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Interviewer: This is an interview with Mary Houston Robinson at her home in Georgetown, known as the Judges. Was it just the Judges or the Judges’ house?

Mrs. Robinson: Well, it was just called the Judges because the first judge in 1793 after the constitution, after the Revolutionary War, the first judge to be appointed was Peter Robinson. Although his brother was -- Thomas Robinson, you know, with the British he left. He became -- he always was supposed to be the leader of all the Torres [phonetic] [0:00:52] and he was a member of the assembly and -- a member of the assembly and when it met the New Castle and then I think later in Dover. And then so his brother was a Patriot although he was Torre [phonetic] [0:01:16] and all of his land and all of his -- everything he had was sold and he fled to Philadelphia and but that -- at the time, his wife died at child birth leaving a young baby and he was named for his Uncle Peter who was the first Judge who -- we’re not sure whether he lived right here in this house but he was supposed to.

And Uncle Peter brought his young son -- I mean his young nephew up and in his home while the boy's father with the older son fought with the British and later fled to Boston and then on to Canada and we still have hanging here the painting of Thomas Robinson and a letter which he wrote to Governor Van Dyke asking him to permit him to come back and be buried at old St. George’s in Angola, outside of Angola and that’s where he -- and he was given permission by Governor Van Dyke.

But anyhow it was his brother who everyone knew was a patriot although there was a great deal of suspicion of that probably he was in contact with his brother who was with -- the Lord how and fighting and they rather were suspicious about him, but anyhow he was appointed the first Judge after the constitution and that was in 17 -- I think 93.

Most of the histories except [inaudible] [0:03:26] seemed to mix the fact that Peter Robinson, the young boy, the son of Thomas Robinson who later became the Judge is the same man as the first Judge Robinson. And this -- I mean Mrs. McDonald, I forgot her name, from Dover. When she described the Judges she has that it was -- that this young Peter Robinson had been the same person as the first Peter Robinson and he couldn’t
have -- he couldn’t have been because he was only been about ten years old if he’d been appointed in 1793.

But that Peter Robinson lived here and he married his own cousin, Uncle Peter’s daughter Arcadia Robinson and they lived here. And of course, had a family. He would be the second Judge that lived here and then later on, the Peter Robinson’s granddaughter married Judge Wharton and they made their home here.

And that was his third Judge. And then after that, their daughter married Judge David Norvell. They lived here and that would be the fourth, wouldn't it? Fifth. And then the house was empty and it was rented to Judge Conrad who had been appointed the Judge here. So it just was the only Judge and it just became known in the town -- I mean they had only one Judge and now we may have a dozen. It was one Judge and it was just known as the Judges.

So, I never know whether to spell it without an apostrophe or with an apostrophe. I see it spelled every way. And but that’s the story of the place here. And it’s -- it’s an interesting old place. I found that there is five different pieces of houses that had been moved here and put together and I have two, three rooms -- three rooms. I have never been in, and the stairways have been removed and the only way to get in is outside through the dorm, are windows. I imagined that they were the slave quarters. And they just eventually were closed of. And so that -- that’s the story of the Judges.

Is there any other question that you want to ask?

Interviewer: I wanted to ask about how long you lived here and where you were born? Were you born near this house?

Mrs. Robinson: Oh, no. This is the Robinson. This was the original Robinson home. And I have lived here only -- I moved here after my husband’s death in let me see. That would have been in -- he died in ’64, I moved in here in ’65 so I've only been here 12 years. Before that, the house that had come down through the female -- and belong to Anne Marvel who was married first to Mr. Deyarman -- Frank Deyarman [phonetic] [0:07:43] and later to A. Felix Dupont. Her mother lived here, until probably 25 or 30 years ago.
And after that, Mrs. Dupont who was living in Wilmington or Newark rented the Judges but she left the house to my husband. I mean he inherited it just a year before he died but since the Robinson’s had been always wanted to live in the house, my husband asked me if I would make the effort to come around here and I moved around here the year after he died. It's been interesting and it gave me something to work with but it's a little bit too much for me at the age of 85.

Interviewer: I think we should say that today is July the 10th -- excuse me, I think the 11th.

Mrs. Robinson: Yeah, 11th.

