, not as part of the mission--and then twice I went to Vietnam to do a home-town stories about Delawareans in Vietnam. And now more and more reporters have gone to--particularly those reporters writing travel stories, reporters have gone off writing cultural stories. Matter of fact, when I was a kid reporter, let's say in the '30's, if we wanted to make a long-distance call, let's say to New York, it was a big discussion in the office--I mean, gee whiz, this was a big deal, to call New York. And remember when they had the ping pong players over in Peking? I'm sitting in the News Room--I forget what year that was, '68 or '69--I'm sitting in the News Room and the Metro Editor--Fred Hartmann, who was then Metro Editor, he tells
one of the rewrite men, Bill Crosland, he says, "Bill, one of
these men on that team is from Wilmington--has some Wilmington
close connections. See if you can get Peking on the telephone." You
know, that knocked me for a loop, you know. Back in the early
days, if you wanted to call New York, you had to get all kinds
of permission. And here now we're calling Peking. So we all can
make all kinds of telephone calls, all over the world, now...
in contrast to the early days when we were extremely parochial.
And their decision was to send me to Vietnam twice...and of
course that took in trips to Hong Kong and Bangkok. And then of
course I went to Israel several times. I went there right after
the '67 war. And people now go all over, in contrast to what it
was in the early days. It's very usual now to hear a reporter
just casually say, "I'm on my way to Washington," or "I'm going
out to Texas," or "...going out to California," or things like
that. We've broadened out a great deal.

Q  But reporters were sent downstate?
A  Oh, yes, it was always downstate. See, now the first time I ever
went downstate was in 1928. I think I went down there to cover
a hanging, in Georgetown. But I went down there by train, what
they called the Delaware Road train.

Q  Was that the B&O?
A  No, the Delaware Road was an old railroad that went right down
smack through the center of the state and was later taken over
by the Pennsylvania, Penn Central. It's now only a freight...
freight road now. But in those days people would commute
regularly, you know. Before my time, they'd commute. Matter
of fact, reporters always traveled by train in those days, what
they called the Delaware Road--it'd leave Wilmington, it would
stop at Parnhurst, Hares Corner, New Castle--all those little
places along the line--and then these politicians would get on
and many a reporter would just circulate through the train get-
ing information. Before my time, I understood that it was a
common thing for a reporter from Wilmington to meet the Dela-
ware Road when it came up, let's say late in the afternoon, and
meet people coming up from Dover and find out what happened
down there and things like that. But I remember going down to
this hanging in 1928 on the Delaware Road train. I also re-
member going down to Hoke Orchard, where the Nanticoke
Indians have their association, and they had a pow wow on
Thanksgiving and I went down by train. But later on the train
kind of went out of whack--passenger service--and then of course
we got automobiles. I don't know what's going to happen now.
but it was very common to move up and down the state, but rarely
outside the state...rarely outside the state, in the '30's. In
the '40's we got a little different and a little bit more, but
after World War II we really broke out the tracers.

Q  When did the paper subscribe to the AP and UPI services?
A Well, let me see. The Every Evening, which was at 5th and Shipley, always carried the Associated Press—for years and years and years. The Evening Journal at 4th and Shipley carried the United Press. Then when the papers merged, they took over both and they even subscribed to the International News Service, which is now...and they now subscribe to the New York Times; they subscribe to Special Service; they subscribe to the Christian Science Monitor. The big thing, the big incident—and I wasn’t around; I was just a kid then--was the False Armistice. I don’t know whether it was November the ninth, 1918, when the United Press said that there was an armistice. And all hell busted loose at the Evening Journal at 4th and Shipley. Up at 5th and Shipley, which was carrying the AP, they had no word on any armistice. And people were tugging back and forth and back and forth. The UP stuck by its guns and the AP stuck by its guns, and that came to be known as the False Armistice. Then on November the 11th came the official word that there was an armistice, see. But the AP was a more conservative service, which fitted in with the Every Evening, which was a very highly conservative newspaper. The UP was a lot more flamboyant, which fitted in with the mood of the Evening Journal. And then later on, as we got new blood coming in, and then we subscribe now to practically everything. We have all kinds of columnists now, and we have the New York Times Service, we have the Christian Science Monitor Service, we have the UP and the AP, we have what is now the INS, we have all kinds now.

Q You mentioned the stringers last time. Did a lot of reporters do this kind of thing? Was this common among reporters?

