Q This is an Oral History Project interview with Walter Smith of Wilmington on January 18, 1973. Walter, your grandfather was one of the presidents of the university—is that not....

This Oral History Project interview is with Walter E. F. Smith, a newspaperman in Wilmington for forty years and the grandson of a former president of the university. Walter?

A My grandfather on my mother's side, Dr. William Henry Pernell, was president of what was then Delaware College from 1870 to 1885, and was distinguished among other things, for having persuaded the Board of Trustees to admit women students, a policy which was later changed and caused a rift between Dr. Pernell and the Board, and was one of the major reasons for his resignation in 1885.

Newspaper work in Wilmington, at least as far as the newsroom was concerned, was a vastly different thing from 1972. The staffs of all the Wilmington dailies, the Every Evening, on which I first started, The Morning News and the Evening Journal, and the only Sunday newspaper, the Delmarva Sunday Star, were minuscule in comparison with the large staffs of today. Most of the news staffs in 1926 were four, five, perhaps as many as six reporters, managing editor, an editor, a city editor and an assistant city editor, and society editor. When I came to the Every Evening news staff in the summer of 1926 for example, we had four or five reporters and that news gathering staff of four or five reporters was responsible for all of the city of Wilmington and a good deal of the suburban area, covering the police, the courts, even the magistrates courts, all of the higher courts, general political news, community activities and organizations of all kinds, ranging from the Chamber of Commerce to Rotary, Kiwanis, and such organizations. We covered the service organizations, all with this tiny staff, and if someone were sick or sent out of town on some special assignment, we simply had to double up and do it faster, or try to, but we were expected still to be responsible for all the coverage that the full staff would be responsible for. And I remember very well starting out, as most cub reporters did in those days, on either the police beat in City Hall at 11th and King Streets, or on the Coast Beat, as it was called, because it embraced many organizations and industries and offices on the...running along the Christiana River. And I alone, because I was young and could move very fast, was given the Coast Beat rather than the police, I believe, because Mr. Greer found out--our city editor, A.O.H. Greer, that I was a former half-mile runner, so he thought I'd be ideal for covering on foot the Coast District which started at the old Harlan plant on the Christiana River north of--or west rather, of Market Street, and included several offices in that building, and then went from there to the B&O Freight Station, from there to the Reading Railway Freight Station, to several offices in what was then the Pennsylvania Railroads, Maryland and Delaware Divisions, at Front and French in the Station Building of the Pennsylvania Road, then to the Pusey and Jones Shipbuilding Plant--shipbuilding and paper-making machinery plant, from there to the American Car and Foundry at the foot of 8th Street.
on the Christiana River, and from there back to several offices uptown in Wilmington. And all of that had to be done between about 7:15 in the morning and not later than 11:00, on foot. We didn't have automobiles, and it wasn't feasible to use trolley cars on the Coast Beat because there was no line that ran anywhere very close to any of those places. So that's just a little example of the much less mechanized way of even covering the news of that character. And I recall that Mr. Greer had a saying. His favorite saying to all reporters was, "Hurry back, Walter." "Hurry back, George," referring to George Stauffman, one of the still-living former members in 1926. "Hurry back, Bill," referring to Bill Frank, still a columnist on the Morning News. And his method of doing things was interesting. Today city editors would smile at Mr. Greer's method. Each reporter was given a typed slip of copy paper torn in small size, which listed his district or assignments for that day, and today it's either laid out so that you learn what you're going to go on, but it was never formalized with a little type-written of your district or your assignments for that day. And one assignment that I remember very well, and others who followed me probably covered it too, was to go out and meet the farmers at the Delaware Grange meetings in Newport, which we went out to by the old Newport-Stanton Trolley line, which ran out through Richardson Park from Wilmington and was pretty much near its terminus for the Grange meetings. We walked about half a mile from the end of the bus line. And I, who had never had any real farming experience remember that the farmers were very helpful in that they explained agricultural terms that were very strange to me, who had spent most of his life in a city, although I had visited farms. And these farmers who belonged to the Delaware Grange had farms that were...now probably...are now probably occupied by buildings, housing developments, large schools in the Stanton-Newport area, and other...even some industries that have arisen since that time. And they were very jolly people. The men I remember were mostly weather-beaten in their faces, and the...and very uncomfortable in their dress-up Sunday clothes, when they went to the Grange meetings. I could tell they were itching around their collars, and scratching their necks. And the ladies even seemed a little bit stiff in somewhat dress-up clothes for this afternoon and largely all-day meeting into the late afternoon. But they were very pleasant people and very hospitable, friendly...always insisted that the reporter have dinner or lunch with them, or both if he could stay.

Q Didn't you find that as a reporter you were always very welcome and almost considered an expert—or at least in many kinds of assignments?