Interviewer: The 11th of July in 1977 and Mrs. Robinson is a woman who has contributed many things to Delaware. She came to Newark soon after graduation at Randolph Macon. And when did you start teaching in Newark?

Mrs. Robinson: I started teaching in Newark in 1918. I -- after coming back from Randolph Macon I -- well, I just happened to go to Randolph Macon. I was to go to Mount Holyoke until my father found that there was a chance that I might have to live off campus and that to him, it was an unheard of thing.

[0:10:00]

At the time, I think I probably was the third girl from Georgetown who had ever -- who went to college. It wasn’t that they didn’t go away to school but they all went away to finish in schools or academies or they just graduated from high school. At that time, we had a very good high school and in fact it had been -- there were several -- I think four or five young men from Georgetown who went directly to Oxford.

We were taught Algebra and of course, Geometry and Trigonometry, we had Latin and French. And when I taught Mount Holyoke, my work was accepted but then the incident of having to live off campus was too much to my father. And I immediately, I had to start finding some other place and I had a friend going to Randolph Macon I went there and expected to move and to go back to Mount Holyoke someday. I have never been there as a student but I love Randolph Macon. And I stayed there through on my four years.
I came back it was nice to be home and I taught in the high school here. I received the sum almost $300 a year and of course, I lived at home and nobody saving any money at that salary. And I wasn't particularly happy in the school. I decided that I would go on to Boston where my aunt – or my cousin was attending sergeant and my aunt had an apartment there and I was going up there and get a Master's Degree in English in which I majored.

But I happened to read in a journal every evening that Newark had just lost its English teacher and was looking for somebody. I was all packed to go to Boston and in a week's time, decided to apply and I applied to Newark and a wonderful salary, I think of $600 and I accepted the job and went there and loved all the years which I lived there.

The latter years, that I was Vice-Principal of the Newark High school, I was closely associated with the college because I taught the freshmen flunkees or the boys would fail in English. I have classes in Fornelli Hall, three of four nights a week and made quite a bit of extra money and enjoyed the work and training them.

Interviewer: You called in Dr. Sypherd's flunkees, did he flunk many out of his classes every year?

Mrs. Robinson: Well, that was a reason I think I got the job. I knew that every boy in Georgetown there probably would be very few that will go on to college but up in Newark, they did not have to pay any tuition at that time. They could live at home and go onto college and get a college education at no cost except probably buying their books and so they all went on to college. Every child like -- I mean graduated practically, every boy, anyhow who graduated the Newark High School went onto college. I knew all of the people at the college because it was a very small college at that time.

[0:15:04]

And I knew their professors and I knew their sons and I was determined that I wasn’t going to send anybody to Dr. Sypherd unless I knew he was prepared to go so that by the time they got through the 11th grade I saw that they did not go on to the 12th grade until they were well prepared because otherwise, it would have been embarrassing for me. I probably would have lost my job because they would have all complained about the, you know, the English teacher.
And so, that I really had to – I more or less had to do it because -- so that Dr. Sypherd of course, had a very strict program.

At that time, we taught grammar, we taught, I mean they had to know their grammar as well as the ability to write. They also had a great deal of reading to do to improve their vocabulary and even though I started as a very young person I had to be strict and -- Dr. Sypherd, you could write like Shakespeare but if you had an IT apostrophe S when it should be without it, you automatically got a B or maybe an E in the paper and the list – I think of about 31 mistakes that you could make that Dr. Sypherd would be very upset about it.

Interviewer: Do you remember his seriousness about the use of words? For example, the word quite when one said quite a lot or quite often.

Mrs. Robinson: Yes.

Interviewer: I remember that, that annoyed him. I think probably usage was very important for him, wasn’t it?

Mrs. Robinson: Yes. He was very, very strict and then also about pronunciation as well as enunciation. And I remember my sister having -- when she first went up there. He said something about her being from Sussex County and then she was pronouncing some words that he had not liked at all. And but he finally of course, did correct -- I mean, she graduated and those things were corrected but he was very, very strict about the whole English -- English course.