A Yes, very common. Even before my time, let’s say a reporter in Wilmington, let’s say in the 19—let’s put it in the World War I era, for example—reporters around that time would get maybe $5.00 a week. And they were encouraged—they told me—they were encouraged to correspond for other papers. The other papers that were very popular in Wilmington at that time were the Philadelphia Record and the Philadelphia North American and the Public Ledger of Philadelphia. And they were encouraged, there was nothing wrong about it—they would give their stories also to these papers. They represented them. And the Inquirer and the Ledger and the North American were very popular here. And it got to be that the stories about the DuPonts or other protected Sacred Cow families that the local papers wouldn't use, they'd appear in the North American or the Record. Now when stories got real hot, then those papers would send their own men down. So everybody was encouraged to string for other papers. This continued on up to a little past World War II. We had a City Editor on the Evening Journal by the name of Harris Samonisky, and you'd call in—you know, you'd be out on a police story—and you'd call and say Harris, I have this and this and this. He says, "O.K. Before you come in to write it, call the Bulletin for me." You know it was a kind of a peonage system. You called the Bulletin and he got paid—you didn't get paid. He kept the money, see. And then it got to be that some of the reporters wouldn't call in anymore because they didn't want to be burdened—but they weren't getting paid at all. There were reporters who corresponded for the Inquirer. So now in
recent years, the past 10 or 15 years, it's been stopped. Right now we are not permitted to correspond for any competing paper. There's nobody here now who corresponds for the Inquirer or the Bulletin or the Baltimore Sun, but we are permitted to string for the New York Times or the National Observer or Time Magazine—we're permitted for that, those big metropolitan papers...but not for the local papers. We're not permitted to do that at all. And they got paid—whatever they got paid, they got paid—oh, yeah, also there were men who represented the UP and the AP. Now the AP didn't pay because they expect the news is a sharing device. All AP papers were supposed to share their news with another. But if you were a stringer for the United Press or the International News Service, you got paid by them. And usually you got a stipend and then any extra stories or special attention, you'd get paid extra. But now it's all frowned upon. We're not supposed to do any publicity, either. You were encouraged in those days, up until 1950, let's say, to do publicity. We had men who were covering politics and doing publicity for the political parties. We're not permitted to do that. And we have to be very careful now, even what voluntary P.R. jobs we may have with—non-paying jobs—with agencies. But reporters were. Now we also had men out—men and women out in the field, who covered for us. They were stringers, too. And they would call in or send in their copy from us. We'd have a correspondent in New Castle, we had a correspondent in Holly Oak, we had a correspondent in Marshallton and Dover and those places. They would send us stories then, and then they were paid $2.00 a column or maybe $2.50 a column, whatever the rate was. And you could see the editors measuring, you know to clip out—"This is Miss So-and-so's story." I think that's where they got the word stringer, because they measured by the column. And bit by bit we did away with them, and then we had to establish bureaus, where we had our own men...and our own staff. I don't think we have any stringers anymore. I doubt it very much. We have a Dover Bureau; we have a Georgetown Bureau.

Q What about how you started your column—your own particular column. I think it was called the "Man About Town"?

A Yeah. There was a "Man About Town" many years ago, and it was started by a man named Barton Cheyney, and he used to be City Editor of the Every Evening. And he started a little column called the "Man About Town," unsigned, and this was to be little odds and ends of pertinent news. And then when the papers merged, I began to take it up...and just like little fillers...they were little news items that couldn't fit into a news story, but would fit into little odds and ends. And then gradually more and more I became opinionated, and I began to develop, and then finally a fellow by the name of William...became Executive Editor. This was in the late '40's. And then he decided to put a byline on it, so I had my byline. So I ran that until I quit the Evening Journal in 1948. And then somebody else took it up. And then when I came back they continued a column by me in the Morning News. So that's how I started. There had been some local columnists, but nothing as regularly as that. There had been political writers who would write columns of special
analytical stories, but it wasn't a regular column.

Q Yeah. You could say Cheyney then would be the first local columnist?

A Barton Cheyney would be the first local columnist, and he worked for the Every Evening, yeah.

Q And then you took over his column.

A I took over that title, "Man about Town," yeah. And it was supposed to be a chatty thing at first. Then it became highly opinionated and then it developed, like I say, maybe some kind of a character. And now I continue in the Morning News. When I went back to the Morning News in 1950, I think they called it "Frankly Speaking." And now it's just "Bill Frank." And now it's exceedingly opinionated.

Q What are some of the general problems about writing this kind of column? Do you get a lot of flack from your editor when you come out with a very strong opinion?

A No. When Charles Hackett was president of the company, before he died, he would—I used to have this room for my office—and he'd come across with a proof—sometimes every other day, you know—shaking his head, and he'd want to know if I could modify this. He said I didn't have too, you know. Sometimes to keep him happy, if it didn't change my viewpoint, I figured, hell, I might as well keep him happy, it just doesn't change my point of view. But I've never had a column turned back—except twice. One was some years ago, slapping the hell out of the Catholic church for a land grab. But that's about all. But they don't... now just the other day the Executive Editor came out and said that he didn't agree with me on total amnesty. I came out for total unconditional amnesty. He said he didn't agree with me. He believes in amnesty of some sort, see. But I said to him, "Look, you can't have amnesty of some sort. It's very nice and all that, but it just wouldn't work." You know, with all these 20 or 30 thousand fellows in Canada, and as many as 75,000, 100,000 in underground United States, you know, it just can't work. You might as well forget the whole damn thing. Well, he never disagreed with me. I mean, he disagreed with me, but never made me change. Sometime they've had an editorial socking the hell out of me.