A I wouldn't say an expert. I think they assumed we had a good deal more knowledge of certain specialized things than we did. But if you broke down and confessed that you didn't know, most people were only too happy to be informal or amateur teachers. But we weren't always welcome in political circles, particularly if you were from the Every Evening, which was known as a Democratic...not a party organ, but a paper which, if it had a political side was definitely in favor of Democratic candidates for office at election time, and was favorable in editorials mostly to projects that Democratic leaders in the legislature and elsewhere were sponsoring. And if Republican officeholders tended to be a little bit distant or a little bit diffident with the reporters from the opposition paper as they saw it...but except for that and police who were often
eager to avoid telling you as much as you felt you should be told, most news gathering wasn't resisted to the extent perhaps that it is today, with so much secrecy and everything from national security down to individual building security, which were things almost unheard of in those days of 45-50 years ago. And I remember that in the courts frequently we ran into resistance or efforts to keep out certain types of court cases that dealt with the...with extreme sex crimes, or with certain types of crimes such as embezzlement, if the person had a standing in the community; and frequently in covering straight-out police cases such as murders, manslaughter, things of that kind, while they were in their investigative stage, the police would frequently try to wave you away, or get rid of you, or give you evasive answers. So that I don't think that in that aspect of news coverage, and even in politics it was altogether easy. We didn't get received with open arms everywhere. But I would say that in the main, it's more difficult, maybe, to ferret out government news today than it was in 1926 to...at least up through the 1950's. The personal side of news gathering was I think very different. You got to know people, the principal leaders of the community, in every field. The competition between the Every Evening, on which I spent about three years after coming to Wilmington, with the Evening Journal, which was the Republican Party support of Wilmington, and also daily, as was the Every Evening, of course, was quite interesting as in most cities of this size where there were competing newspapers, each news staff tried to get scoops on the other, regardless of what type news it was, particularly political or police news or county or city government news...and occasionally even business scoops of a new industry coming, or perhaps a new phase of some of the major industries being expanded, things of that kind. And the police district which I later was transferred to on the Every Evening...we had a very keen rivalry with our opposite number on the Evening Journal to scoop...each to scoop the other...in more important police news. And I was in my middle 20's then, and remember that the Journal's star police reporter who had had years and years of experience, was middle-aged and had entré and had advantages which of course a newcomer to Wilmington as well as a newcomer covering that district did not have. And I think in the batting averages I would probably be about one to three as to scoops with him...not in my favor, against me. But he was...the rivalry never descended to some of the old newspaper play front pages tactics and undercutting of the other, but it was a keen rivalry. And often times the Journal's police reporter, who at that time was George Stengel, grandson and son of Methodist ministers, was very keen in the sense that George would...because of friendship with the Superintendent of Police and the Chief of Police, and most of the captains and lieutenants and even the patrolmen, had access instantly to places that I had to really fight to get to, and get next to. So frequently, and with the Fire Bureau too, he would get to a fire before I would by a few minutes and sometimes to a scene of a serious crime, a murder or manslaughter, and that was a problem that everyone faced who had to compete against a reporter with long experience in the city and suburbs, and who had many better contacts of longer duration. But those things I found evened out after a while. And as I got to know news sources in a year or two or three, it wasn't as much of a problem. The Superintendent of Police of Wilmington at that time was a tall, angular, very florid-faced man, George Black, who was quite a character in his own right, and had very magisterial manners to everyone who wasn't in a position to influence
or hurt him. And he was very brusque even with his own inferiors or subordinates, a better word, in his own department. And for reporters he had about as much regard as for a street sweeper or janitor or a some sort of minion who was a little bit higher than a slave. But by long years of rebuffs we got case-hardened to it, and finally he used to break down and actually get a little friendly once in a while. But his son, a police captain, was very hard to deal with, because he was always afraid of what Daddy might do if he told us too much. And I remember on one occasion when a Chinese laundryman who had a laundry at 8th and Orange, Chung Bee Doon, middle-aged man, was planning a trip to see his grandparents and other relatives near Shanghai, China. And I had become friendly with him by taking my shirts and other small laundry items to him, so he asked me about how to get his shipping arrangements and buy his tickets, I helped him on that, and came to see me at the office to say goodbye...told me he was leaving that afternoon.