The -- I remember I had a great deal of discipline as a principal of the high school. I was superintendent of other schools at the last. I started my teaching in the Old Academy where the ceilings were so low that in the upper floors you could almost touch the ceiling and of course the rooms were crowded. but before I left there was a new high school and then there was an elementary school and a grammar school as we called it. And I was Vice-Principal of the high school -- all the disciplinary work as well as teaching.

Interviewer: When were you married and was your husband then the editor of the Sussex County...

Mrs. Robinson: No. No, I am -- I was married. And I always have to think what the date -- the date is -- I was married in 19 -- I graduated 1916. I taught 10 years and I was married in 1927 and my husband who had not gone to college
had graduated from the Episcopal High School in Washington, near Washington where that – I think...

Not the Washington Cathedral, it’s outside of Washington -- I don’t know. Somebody said well, everybody speaks of it as The High School rather than any other thing if you went to The High School and it was out of Washington, the seminaries, it's Episcopal school and he graduated from there. His father had died when he was two and a half years old.

And he was only interested in either business or something. So, he went New York and lived in Montclair with cousins and had a job and was salesman for many years for – of raw rubber company and traveled from Akron to New York because it wasn’t much used for rubber except out where they were making tires and he lived partly there.

And then he went in the service and he was older than I and of course, I have known him from all my life and but the fact that he was three or four years older, he had noticed me. And so then the families were friends and all that. My family came in along late. I was married four years before my daughter was born and she came the day after my 38th birthday and my first son was born when I was 40.

Interviewer: Then you had your family late. Did -- were these just your two children?

Mrs. Robinson: And then my third child was born when I was 44. It’s very difficult to be 85 and have young grandchildren and I have a five year old grandson and then three other young grandchildren because I can’t do anything to help take care of them. In Jordan [phonetic] [0:23:03] and not for late marriages.

Georgetown, it is not as old as the town as the many in Sussex County. Probably I find that, everybody should know but I found that people do not know that all of the land from what was Farmington up there in Harrington down to the Rehoboth Bay was Maryland up until Mason Dixon [phonetic] [0:23:47] and I must settle and of course, Lewis have been settled in 1631 of course, everybody was killed and then defying all set on that was probably around 1650 and then the years -- I mean all these years later and of course, Lewis was the County Seat and nobody had to go on farther from any area.
Georgetown did not exist. And Mason and Dixon along, somebody said if Lord Baltimore had its good as Law as Penn, that all of Western Sussex would have been of course, still part of Maryland. The people over there were all descended and they came from branches down in Maryland and Virginia as my family, the Houstons, did down from Princess Diane and those places all of our records there, the western side of the county.

And for a long time, it was called Old Sussex and New Sussex. And then, it was a great -- a lot of complaints that the people on the western side of the county had travel all through the sands and the roads to get to Lewis, the Court and made the complaint. That was probably around 1790 and in '91 a legislator decided to have a new County Seat and they were to pick a place and more centrally located.

Well, they picked the worse place in the world. It was called [inaudible] Swamp. I suppose they bought it cheaply. We have no way of getting rid of surface water and great ditches that had to be dug out to the rivers. There’s no water running off except for those ditches, some of them the [inaudible] to the rivers on the east.

Georgetown was laid out with the center circle, a square which we always call it square up until it was no longer a square and the automobiles made necessary to have circle rather than the square. The interesting thing or one thing about Georgetown, it has never been a friendly town. The people have -- are considered to be rather in -- going in creeks. There is -- there is an improvement now but the thing that happened in the early days this was the poorest section of Sussex County.

We have a place near town here called Heart’s Gravel. There’s Gravel Hill, the land is poor, it's swampy and it always been a problem of irrigation here. And then the other thing that happened was that here in this very poor area and only four miles from town there's this grave stone out here less than four miles sang -- that the family moved from mini river in Maryland over to Somerset County in the wilderness of Somerset County so we were early part of Maryland.

Well, then when the courts opened here it brought a very fine class of young man and families who were lawyers and that is probably one reason for the division. I remember few years ago meeting a man by the name of Outerbridge Horsey, I honored on a cruise going to Italy. And I couldn't imagine the name I knew that it was that same person had built
my husband’s great grandfather’s home in Georgetown and I was traveling with his cousin from New York and they -- Mr. Horsey, was then the ambassador or a Minister to Poland back [inaudible] [0:29:38].