Q The paper's editorial writer?

A Yeah, sometimes.

Q Is there any other time? You said twice they were thrown back. The Catholic Church and...

A One was the Catholic Church, and the other was I bitterly supported, very strongly supported a Democratic politician and the editor of the editorial page was just up in arms about it. You
know, I don't like to invoke principle unless you really have to. So I figured, look, I want to keep on working, and I didn't want to pack up and go home, so I said, "O.K., you're the boss." After working in a newspaper office as long as I have, you get to be disciplined—"If you don't like it, I'll get something else." So I said, "O.K., just scrap it, I'll write something else." But that was only two cases. Of course you have certain bounds, and I must say that you're conditioned by taste and you just can't go wild.

Q Do you get a lot of mail? Have you gotten a lot of mail on your columns?

A Well, it depends on the subject. Recently we've gotten a hell of a lot of mail from the police who object to the use of Tom Winsett. This has been a really tough week from the University, who've been objecting to my criticism of them. And then I would get an awful lot of mail about taking a stand on pro-abortion—that's criticizing the Catholic Church. So it comes and goes. And I must say that sometimes I come in—I try to come in the morning, before I write the column, I try to get angry at somebody. And then you loosen up and once in a while you write a nice nostalgic pablum piece, and then you get angry at somebody. And sometimes I get very angry.

Q How did you get interested in Delaware history—local history?

A Well, I was born in New York, I came here—I tell these old biddies, you know, they kind of kid me about being born in New York—I said, "You know, I came here when I was six years ago. I came here," I tell them, "the moment I heard of Delaware." I said, "Here I was on the east side of New York, and I heard about Delaware and said, 'Hey, Mom, let's go to Delaware.'" That sort of knocks them for a loop. Well, my mother married—my father died and my mother married, and I came from New York and lived on the east side of Wilmington. And then somewhere in school, in the grade school, I came across a delightful little book by a woman named Katharine Pyle, who was a sister of Howard Pyle, the artist, and she wrote a little book called, "Once Upon a Time in Delaware." It's a little simple story, well told, about Delaware history. And I was fed on that. And this began to prop up my curiosity. And then I began to wonder, you know, about where you lived. That book started me on my way. And I got very much fascinated in Delaware history. It's very interesting about Delaware history, because it's a small state. It's not as complex as New York state or California. It's a real small state and the history could be confined. And there's a certain amount of snobbishness about it, because I discovered that the average Delawarean knows nothing at all about Delaware history...practically nothing. They still say that Caesar Rodney up here was riding to vote for the Constitution, and they're absolutely ignorant, these Delawareans. They're so proud of a history of which they know nothing at all about. And...but I'm not a researcher—I mean, I'm not a scholar. I called Dr. Munroe last night—she
went to Turkey this morning--I called him last night about something, and I said, "You know, all I want to know is, can I quote authorities." It's really rank journalism, what I write about history is rank journalism, but I believe that's all people want to read. And I think, like they read this little book, "Once Upon a Time in Delaware." It's just a simple little story. That's what they'll read. They won't read the big tomes or the big scholarly things. So I just pick these people's brains apart. But as long as I can say when I write a story with some historical background that this historian said this, this book said this, this book said that...and so if anybody accuses...I don't do original research. They do research and they write it, pretty dull, and then I like to take it out and sort of jazz it up, see.

Q So you are reading these heavy tomes that other historians are writing?

A Oh, yes. I read Munroe's heavy book on McLane--it'll never be a best seller--and I read Sharpe's history and Conrad's history, and I know where this stuff is. But I never go down to the original--that's too damn much work, you know. I mean, as long as--there's another damn good historian named Harold Hancock--as long as I can say...for example, a couple of years ago I wrote a story of Delaware's day of independence, which is June the 15th--that was the day when Delaware declared her independence, 1776--and all I needed was a reference to an outstanding historian, which happened to be Munroe...so nobody could come back...I'd say, "Don't come back at me--hell, go to Munroe. He's the number one Delaware historian." I think he is today. There are only a handful of really good Delaware historians, but they write so pedantically. Nobody's going to read that stuff--a few people will, but not anybody, see. And so I just took that and took something else and jazzed it up and said, "Look, our independence day is--we're having a bicentennial in...June the 15th, 1976 is Delaware's bicentennial of independence." I just pick it up. Sometimes I'll read a little thing and make a note. And when I read through history I'll see if there's a commemorative date, you know, a 150th or 200th anniversary, you know, and make something out of that. But I don't do any original research. I collect. I collect an awful lot of stuff.

Q Someone said you have the largest collection of books on Delaware. Do you think this is true? You have over 1,000 books...