Later in the day, when I was at the police station, a call came from the Pennsylvania Railroad Station that Capt. George Black, the Superintendent's son, had stopped for questioning my friend Chung Bee Doon who was about to board the train to go all the way to Seattle, Washington, to take his ship to Shanghai, China. I didn't know what the reason for Chung Bee Doon's detention was, but I waited impatiently until he was brought up to the police station by Capt. Black. Then I found that Capt. Black had a general suspicion of any Oriental, and thought that any Chinese looked furtive and was just holding him on suspicion that he might be doing something wrong. Then when Capt. Black had found that Chung Bee Doon had a large sum of money in cash...in paper money, on his person, he was even more suspicious, and thought he should take him to the police station and find out what he was up to. So I remember the flustered house sergeant counting out eight thousand dollars in cash in five, ten, twenty, and a few fifty dollar bills—and it made a pile almost up to his chin. And all the while Capt. Black getting more and more suspicious of what could this Chinese be doing...

"Oh, he tells me he's going back to China on a trip, but who believes that." So then, on my own, because of my friendship with Chung Bee Doon and also that they...seemed it might be a good story in his difficulties in getting started on his 10,000-mile trip to China, I called the Deputy Judge of the Municipal Court, who was a very kindly person, Bill Broughall; and Mr. Broughall came to the police station late in the afternoon after he had already gone to his home. He arranged to have Chung Bee Doon released, and so if possible to catch the next train, and to start on his trip to China. And Mr. Broughall as a Deputy Judge of the Municipal Court, was able to convince Capt. Black, Superintendent Black and the captain and the sergeant that Chung Bee Doon was a responsible businessman who had run a laundry, was law-abiding, well-behaved, and with no reason to be detained just because he had a large sum of cash on his person for his 10,000-mile trip to China. The windup of the story was that I got a letter several months later from him from Shanghai, asking...telling me that he had arrived safely and was having seeing his grandparents and other relatives, and that he would like to express his appreciation to Deputy Municipal Court Judge Broughall for his kindness in expediting his release from detention at the Wilmington Police Station and getting him on his road to China, and what did I think would make an acceptable gift. He realized he couldn't offer a judge money. So I wrote him back to the address he gave in Shanghai and suggested that since Judge Broughall was an avid chess player, that a hand-carved bone or ivory set of chessmen in a
Chinese design would be an ideal present of appreciation to Judge Broughall. In another month or two, Chung Deon Doon arrived back, and he called me up at the office and said, "I have a present for my friend Judge Broughall." I went down to his laundry, and he handed me this lovely teakwood box, and lifted the lid, and inside, laid out in velvet, was the most beautiful, hand-carved ivory chess set, red and white. The pawns were little Chinese warriors with tiny ivory swords stuck through their belts, and the other pieces were also in Chinese design, larger of course than the pawns. And the whole thing was so beautiful and so perfect as a present, that he was embarrassed and said, "Well, I don't know Judge Broughall very well. Will you give it to him?" So I passed it on to Judge Broughall, and as far as I know he was devoted to that set until he died some, maybe 20 years, after that. This man's experience was just something popped into my head because it did involve people and different kinds of people. And then I remember telling George Black, Capt. George Black and Superintendent Black, "Well, for your information, I'm semi-oriental. I was born in Poo Song in Korea, so if you see me sneaking around, maybe you'll be suspicious of what I'm up to." So they thought that was very funny, but they said, "You're not of Chinese blood, or Korean blood." And I said, "No, but I've been accused of looking like an oriental." So I never knew whether they were speaking in fun or whether they were disturbed or nettled by the fact that I was criticizing their easy suspicions... suspicions concerning orientals. Then in court cases we had some very interesting judges. Later, when I was on the Morning News, I got more acquainted with judges than I was on the Every Evening. And the judge I remember the best, and who seemed to have more personality in a sense than the others, two of them that had, were the late Judge John Percy Nelds of a very old pre-Revolution Delaware family, who was judge at that time of the United States District Court of the District of Delaware, and his fellow Delawarean of even greater antiquity, Judge Richard S. Rodney, whose family had been in New Castle I think since perhaps 1700. And he was a judge in the State Courts. Judge Nelds, who was a tall, very austere and severe looking man with a very ruddy complexion, was underneath quite interesting to know. Judge Nelds was no hale-fellow-well-met type of man, probably because he was a judge of an important court and also temperamentally I think he was rather reserved, very dignified man. But he had his playful side, and in the many very dry and rather uninteresting patent infringement and other corporate litigation in his court, even the lawyers would sometimes get bored and very tired. And in one instance I remember Judge Nelds' sense of humor broke out very strongly when a famous New York corporation lawyer, who was representing one of the litigants in this case, began a long-winded digression. And Judge Nelds listened patiently for a few minutes and then leaned forward and with his stiff back from the bench, and said, "Mr. Darby, it seems to me that you have been riding very hard for quite a while here, but I think we're all very far afield." And the reference was that Judge Nelds was aware as were other lawyers who knew Mr. Darby that one of his hobbies was cross-country horseback riding. He belonged to a celebrated New York hunt club, and Judge Nelds was using an analogy in the field of hunting, cross-country hunting, fox hunting and other similar types of cross-country riding. So Mr. Darby, who also had his sense of humor, looked up and smiled and coughed briefly, and said, "I'm very sorry your Honor." He said, "Not only shall I try to get back on course, but if necessary I