They did not want me to speak to him and ask him if he came – his family came from Sussex County because they said the outstanding lawyer in New York was Outerbridge Horsey but I didn’t think it possible with two such names. There must have been connection and I finally asked him and he said, yes.

[0:30:02]

His family came here they built a home on the circle and then I knew that was the house where -- Mr. Horsey was a most delightful gentleman and we talked a great deal about his family. He had -- was surprised that the old family home was still on the circle and it had later become the Farmers Bank and then had been -- became a private home again.

He said that -- I asked him, I knew that the name Horsey was quite well known here, but I didn’t feel that Outerbridge was too much of a name in Sussex County. He said that his family had first settled in Bermuda and then had later come on to the eastern shore and they had lived over near [inaudible] [0:31:14] and that his son was the eighth Outerbridge Horsey that he had record of. And he said my son doesn’t like the name but he said we’re rather determined to keep it going. So the family, I later found out that the property and nobody’s quite and there were a number of things mentioned.

We had one attorney here who had married a [inaudible] [0:31:49] from Virginia who was very handsome woman in fact the -- she there -- she was considered or has her profile on one of the coins I think he always said she could entertain a president or she could stab a pig, or do anything and she probably could. She brought a friend down who met another young attorney and lived in town it was that type of people that came. Then there was the Warrold family that came -- I think they probably came within the iron ore business that was quite a business here at the time.

He married by the way the foster daughter of General Dagworthy. Their lovely home is in Georgetown on the -- near the outskirts on the back street that doesn’t -- well, people do not sit very often. She inherited many of the -- well, the homes and the -- all the -- some of the 30,000
hectares that the State of Maryland had given to General Dagworthy. He had no children and she was his foster daughter.

In his will which is on record in Georgetown, he left most of his estate to her except to his sisters who still were living. He was insistent -- insistent that she be educated abroad. She was sent to France and England. She was quite educated in languages and the Warrold lived here one time and then he was elected United States Senator and the family moved away from this area.

The Georgetown was quite a cultured town then besides the legal end of it and there were many things in Georgetown that were delightful.

[0:35:05]

I have lived here since I was born and as a most happy childhood, my father was an attorney and we lived in the home at the edge of town. It was built by a very fine gentleman from Bermuda whose sister have married a member of the Pinole family in Georgetown and his name was Albere he came from -- and later went back to Bermuda. And but have you...

Interviewer: Mrs. Robinson, the Sussex County in -- of Georgetown which was your husband’s newspaper and I think now your son is the editor is probably a unique paper in Sussex County.

Could you tell something about the history of the paper and you’re family’s connection with the paper and maybe changes you’ve seen through the years?

Well, the newspaper was purchased by my father when he came to Georgetown. He was a young attorney, 21 years old and very much interested in political life. His father had been a sergeant in the Civil War in the Northern Army but his uncle who never married had served in Congress, was very active in all of the -- all of politics in Delaware and later served four year -- 45 years as Judge in Kent County. And so, my father grew up in a political atmosphere which of course, continued all through our lives and so that we were always interested too.

He was not interested in running the paper. It was in the rear of his law offices which were on -- at the back of the Courthouse where most of the attorneys when they were very few, lived. Those were all have been torn down and have them been replaced by the addition to the Courthouse.
But father for many years kept the paper and all through the years in Congress and in other political jobs and positions that he had.

And when he was -- came out of Congress about the time when the Democrats with Roosevelt were in control, he was a Republican, he decided that he would no longer continue with the paper. It was during the depression and my husband and I realizing the little money that was being spent in running the paper and knowing -- but knowing nothing about it, of course, we noticed that we had all of these -- to bankruptcy it was rather during a depression and then we counted up what the bankruptcy sales we were paying newspaper and we realized they carried the full cost so we took over and we found out that at that time you were allowed to send anybody a free copy of your newspaper. And father had simply taken his laws and sent the newspaper to his political public appointments as well as allies.

[0:40:08]

And there were exactly 33 subscribers to the newspaper. It had been a Seaford Paper and interestingly enough, about a month ago, I was called by the Seaford Historical Society and they had been doing research on the paper which had been at Seaford before it was purchased by my father. And they said that they had traced it back and they thought that it was the oldest paper on the Eastern Shore.