A I've got about 1,000 books; I must have about 2,000 pamphlets. Now the pamphlets are really something. Those pamphlets are all indexed...the most amazing thing about me--the only ordinariness about me. Now last night--I'm writing as of today a story about Washington's headquarters in Wilmington, see--and last night I was doing some research and I knew I had a pamphlet called "Washington in Delaware," published in 1926. And by god, you know, I could go to that damn index of mine, card file, and I could find it. Just like that. I'm amazed at myself. I got about 1,000 Delaware books--not the best. I mean, they're all
work books—you know, they're all marked up and their bindings are used and all that sort of stuff. Sometimes a book comes out and if I have the money, I buy two copies, one for kind of an investment and one to work on, because I'm always working with the books. I must have about 1,000 books. I wouldn't say I've got the largest collection. It's amazing the historians like Leon DeValinger, used to be archivist, and Munroe, it's amazing how little books they have. Now there's one writer who writes—most prolific writer in the state on Delaware history is a fellow named Westkager, C. A. Westkager—he puts out a book every year...the dullest goddamned thing I ever read. But his books—he wrote about Indians; he writes about the Brandywine; he writes about Brandywine Springs; he writes about Richardson Park. He's done a lot of work about the Swedes and the early English...but Jesus, you have to read every damn line to get what the hell he's saying, you see. But he does write, I mean, there's no question about it—he turns out a book practically every year. My favorites are Munroe, both in reading and presentation. Another favorite is a fellow named Harold Hancock, who does and has been doing a lot of research. I've just been picking him apart—oh Jesus, I'm just feeding like hell on him.

Q You mean you found Hancock making a lot of mistakes?
A No, no.
Q You're just using a lot of what he wrote?
A I use a lot of what he writes, yeah. See, but then you get up and you talk as if you know what the hell you're talking about, and people say you're an authority—and I kind of wince at that. I'm really not, except that I know where the stuff is. That's all, I know where the stuff is. Now these pamphlets I have is a tremendous collection of pamphlets, because you see in the past 10 years we've been deluged with pamphlets. The only difference between a pamphlet—is hasn't got as much value on the book market because it hasn't got a hard binding. But we've been deluged with pamphlets—all kinds of reports from the University of Delaware, and every agency is turning out reports galore. And I've been trying to save as many of them as possible. I have stuff that the University Library doesn't have. It's accidental, because I won't pay too much for a book.

Q But you bought McLane's book, huh—Dr. Munroe's book on McLane—that was a hefty price to pay...
A No, I got that for a review. And I got a Wyeth book also for review. But if I have to, I buy it—see, if I have to. Then over the years, since the 1930's, I've been getting a lot of catalogs, book catalogs, particularly Americana, and by reading and reading and reading...and also, not being able to buy the books—which were very cheap in those days, they're cheap now, looking back on it, but the amount of money one had available...see, if a book cost $6.00 in those days, let's say in the '30's, I still didn't have enough money to buy a book for $6.00. Now
of course I've got money to buy a $6.00, but the book is now maybe $15-$20.00, see. But what I was doing, I was snipping out these items from these catalogs and putting them on cards. So when you do that, you begin to evaluate a book. Now, if you'd ask me about the value of a book now, I would say, well, Scharf's history in good condition, you could get $200.00 for it. Conrad's history in good condition, three-volume, you could probably get $85.00 for it. I mean I'm just happy to know these prices...they're somewhat...but I see people buying an awful lot of stuff now, and paying fancy prices for them, which really knocks you for a loop. But I must have about 1,000 books. But I don't know if it's the biggest collection or not.

Q But your interest has continued in Delaware history?
A Oh yeah.
Q Who else on the paper writes on Delaware history? W. Emerson Wilson...
A He used to. He's now retired. I told you about my retirement--pseudo-retirement. Well, he retired, but he writes once a week. And I don't know about his source. He gets a pretty interesting source, but he doesn't jazz it up like I would like to. He doesn't jazz it up at all. He claims that my approach to history is debunking history. Well, maybe so. But I like to jazz up and he doesn't jazz up. He's about all. Now we have a Managing Editor here, Harry Themal, who is very much interested in history, but as a Managing Editor he doesn't do much writing. But that's about all. There's nobody else writing about Delaware history.

Q There was one person I wanted to ask you about who wrote. I read some of the articles on Delaware--Al Cartwright? He seemed to write several articles on history.
A He does? I didn't know that. He's basically a sports writer.
Q His A La Carte column?
A Yeah, he writes it now, yeah. I didn't know it was history--Delaware history--is it?
Q I don't know...he seemed to write--he wrote an article on Charlie Rutledge, who was one of the early reporters.
A Yeah, Rutledge was here...Charlie Rutledge, yeah...well, they would be more reminiscences of reporters he had known. Charlie Rutledge was here in the 1940's and '50's. That would be reminiscences, things like that. Now we've had some centenials. We had a centennial of the Every Evening and we put out a special edition. I did all that, see, the history of the paper.
Q You wrote most of that centennial edition?
A Yeah, I wrote all that. Got it all together, planned it. And then I'm keeping kind of an archives of all the papers. I have
all the files and dates, and anything happens, I put it in the file. I haven't indexed it yet, but I have a lot of stuff on the history of the papers.

Q Do you think you'll write something on that?