shall remount and return to the stables and begin again." At which Judge Neilg gave a broad grin and nodded, and the rest of the courtroom then settled down to pursuing the subject with fewer digressions. And I remember on another occasion Judge Neilg, who presided at the naturalization of new American citizens,...all was held in the evening with a little bit of formality in those days, in his courtroom, in the room itself. And Judge Neilg, who gave an address in welcome to the new Americans, on several occasions would caution them not to give up their cultural past and their different habits and folklore but to preserve them and pass them down. He said, "This is a country that's made up of many strains of national origin and background, various ethnic groups have contributed to it." And he said, "For example, I've heard that..." this was probably very early in the 1930's or even the late 1920's when he told...not once, but several times, I heard him caution the newly naturalized American citizens, "Don't, as I have heard some of you are doing, apply to Delaware courts to change your names from Polacofski to Pauly, or from Mondalazewski to Brown, or from Vandeuzen to Smith." He said, "Be proud of the fact that you're of...that you're a Deletario or a Denunzio, or a DeFiori, and keep that name." He said, "My name is Neilg which is very easy to spell, but if it's because you say the Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent won't or can't learn to spell your names and pronounce them properly, you educate them. It's a good chance for you to teach us how to spell your names and how to pronounce them. But please, I beg you, don't give up your national origins and your rich cultural heritage just because Americans are too lazy to learn to pronounce or spell your names. Make us learn." That was just one example of his keen interest in history, of which his family had taken a very active part in Delaware for many years. And another judge who was quite a different type and later was a United States District Judge, but in those days in the 1930's was still in the Superior Court of Delaware, was Judge Richard S. Rodney of New Castle, who was a collateral descendent of Caesar Rodney who made the famous ride from Dover to Independence Hall in Philadelphia for the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Judge Rodney was a small twinkling man about scarecely to the shoulder of Judge Neilg, but had just...in fact, even a keener sense of humor and was often interjecting very delicate or even sometimes broad jokes into the midst of testimony in the Delaware courts. And I recall one time that someone who Objected to being sworn on the King James Version of the Bible, pleading that for him it was not the version of the Bible which was acceptable and which he felt he could give his oath, Judge Rodney said, "Well, I'm very sorry," but he said, "I haven't time to go through 2,000 pages of the text of this Bible compared to other versions." So he said, "Will it be agreeable to you if you will just make an affirmation as we do with members of the Society of Friends or other who for religious reasons do not wish to take an oath on scripture or on...in the case of Jews, on the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch...." And when the man was a little bit flustered and uncertain and finally said, "Well, I guess that's all right, your Honor." Judge Rodney said, "Well, then let's proceed and swear in the jury." So Judge Rodney also had more broad senses of humor than I think...a broader sense of humor than Judge Neils. But other judges as a rule were more businesslike than Judge Rodney and Judge Neilg, at least in the sense they very seldom departed from strict protocol or being dignified from beginning to end of every case. And then in the municipal life, I remember very well that there was a secretary of what was then the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce, later to
become the Chamber of Commerce of Delaware. I don't think he's living
now--Gerrish Gassaway, who was a southerner, I don't recall from what
state he came, but he was quite a joker. And he told me once that a
friend of his--I have a suspicion it was Mr. Gassaway himself, but he
wouldn't admit it, although others have told me they heard...were
present at the banquet at which he made this gaffe--and a distinguished
visitor from out of town was the guest speaker for this Chamber of
Commerce banquet. And the toastmaster, who as I say I still believe
was Gerrish Gassaway himself that night, was introducing this distin­
guished speaker who happened to in this case was from Dover, but of
Delawarean, the Governor of Delaware, whose name was C. Douglas Buck,
and in introducing him, the toastmaster at the Chamber of Commerce
banquet--as I say, I'm quite sure that it was Mr. Gassaway himself--
said, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure and honor and
and a real privilege to introduce to you our distinguished Governor, C.
Douglas Duck." And he was totally amazed when everyone roared. And
he turned to someone and said, "What's the matter?" And the man
whispered back, "Duck, Duck--you've just introduced the Governor as
C. Bouglas Duck instead of C. Douglas Buck." Whereupon Gassaway--if
it was he, and I think it was--had to make a red-faced apology to the
Governor and to the audience that he didn't really intend it to come
out that way, and would they please forgive him. And the big figures
in the town, in banking and in business, were the most difficult people
ever to get in to see in those days. I remember being sent to see the
late General T. Coleman DuPont about some business interest that he was
concerned with, and having to cool my heels in the outer office with a
male secretary for about 25 minutes before I could even get in to see
General Coleman DuPont. And when I did get in, I had never met him be­
fore--I'd heard his name mentioned--and I was scared out of my wits
when a sepulchral voice came from this huge man, and only after he had
talked for a few minutes I realized he had an artificial larynx. He
had apparently had cancer of the throat and had had an artificial
larynx replacing his natural larynx and it made him sound like a voice
coming up out of a well, and with a mechanical quality that didn't
even seem human. And I was always very loathe to go back after that
and talk to General DuPont because of this feeling of strangeness.
And yet the secretary told me--the male secretary--that people finally
got used to it, and he said, "If you came here every day, or every
few days, or even once a week, you probably would too," But he said,
"It scares everybody the first time." And I wonder sometimes if I
was able to turn in very much of a story on what General DuPont gave
me, because of my experience with his strange sepulchral voice. And
yet he was a very nice man who was friendly--he wasn't austere or
condescending. It was just this frightening experience of an utterly
inhuman sound issuing from this man's mouth. The other DuP Onts, par­
ticularly A. Felix DuPont, was somewhat easier to talk to. He was a
man...he was a very big figure in the affairs of the Episcopal Diocese
of Delaware and frequently he had news in that phase of Delaware life.
But approaching him was quite easy compared with Coleman and Pierre
DuPont and some of the other members of the family who were high up
in the company hierarchy.