I haven’t gotten the final results but anyhow, my husband who had been a good businessman to go with the business end of it and I thought having been an English teacher, I could handle the rest of it. So my father turned the paper over to me and to my husband. And I can’t think of exactly of the date but it’s been a long time. We worked hard. And of course, the paper, when my father had it was a Sussex Republican.

But my husband being a Democrat and having served as speaker of the house at the legislature he could not really be on the newspaper that was a Sussex Republican. So, then we changed it and called it the Sussex County and we have always given equal time and space and room for editorials and so forth to both parties and have been independent.

I don’t think my father ever went up the newspaper office. He – his offices were downstairs and he sent his editorial platforms a week. But we made it a full time job and carried on for several years. I still am a nominal editor but my time now, I just simply, I’m interested in business meetings and I’m semi-retired.
My son who graduated from the University of North Carolina, he was going to Delaware but he had a scholarship from the Navy and there was no Navy Program at Delaware it was only the army ROTC. And then he served in the Navy for four years and returned home. In the meantime, he had to have a short novel finished published buy Random House. And his one interest is in writing.

He does -- he is more or less the editor and then the General Manager and also the person -- he does the most – a great deal of writing too as Mr. Spencer -- William Spencer. We have a big commercial plan as well as the – as a newspaper.

Interviewer: What about your long editorship, when you think about your career as newspaper woman in Georgetown, as you said you started because after all you had graduated in English. Did you start with enthusiasm to become an editor?

No, I didn’t start with any enthusiasm. It was during the depression and it seemed a way to add to income with the family.

[0:45:00]

And my husband had been in business in New York and he was – he and I have decided that when my father gave up the newspaper, that we would continue it and I don’t know. Did I mention that it was more or less a political mouthpiece for him -- I think I have said that?

Interviewer: But you wanted it to be an independent...

Mrs. Robinson: Yes, and...

Interviewer: ...paper and you allowed equal say.

Mrs. Robinson: ...and we have that. It was anything but an easy job. It was very difficult in every way to run a newspaper down in Georgetown. I remember how desperate we would be to get a linotypist, and I remember going downstairs to tell my father that I have just fired a linotypist who was half drunk. And I went down the stairs and knocked at his door, but before I knocked, I listened to see if anybody was -- any client was in his office.

And I heard him say well, what is the work that you’ve been doing and he said he was a linotypist and father was a district attorney down here and
his wife was putting a linotypist in jail because she, well, they didn’t get along.

And so I knocked loudly on my father’s door and pulled him out and told him to hire the linotypist. And he stayed with us fortunately for many years. And but it was most difficult during the war. We had not the staff, we could not get any more men and more and more -- I had to take over. I have just been doing more or less social columns and but I took over more work all the time. My husband managed the business and selling the ads and with we finally worked the business up until it was a good paying business.

It was also the commercial printing and are doing work for the legislature and but it was entirely and the need of income and that made us take over the paper. And upon the death of my father, he left us the newspapers and I had said that I will never write an editorial but Mr. Frank changed all that. He came down the Sussex County and his general hated seemed to be of everybody in Sussex County. He has become much more friendly in the years past but he brought his -- some young children down, it’s a lawyer speech and he never -- may have seen what goes on in Sussex County.

There was always the division from the colored people and the toilets. The colored people had to be -- each had their own bathe -- bath houses and they had their own beach and they had their own toilets. And when his children went to go into the toilets they found that they remark for the colored and the white, as I recall at that time.

He immediately piled all the children back in the station wagon and took them back to Wilmington and I couldn’t get over how disappointed all those children must have been that came to spend the day at the beach and all he could see was many of the toilets -- I mean it was nothing new to us. And that he seemed to see the bad side of everything and he failed to let the children go for a swim. And from that time on, Mr. Frank and I had all of these feuds.

And our opinions on everything were very different. And I wrote editorials because I was so angry at some of the things that he said. And then again I felt that -- to appreciate people -- up state people had a great disgust and no affection for the people in Sussex County and they did not understand the -- to them we were [inaudible] [0:50:37] stricken,
and they didn’t realize that there always had been from the very beginning just as there are in Wilmington and other places there are cruel people and people who are educated and people who are not educated.