A When I get around to it. Now there's another fellow named Henry Sholly. Henry Sholly used to be a newspaperman. He's now a clerk in the U.S. District Court. And he has collected a lot of data, bare facts about Delaware newspapers. And if you contacted him--he doesn't have the color or the personalities or the heartbeat of these papers, but he has a pretty good index of the papers.

Q You mentioned one thing before, briefly, your contacts--how you get your information about your column. Can you say anything about the contacts in the past?

A Well, I'm in a peculiar position, and sometimes it scares me and I think sometimes it may give the editors a little concern. I like to think of myself basically as a reporter rather than a columnist, and I go out for a story, and I'll cover a story and try to write it as objectively and impartially as possible. Then I'll come back and then comment on it in the paper in my column. Say for example that you belong to an agency and I'm covering the agency, I'll try to write a straight news story. Then I'll come back and knock the living hell out of it, you know--or praise it, you see what I mean. This is a weapon that as of right now nobody seems to have. They get kind of an envy out there. And sometimes I'll go to a news event, not covering the news event, because somebody else will be covering it, just to get the background. Now my contacts for the column are the normal news contacts I have. Generally speaking I--little by little with the reorganization of the state government, some of the regular contacts have been dried up. But today I still keep in contact with people in Mental Health and Highways and Prisons and stuff like that. Now if I have nothing to do, I'll sit at home or here and just keep calling people, you know, just to chew the fat. It's what I call servicing your accounts, you know, just chew the fat and talk to them. See, we don't have that anymore like it used to be. It used to be that a reporter came in, let's say to the Morning News, he came in at 2:00 and he saw his assignments. He had what's known as a beat. And then he'd check that and maybe chew the fat here for a while, and then he'd go out on his beat. And that meant seeing so-and-so, so-and-so, so-and-so, so-and-so, 'til about 6:00. Then he'd come back, write his stories, go to dinner, and then go out and cover evening assignments. And the same thing on the afternoon paper. You'd come in at 7:00 and then you'd go out and make your contacts, you know, go to the offices or call 'em by telephone, then come back and write your stories. But now we don't have any assignments. But I still hang on to that. And so I'll sit down....See, also now reporters have what they call areas of responsibility, general area--we have a reporter here who covers urban affairs, and that's from here to there, see--they all have areas. And then on the bulletin board of the Metro Editor, my name is--they just call it "a man of
all seasons"--or "reporter of all seasons." Sometimes I'll intrude in somebody else's bailiwick. Or like a black man will call me, and I'll go out and cover a story in his area--somebody else's area. I don't cover courts the way I used to. I used to cover courts--I don't cover courts now. But some lawyer will call me and say, "Look, I've just filed a suit." And then I'll go out and get the bill. But then I always tell the reporter who covers the court that I got it, you know--you let him know in advance.

Q Now reporters are very specialized, isn't this right?
A They're highly specialized--more specialized than they ever were before, yeah.

Q When do you think this changed--when did the general reporter become more specialized? Can you pinpoint this?
A Yes, it came--the big revolution came here in the '60's...in the '60's with people like Richard P. Sanger, Dixie Sanger, who is now the president of the company. And then it continued to be specialized when John Craig became Executive Editor. It's going all over the country now. The complaint of an old reporter like me, virtually what's happening now is the papers are becoming more like essays.

(Conversation interrupted here--picks up below.)

Q Do you use a little cassette machine sometimes?
A Yeah. I really don't like cassettes, but they're the coming thing, and once in a while a cassette will get all screwed up, and then it's really a goner. See if that thing gets screwed up, you can just snip it out. I used the first wire recorder. Did you ever use a wire recorder?

Q Really? That must have been right after World War II?
A 1948. I was with WILM, and in those days if you went--I was heading the news department--and in those days if you went out on what they call an outside thing, like the Hotel DuPont, you had to use telephone lines, and then you would type into the studio, you see. And then they'd have what they called the electrical transcription. So one day the owner of the station, who was also the owner of a Chester paper, named Alfred Hill, had a picnic up at Swarthmore, and he took us into his garage and he showed us with great pride a little black box. And this was a General Electric wire recorder. And he showed us how to--and everybody went wild about it except the engineers, cause they questioned the quality. And I said goddamn it, you didn't have to question the quality as long as you understand what a man was saying. Of course you know they were getting stuff from Europe where the quality wasn't any good anyway. But in other words with this wire recorder immediately we could see that you could take it--it was a little heavy, but you could take it, go anyplace in the world you wanted, plug into the AC current, and you could tape the guy, then come
back, and then transfer it to an electrical transcription. And it became quite popular. And then the WDEL then countered with a little small wire recorder. Once the wire—one time I had an experience where the wire broke. And to repair it you had to tie it in a knot, and pulled it—but it didn't break very often. Then a year after that the tape recorder came in. And then we had various kinds of tape recorders. And then we'd go around with these—this is a Wollensak?—and then there was another one that was very popular—like a workhorse, you know—and then came the cassettes. The cassettes are all right, provided you don't buy a cheap cassette and provided you keep the—clean the heads, you know, and provided the tape doesn't get wound up, you see. But you see with a cassette, if you buy a cheap cassette that runs an hour, you're out of luck. Because you can't trust it because you don't know that things won't get fouled up on you. I've had tapes foul up on me on cassettes. And the best thing I could do would be to straighten it out as much as possible and then transfer it to another one. But see I was doing some of these things in interview with people. Oh, I'd save a lot—we'd go out on a press conference, I'd save a lot of cassettes and later on give 'em to the Archives as part of their oral history. But then when you go down there they don't know where in the hell it is.