Q  What about the story about Lamont DuPont coming into work on his
bicycle. Was that true?

A  Yes, that was true. As I recall it, it was because of gas rationing
in the early part of World War II and in the early 1940's. And he was one of the first, and in a way set an example by riding in from his home out on the Kennett Pike, I guess a distance of at least three or four miles from center city Wilmington where his offices were in the DuPont Building; and he bought this bicycle or had one at least, early in...very early in World War II, and would ride carefully at a reasonably fast pace, but not madly pedaling his way in Pennsylvania Avenue and then Delaware Avenue to the DuPont Building. And in the evening when he would leave, a little after the exodus of the employees of the company, he would pedal his way out the same way back to his home on the Kennett Pike. And it got to be very...I don't recall that many followed his example...very few if any that I can remember took his good example of saving gasoline by that method. But many did use public transportation or formed car pools to cut down the amount of auto traffic during the war years.

Q What was your usual assignment load for a day. And also, what were the hours like for a reporter in the early days of the Morning News?

A That's a good point. The Every Evening, an afternoon paper, and I believe also likewise the Evening Journal of the middle and late 1920's and early '30's...the reporters came on about 7:00, some of us even at quarter to seven in the morning, and the editors, including the city editor, the assistant city editor, and often the managing editor, were there even earlier than the news staff. They would sometimes come in at a quarter after and half past six, and lay out the work for the day and confer with the mechanical departments, the pressmen and the composing room foremen to line up the probable number of pages and columns of news, columns of ads and details of that kind. And the work loads in those days were heavy in a sense—not that the copy that we finally wrote was perhaps as much as is written by one reporter today. But we had a larger number of news sources to cover in most instances and we had longer hours in that we would start very early in the morning, and frequently after our news beats were covered and the second edition of the afternoon papers went to press, we would have to do chores for the business department, such as writing...for a good many years I had a small businessmen's and store district to cover in the afternoons from about 3:00 to 4:30 or quarter of five in the afternoon, interviewing small businessmen, managers of stores, proprietors of commercial shops, tailors, barbers, anyone that had a small business in the central business district, and getting stories from them of the type of business they ran and little interesting facets of a tailor shop or a small store or appliance store, or a restaurant, small restaurant, which were run in sometimes two, three, four paragraph length on a page known as the Business Page, which ran once a week—at least in the Every Evening and I think likewise in the Evening Journal. And it was an education to be assigned to that afternoon business page district or beat, because there were frequently people who of course were very knowledgeable in their line of business. I remember a tailor, Harry Ambrose, who had a little tailor shop on 7th Street near Shipley at that time, who was not too well educated but was an avid boxing fan and an avid opera goer. He had seen practically every major Italian and German opera written in the 19th and 20th centuries, and could hum or sing any tenor aria from almost anything from Rigoletto to Aida, who knew the text, often in Italian in the case of Italian operas, or almost every opera that was popular in the Metropolitan Opera House in New
York or in Philadelphia, and whose main hobby was going to the Opera on a weekend or attending a boxing match anywhere within a hundred miles of Wilmington. Then there were other men like him who had other hobbies who were in business. Mr. Stewart had a bookbinding business and re-bound the law books in the...and ledgers of various kinds for business firms...was a native-born Scotsman who used to tell me about the land of my ancestors on my mother's side, and told me many things, and it was an education because you saw these men every day...or women, and every day, week after week, and they would often digress into other subjects than their business, so that it was a very good beginning experience for a newer, younger reporter to have that district. Now the Journal, I believe, worked about the same hours we did on the Every Evening. The Morning News I wasn't as familiar with then before I went from the Every Evening to the Morning News. But as a morning paper, they would come on to work their jobs around early afternoon, 1:00, 1:30, and often work until 1:30 in the morning. There was always time off in the evening papers, maybe to snatch a bite or two or a sandwich before the...right after the first edition went to press. But in the case of the morning papers, there was a little time lag at the end of the closing of public offices and government offices in the afternoon which you could get maybe a scratch supper for a half hour.