And so, our battle went on for several years. I found that it increased the circulation of the paper tremendously. I found also that it was hurting the business if I got into anything that happen to step on somebody’s toes in a business way. I unfortunately advocated that there would be a road put outside of Georgetown to handle a traffic.

That was a mistake and I lost all the business of all the merchants in town so that our income had become from the national or from the towns around. I also...

Interviewer: When did that happen?

Mrs. Robinson: That happened at the -- well, almost quite early from the beginning, you know, there is no -- In Georgetown, we have only one road going north and south until they put the Dupont Road and there still is only one road going east and west and the traffic to the town now is simply impossible. The people have tried to get and also the highway has wanted to put an east and west town outside.

I’m sure the cause of it is that the business people have fought it, they do not know that if -- that when a town has more than one store for clothing you have more people come and if they just come and find one store, they do not return. But I don’t know why -- I can see where gas stations were hurt. But it certainly -- you could not express your opinion.

I fought for years to get some safety on a certain street because of the school children and all I did was lose the -- for six years advertising from the big -- one of the big motor companies. I’ve unfortunately found another thing they all wanted me to take the fight, they had complaints and they brought them to me. And they wanted me but they themselves would not sign a complaint and all I did was make enemies.

The later years when my husband became ill, it was more than I could stand because not only was the work heavier in the office but also the weekends were filled with people either complaining or warning me to make a complaint. And I was the one that was bearing the brunt. And all I did was loose business and advertising. And I feel that in a country newspaper that is almost impossible to express yourself and what you
believe and because everybody is interrelated or their friends and they take up the fight for that person that you criticized.

[0:55:18]

Interviewer: Like the family feud could be started this way. Is that true?

Mrs. Robinson: Yes. It was unbelievable.

Interviewer: Well, does your son find these problems now?

Mrs. Robinson: Yes. My son, in taking over the paper started to write an editorial. His mother -- I mean his first editorial which expressed some -- something in either a political subject or what, I do not know but Mr. Frank immediately started again and said that Robert should have his mother take him back at the wood house and give him a good spanking. He never again written anything.

Interviewer: Did he let that old newspaper man buffalo him?

Mrs. Robinson: Well, no.

Interviewer: I hope not.

Mrs. Robinson: Well, it didn't -- I think in a way if it hadn't been that it was his first writing. And since then he writes his column, but it is really a column. And frankly I'm glad because I hate to have him go through what I did and because I am now convinced that a small town paper cannot afford to take sides on every problem. So his column which many people find very delightful because of his sense of humor, and lightness in subjects had become a very popular column.

Interviewer: What is the name of his column? Could you tell us a little bit more about the feud which is certainly an important one for Delaware between what would have to be describes as the longest in active writing experience and probably editorial opinion in the state William P. Frank?

Mrs. Robinson: It's sort of difficult to go back and I remember things. I do remember of the -- in particular, his criticism of all of our institutions down here. He was so critical of the -- what we call the Delaware Colony. I had watched Delaware Colony, I grew along, I had -- because my father was a commission and I had seen, gone out there and seen how they -- the people who were inmates there, if you want to use that term, I probably
should have another, the patients, I should say, and the energy and the work and the labor that all of these people and of course with the assistance of Mrs. Coleman Dupont and Mrs. Deamer from New Castle assisting down here to get those places established and of course, Mr. Frank could see nothing of any good in any of it.

I could just see how they started and how hard these people have worked even get anything, even get an institution for the mental -- I mean there were of course, the [inaudible] but just for the feeble minded, this was at a new project that had to be fought through the state to get any money to even start the place.

[1:00:00]

And I had seen the people were -- probably 25, 35, 30 years and I resented naturally all of this criticism that was coming from Mr. Frank. Another fight that I got into with him, we have our Chamber of Commerce in Georgetown, they have them in Seaford, Delaware, Dover all the other places. But Wilmington Chamber of Commerce called itself the Delaware Chamber of Commerce.

The Delaware Chamber of Commerce they were before were ceased all the information that comes in -- from businesses that want to establish in Delaware. It's all kept quietly in Wilmington and this was the area that it was just really needed. We needed information about new businesses that wanted to come to Delaware and yet it was...

[1:01:14] End of Audio