Q O.K., can you tell me something—you mentioned your radio—can you tell me about some of your experience in radio? How you got started in that?

A Yeah. While I was on the Evening Journal, during the war, I was doing radio shows for the—down at the Wilmington Airport there was a thing called the Second Bearing Command, which was sending ships over to Europe three or four times a week. And I was doing propaganda shows for them on WDEL, writing scripts. And then we were doing various kinds of shows.

Q What is WDEL?

A That's another radio station. One of the leading radio stations in town—in Wilmington.

Q This was the only station in Wilmington at that time?

A Well, kind of an orphan subsidiary was WIIM, which later became independent. And then I was active in the Wilmington Drama League and they were doing radio plays—it was a great era of radio plays. Then I quit the Evening Journal and went to New York. And then there was no jobs worthwhile there, and then I heard that this fellow Hill of Chester had bought WIIM and made it an independent station and wanted to develop a news—radio news bureau.

Q When was this, about?

A '49. So I came back here and he hired me, and then I developed a news bureau for WIIM. We were doing news shows and special interviews. In those days they had a 10-minute national news
and 15-minute local, and then we had special productions and things like that. And then I got tired of radio and then came back to the News Journal papers. But while there I got a lot of exposure to radio. Quite a few fellows around here have been exposed to radio--like Themal, Fred Hartman, Tom Grier--they've all been involved in radio news. But I didn't like radio news, because once you broadcasted it, it was gone. You didn't have a clipping. So what we were doing, to sort of compensate for that, sometimes we would type the news broadcast on special paper and send it to somebody, said, "Last night we brought this about you." But it didn't have the clipping--it wasn't permanent. But I continued on with a column--five minutes of commentary. I continued on there on WILM as I still do now, three times a week.

Q That's been going ever since the '50's?

A Yeah. Three days a week, five days a week--three times a day, five days a week. When I was with the radio station entirely, it was sponsored. But now it's not sponsored. The radio station just pays me a flat fee. I don't know whether the News Journal likes to have you sponsored or not, but anyway I'm not sponsored. But I do it three times a day, five days a week--in the morning, in the afternoon--noon and late in the afternoon.

Q The way you report your stories, was it different than when you were doing reporting for a newspaper?

A Oh yeah. Reporting for radio was entirely different. First of all you don't have to be so careful about the spelling of a name. Your most important thing is how you pronounce a name. You don't have as much time. You can't do anything in depth--even when you had 15-minute news, you couldn't do too much in depth. You just gave sort of the cream. But to compensate for that, we developed something on a Sunday of the Review of the Week, in which we discussed more about the local news. We emphasized local news. We developed a program on Sundays called the Review of the Week in which we discussed more about what went on. And then every damn day for two years we dramatized--we had a dramatization of some local event called "Assignment Wilmington." They'd be written--let's say they'd be written on a Thursday, we'd have a rehearsal on Friday morning, a production Friday afternoon--air time was 7:15. It was a fantastic thing. It was like a public service also. For example, if the March of Dimes wanted something, why I'd bat out a script. It got so that you could tell right smack to the button 13½ minutes. If it got a little bit too complex, then we'd have a longer rehearsal. And the actors were usually staff members of WILM and occasionally we'd bring in somebody from the Wilmington Drama League. But I shudder when I think that that went on absolutely every damn day, five days a week, for a couple of years. We had an opening called "Assignment Wilmington" and stuff like that.

Q Who are some of the outstanding characters you remember--associated with those early days of radio in the '50's--the '40's and '50's?
A  Well, Mr. Radio in Wilmington was always a fellow named Gorman Walsh. He was always Mr. Radio. He was with WDEL, and he was always sought out by the establishments—all agencies around here would always have him as the M.C., and he was always recognized as the leading man in Wilmington radio. Now he went into the advertising business, so he's out of it. Then there was a fellow named Harvey Smith, who also became kind of a substitute as Mr. Radio. Then there was a fellow named Moe Mulderick, who was a commentator mingled with record playing. The most bombastic guy we had in town was a fellow named Joe Pyne, and he was the one who introduced the talk show here in Wilmington. And he was very cantankerous, extremely opinionated, and very aggressive and very obnoxious, and would take no stuff from anybody. And he had all these biddies listening to him every night.

Q  Doesn't he have a talk show out on the West Coast now?