Q Could you compare some of the editors you worked for in terms of the kind of slant they had or the kind of preference they had--did they enjoy making up the front page with the copy editor, or were they particularly interested in local versus other kinds of news. Did they have a way of getting their reporters focused on the news. Was one different from the other?

A Yes, there were differences. I think mainly that the editors, both the editors-in-chief as they might be called, and the managing editors and city editors in those days, while as in the case of all newspaper work there were feverish periods for the hour or so before the editions, before copy closed for editions of the papers, which were only as I recall only two editions in those days, they were just as feverish in that period. But in between editions and at the end of the actual news gathering day, there was a great deal more informality and you could often put your feet up on a desk, or they did, and they would often break down and reminisce over their experiences, as most of them were in their middle age or even into their fifties, where we were in our 20's or 30's.

Q Was one of these men a harder taskmaster than another one? How did they differ in terms of getting out the news?

A I don't think I would really call any of them severe taskmasters. They were exacting as I imagine even editors since I retired nine years ago are exacting, but mostly they were not severe on their staffs unless some very bad boners were pulled, in which case--as in the case of most bosses--they would really bear down on you. But I would say that one of the most interesting editors who had a more ivory tower approach to news was William J. Robertson, the editor-in-chief of the Every Evening before I came to Wilmington in 1926 and for possibly eight, ten years after that, up into the middle 1930's, who was a brilliantly educated man, who had not only a bachelor's degree but a master's degree in political science, which was rare among the editors in those days.
And his hobby was Greek. And I remember Mr. Robertson asking me if anybody on the staff had ever studied Greek in high school or college. And I said that I had studied elementary Greek in high school and second year Greek in college, but was very miserable in it. So he said, "Do you have any of your old textbooks—not only your elementary Greek texts with grammar but with the Anabasis or some elementary Greek reading." So I said, "Yes, I think I do." And I brought in an elementary, Poite's Elementary Greek, which included the grammar with the declensions and conjugations of verbs and so forth, and a reader, a second-year Greek reader. And I found out to my amazement that in scarcely two years he had become very fluent in Greek as far as reading is concerned—of course Greek...classical Greek wasn't a spoken language. But that was one of his hobbies. Now his editorials were written from rather a detached standpoint, and many of them seemed almost remote from daily concerns, although he did write well on Delaware politics and the legislature and big affairs in the county or city. But Mr. Grider, who helped with editorials on the local and state level, was a much more down-to-earth person in the sense of his things were written on a level that the ordinary reader would understand much better than Mr. Robertson's national and international editorials. Then, later, on the Morning News Mr. Albert W. Cummins of the Cummins family of Smyrna, very old family in the Smyrna area, was a...he was editor-in-chief of the Morning News when I first went there and had been for a number of years before. He was a huge man about six feet three, weighed about 240 pounds, was then middle aged. But I found out that he was not a hard taskmaster. In fact, the city editor and managing editors were much more...much closer of course to the news staff than he. But he had some very interesting personal slants. His editorials were often...some people thought almost too jejune. They were geared to somebody about fifth grade education. And some of the intellectuals in town always thought it was amusing or irritating that the Morning News editorials, most of them of Mr. Cummins' editorial period, were almost too puerile—that they weren't addressed to people who had reason to want a reading on a little higher level than that. But he still dealt with things as they were then and he had some good suggestions, so I didn't maybe feel that they were quite as babyish as some people did.

Q Did Mr. Cummins write all of the editorials when he was the editor of the Morning News—before a larger editorial staff?