A  He died, now. He had an operation on cancer of the foot and he died about a couple of years ago. He left here and went to New York and then went to California, to Los Angeles. But he was extremely opinionated. And then he would always attack me and then I would attack him. And we'd meet in the morning sometimes and decide what line we were going to take for attacking one another. It got to be a game. Sometimes it became very real. But a lot of times it was just a put-up job. I'd walk along the street and some truck driver would say, "Hey, did you hear what Joe Pyne said about you?" I said, "No, I don't listen to so-and-so." And we kept that up a long time. Then he left here and then I took over for a while, for a couple of years, and then it was too much for me and so I gave it up. But Pyne was the leading radio character for a long time—well three or four years. His show was called "It's Your Nickel." Now in those days he had to repeat what the person was saying to him—now you can hear the voices now. And then...otherwise there haven't been too many cantankerous people in radio. WILM has always been more or less free-wheeling, giving their men much more independence doing whatever they want to do than WDEL. WDEL was always kind of restrained. And that was because WDEL was part of the Steinman group, which comes out of Lancaster. They run WGAL television station in Lancaster. Yeah, they all had to answer to the Steinman's, but WILM was independent. First it was owned by Mr. Hill, who was really basically a newspaperman more than a radio man. And then he sold it to a fellow named Ewing Hawkins, and now Hawkins is more or less out of it and his wife is running the station. But it's always been sort of a free-wheeling station in giving their staff people a lot of leeway, particularly their commentators. You could say practically anything you wanted.

Q  Was there any DuPont influence in any of these stations?

A  No. There was some talk one time of the News Journal buying WILM. But Mr. Henry T. Claus decided that he would not go into the radio business. I think they felt that it would be too much—I think he felt that it would be increasing the alleged monopoly too much for the only newspaper in town to also own a radio station. Of course radio was absolutely foreign to these people here. I mean
most of these people who've never been in radio don't understand radio here.

Q You said some of them did come from radio.

A Yeah some of them--there's Themal and Hartman and Tom Grier--and that's about all. But the front office doesn't understand radio a damn bit. So they decided not to get into radio. So then Mr. Hill of the Chester Times bought WILM and developed it. And now it's a pretty controversial station.

Q What about television in Wilmington?

A Well, there was a thing called Channel 12, which was a part of WDEL for a while, part of the Steinman. I did some stuff there on a panel, a weekly panel called, "May We Quote You?". It was a regular panel, and we would get personalities and we'd interview them, similar to "Meet the Press." And then for a while I also did a solo job, every week, a half hour, called "The Delaware Heritage," which was a Delaware history thing. And I just talked for a half an hour on some aspect of Delaware history. If I could I'd show slides or show pictures. And I wrote the script myself but ad-libbed it so I got a 5 minutes to go, 3 minutes to go, then I'd swing out of it. I took all the pictures myself, and I would give the man on the control a cue as to when he was to focus in on a picture. And then I stopped that.

Q When was this--when were you doing this? The '50's?

A In the '50's, yeah. And then there was an effort by some brewery company in Valley Forge, I think, to sponsor it, but WDEL didn't want to go commercial on that. They wanted to keep it as a public service. And then WDEL got out of the television business and then they're now into WHYY, which has Channel 12. So I've done very sporadic things on that--not too much. I personally don't like television because you've got to get dressed up, you've got to have a clean face, got to have your hair combed--and then if you come to a station and they say, "We're going to start the cameras at 6:00," I'm just not enchanted with it at all.

Q Were there any early stations in the '40's that you can remember?

A No. There was an effort to make it a commercial--I think the Rollins people wanted to take over Channel 12 as a commercial, but it was given to this non-commercial, what they call educational television, which now operates out of Philadelphia and here.

Q Getting back to newspapers, do you have any memories of the foreign language press in Wilmington?

A Not of my own. But I know that there was a German paper here called Der Freie Press. It was published at 6th and Tatnall. And there was at the time, in the 1890's, up until World War I, there was a very strong, articulate German population here. At
one time you had four breweries here. They were practically all German-oriented. And this was a paper—at one time it was a daily, the Freier Press was a daily. At one time the editor was a man by the name of A. D. Jacobson, who was Jewish. This was now in 1908, something like that. But World War I knocked all that out, see. They had German singing groups here, they had a German hall, and they had the Saengerbund...and they had a very strong good German population here. And then with the coming of World War I, you know the teaching of German was knocked out of the high schools and everything was anti-German. You know, they didn't have any German opera anymore and things like that. It wasn't like that during World War II. World War II was anti-Jap, Japanese. But that's the only paper. There may have been a Polish paper, if there was I don't know. There was no Jewish paper as such, a Yiddish paper. There were newspapers put out by the Jewish Community Centers—house organs. Then there was a labor paper here called The Labor Herald, which was published on Shipley Street between Fourth and Fifth and that was a kind of a gadfly put out by a man named Saylor, John Saylor. His father was A. R. Saylor. His father was a single taxer and he published a very hot paper in the 1890's called Justice, and it was a 100% single-tax paper. There are a few copies around—the library may have some. And then A. R. Saylor died. Then John Saylor took over, and his brother Frank; John was the labor man, the editor, and Frank was the mechanical man. And this was a paper published on the west side of Shipley Street between Fourth and Fifth. And it was called The Labor Herald.