A In those days there were no editorial writers so-called as there are now—maybe three or four of them. All the editorials in the Morning News, unless occasionally a guest editorial was suggested by some of the owners of the newspaper, or some member of the board, which was rather rare, Mr. Cummins himself literally wrote every editorial run in the Morning News during his period of editorship...editor-in-chief...in the years that he occupied the position. And they were written on one of the oldest, weirdest looking typewriters that I have ever seen, which was called I believe, a Sterns Visible. And the type bars were arranged in two groups, and only one man in the composing room, whose name escapes me, was capable of repairing that Sterns Visible typewriter for Mr. Cummins, and when Mr. Cummins died he left one of his two Sterns Visible typewriters to this member of the composing room force who had so kindly and with no charge to Mr. Cummins or the paper, had repaired his two Sterns Visible typewriters.
over a period of perhaps 20 years. And Mr. Cummins himself was a character, in that his hobby was football. He had been a guard at the...on the Lafayette College football team, and was a member of the class of 1888 at Lafayette, and had played I believe the whole four years he was in the college as a guard on the football team, and had been a fervid fan ever since his graduation. And during the 1920's and 1930's when I knew him well, he would attend every Lafayette game, home and away, within 100 or 150 miles of eastern Pennsylvania, the seat of the college. And I always knew, even if I forgot the calendar, I always knew when Friday night was arriving, because Mr. Cummins would be bustling around getting ready for his trip to Washington if Lafayette were playing in Georgetown there, or to NY...to New York City if they were playing New York University, or to Lehigh, to Bethlehem if they were playing Bethlehem, or to Muhlenberg College if he were going...if the game was there that Saturday. And he never lost his love for football, although he didn't talk a great deal about it in the Office. But his devotion was expressed mainly in his unfailing attendance at every game. And I don't remember, unless he might have been sick from grippe or flu or something one winter, I don't remember any fall, up into the late November or early December, that he didn't attend a Lafayette game over at least two decades, every single game.

Q Who followed him on the Morning News?

A I'm...right now my mind is a little uncertain on that because to me the editor of the Morning News will always be Alfred W. Cummins, but I may think of it at a moment. In the meanwhile, I'd like to mention one other interesting thing about Mr. Cummins--or two interesting things, in fact, that were personal sidelights on the man, who of course was a native Delawarean of a very old family. He was a lifelong bachelor, which may have explained to you why he could always get away from Friday night until Monday morning to attend Lafayette games, as I'm sure unless his wife had been a fan, she wouldn't have relished his absence every single week from September till December, early December from Friday night until Monday morning. But in addition to his lifelong devotion to football as a fan after his playing days were over, he was a very warm-hearted person and very friendly, very informal. He always called us by our first names or our nicknames, and he would...early in my acquaintance with him, in 1928...or '29, '30, and from there on until his death in the late 1940's, he would call out to the newsroom from his inner office, of which the door was usually ajar...he would say, "Smitty, will you come in a minute." And I knew what was coming...it was usually toward the end of the day, the Morning News day, and I was...because I weighed only about 140 pounds in those days and probably one of the lightest people around the building, he introduced me the first time to the little job I had for him, he said, "Would you mind climbing up on my rolltop desk and winding that clock over the desk?" And I looked up and saw this old-fashioned school clock with Roman numerals, and it was I believe an 8-day clock--wound tight it would run about a week or eight days. So I had a steady job every...about every week, to get up on his desk and reach up and wind this clock with the hand key in the center of the clock. And then another little job I had came to me unsought when I was looking down toward something on the floor and I said, "My, that's a magnificent pair of shoes you have, Mr. Cummins." And he said, "Why, how would you know?" I said, "Well, when I was in high school in Baltimore, a couple of summers I worked in a leather
plant, and I saw how the leather was finished, Morocco and other types of leather used for shoes, both men's and women's shoes, and I got to recognize good leather, even a foot or so away from it. So then I said, "Let me feel that leather, Mr. Cummins." He said, "Go ahead." So I reached down and rubbed my thumbs and fingers over his shoes, and I remember him coughing and saying, "Well," he says, that ought to be good leather. They're Edwin Clapp shoes and they cost $35.00." And in those days a pair of men's shoes costing $35.00 would be the equivalent of paying $75.00 for perhaps even bench-made, hand-made, men's oxfords today. So my job was, after that, because of my admiration for his Edwin Clapp shoes, made in New York, I believe, or at least sold in New York, my job after that was to tie his shoe laces. The reason for that was Mr. Cummins, who at that time must have weighed at least 250-60 pounds, had what Hugh Walpole, the English novelist, called a huge protuberance...a bay window, in other words, and it was very difficult for him to lean down and tie his own shoe laces. So when I saw his shoe laces were undone, or if I didn't notice them he would say, "Oh, Smitty." And I'd go in, and he'd say, "You mind tying my shoe laces for me today?" And I said, "Of course not, Mr. Cummins." I bowed very low many many times before the editor-in-chief could tie his shoe laces. And a still more interesting habit of his was something that puzzled me the first year or so until I finally caught on and learned indirectly what this habit of his related to. Toward the end of the day, as he was getting ready to leave the office, end of the morning, I might almost say, since he rarely left before midnight or so, he would roll up old papers, which were going to be discarded...which had been clipped from for the files of the morgue or library of the paper, or were going to be junked because of defective pages or things...he would roll up maybe 15 or 20 of them into a roll the length of the paper and perhaps four or five inches thick, and then tie them with heavy cord from the bundle in the newsroom...the mailroom department where the papers went out in bundles. So I was curious what he could be up to, and then through somebody else in the building I learned that Mr. Cummins was making his own fireplace logs as it were. He took these home during the fall, winter, and early spring months, and burned these tied-up newspapers, which were very tightly rolled and wrapped and tied with cord, and were just about the size of fireplace logs. And he would put them in his fireplace in his house out on Delaware Avenue, I think near Emanuel Church...Delaware Avenue near 17th Street. And all through the years I knew him, Mr. Cummins furnished his own...or you might say the Morning News furnished Mr. Cummins' logs for his fireplace, through his ingenuity. I never found out where he first got the idea of wrapping these discarded papers very tightly and tying them up in thick, four or five, six inch diameter logs...where the idea came to him. And I never was quite courageous enough to ask him, because I thought he might feel that I was implying that he was somewhat stingy that he wouldn't buy firewood for his paper, but was using the company's discarded papers. But it was a habit that he kept up for years and years, and I always knew when the weather was getting chilly in the fall when I'd see those logs being assembled to be taken home with him.