Q That was a weekly?
A Weekly, yeah.

Q How long was that in operation?
A About 20-25 years—that's a rough guess. Then when the Saylors died, the thing conked out.

Q Was that a good paper, do you think?
A Well, everybody read it to see who John Saylor was kicking in the tail. But then we became suspicious. He would kick the Delmarva Power and Light in the tail and then the Delmarva Power and Light would put an ad in the paper, a big ad, and then he wasn't kicking them anymore. We always had suspicions about that.

Q What papers did you read—as a reporter?
A Well, as a beginning reporter we always had to read the New York World, and you had to bow at the shrine of Heywood Broun and F. P. A, Franklin P. Adams. You read the New York World—that was the newspaperman's paper. Then you always read—you always had to be seen with the American Mercury... and the New York Times, and then we read the Philadelphia Record a great deal. And the Record became quite a liberal paper under a man named Stern. And he became one of the great proponents of the Newspaper Guild and then he was
done in by the Guild. We had a Guild here once, and then it died. It was a newspaper union, you know, among reporters. Among the... the first president was a man who is now--Charles L. Reese, Jr. was the president. He later became president of the News Journal Company, and now he’s the chairman of the board.

Q He was the president of the Guild? When was this? At the beginning?

A At the beginning, yeah.

Q When did it begin--the Guild?

A It was during--around '38 maybe, '39. I remember I was sent to the first convention up in Minneapolis, of the Newspaper Guild. Of course Broun was there and all the reporters just--you know, he was God, Allah and the Prophet, you know. But then we found that we never came to grips with any bargaining, because we found that the company was always one step ahead of us. They'd hear what we were talking about, and then with that and then with Federal regulations, and then they began giving us more and more concessions. So we never came to grips. And then when the fellows found out that they didn't have to fight for anything, then the Guild died down to about eight or nine people and I was left with the charter, which we now have in the...and once in a while I come across some early Guild membership cards. We organized in the Y.M.C.A. one night and decided to have a Guild--that was a real radical damn thing. Of course in those days the Guild was the A.F. of L. And then Broun said we had to join the C.I.O. And many of the members sort of felt they didn't like that, but he said that you either join the C.I.O. or I quit. So they weren't about to lose Heywood Broun so they all voted to join the C.I.O. But it was never a radical organization. That is, we never had a strike, we never had any confrontation, anything like that. It finally got down to about eight members and then we finally gave it up.

Q So there's no union or guild now?

A No. Then there was an effort within the past three years to re-form the Guild and two years ago we had a vote, and the Guild was rejected.

Q What was this strike--it was in November of '72?

A Wait a minute, there is a guild downstairs among the distributors, the people who handle the papers as they're going out. One thing I didn't like the Guild was because it involved everybody, secretaries, non-newspaper people and all that sort of stuff. But there is a guild downstairs. And then we had the truck driver strike. And that was the first strike in our time. We've had strikes before, years ago. Typographical people had a boycott against the Morning News and the Every Evening, but in recent times is the first time we ever had a strike like that. That was the guys who took the papers out, truck drivers out. But there is a guild downstairs now, but they represent only the people who
handle the paper, the wrappers and the distributors.

Q But that's different from the guild that you're talking about.

A Well, the American Newspaper Guild, but no newspaper men are part of it. No writers or editors are part of it. And that's something that some of them didn't like, to be included with the secretaries, clerks, non-newspaper people. Also, if you had a guild and you had a contract, and a guy, reporter--reporters now take photographs. And they wouldn't be able to take a photograph. They'd be limited, see.

Q I guess reporters in general are a pretty independent bunch and hard to organize.

A Well, they got organized pretty well in other cities where they--I'm amazed that they do get organized, but they're pretty independent here. And what happened was, prior to that incident, when we had a vote on the guild, Dixie Sanger, who had been a reporter himself, see, had many meetings with the staff and discussed pay raises and things like that, and he had just become president. His view was, "Look, give me a chance to upgrade the salaries." And so there was a little group, small group of people promoting the Guild. But the thing that I opposed was that it would be restrictive, coming and going, you couldn't work as long as you wanted--you know, you'd have to stop working, you couldn't work, if you wanted to work eight hours or nine hours, you couldn't do that--you couldn't take pictures. My feeling was that it perpetuated mediocrity. It was always good for somebody else, but I didn't like it for myself. And there is an independence. Of course on big papers, the Guild's already there, and many of them belong as a matter of fact, you see, a way of life. I think what busted up the early guild here was that we were paying our dues and then we were paying assessments for strikes in Newark, New Jersey, or strikes other places, and didn't see why we should--they didn't have a sense of what they would call that traditional solidarity. You know, they figured, "Why should I pay a dollar and a half or a dollar seventy-five extra a month for a strike up in Newark, New Jersey?" They didn't feel that way. And so gradually that thing died down.

END OF INTERVIEW.