There were several of the Every Evening people who went on to the Morning News. People like O. A. H. Gruber, and you, and was the Morning News, after the merger with the Journal, after the Journal and the Every Evening merged and the two papers shared the building, and shared a newsroom,
was that competition a stiff kind of competition?

As I recall it, the merger took place in the late 1930's—I know it was well before World War II. And some of the Every Evening staff, after it merged with the News Journal Company's two newspapers, the Morning News and the Evening Journal, did go over. I recall Bill Frank, who is still, although retired, still writes for the Evening Journal, and I believe...and runs a column in the Morning News...Bill Frank went over from the Every Evening to the...first I believe to the Morning News, if my memory is correct, and then later to the Journal. Or it may have been the other way around. But...and as I remember, the Every Evening continued to be published independently, however, in a different building...in the present News Journal Building at Grard and Orange Streets, even before the merger of the Every Evening and the Evening Journal. The first step, sometime before the merger, the Every Evening moved from its decrepit building at 5th and Shipley Streets up to the present News Journal Building, which was scarcely half the size then that is now with two additions having been made to the Grard and Orange Street building, and Mr. William F. Metten published the Every Evening there for some years...a few years at least, before the Every Evening merged with the Evening Journal, which still remained during those years in its very old beat-up building at 4th and Shipley Streets. Then when the merger took place, as I recall, in the late 1930's, the Journal and Morning News moved out of their jointly-occupied building at 4th and Shipley into the Every Evening's brick building, new brick building, at Grard and Orange Streets, and then when the merger took place, the Every Evening simply dropped out of existence, except its name was then mentioned in the masthead, that it had combined with the Journal. And the Journal really absorbed the Every Evening, was what it was. And then I believe that from...in addition to some...after the merger, there were others who had worked on the Every Evening who did join up either with the Morning News or the Journal. And the...and some went to other occupations. One or two I remember went into insurance or other...the Journal didn't by any means get all of the former Morning News...or Every Evening staffs. They didn't get all of their people. Getting back though to the editors, perhaps one of the most interesting editors, who I believe succeeded Mr. Cummins, was the late...or, I guess he's still living; I hope so...William L. Mapel, who came from a New York newspaper, I don't remember which one, to become editor of the Morning News, and later he was made executive editor of both papers, the Morning News and the Evening Journal. And he fastened the name, I don't know why, on Mr. Cummins, as "Colonel"—he kept calling him Colonel. He didn't call him Mr. Cummins or Al, for Albert W. Cummins, and he made the mistake at first of thinking Mr. Cummins was Cummings. But Mr. Cummins was C-u-m-m-i-n-s. It was a Delaware family which did not spell it Cummings, but Cummins. But he called—Mr. Mapel, who really succeeded Mr. Cummins as he advanced in age, and was deemed to be a little bit out of touch with the times of the new kind of journalism that was developing...Mr. Mapel insisted on calling Mr. Cummins Colonel. And I asked Mr. Cummins, I said, "Mr. Cummins, you were never in the Army, or served in the Spanish-American War or anything." I says, "Where does Mr. Mapel get this title of 'colonel' for you?" And he said, "Search me." He said, "I don't know, unless it's my venerability that impresses him that I should be a Kentucky colonel or something." But, he said, "I don't know why he's fastened this name Colonel on me." But Mr. Mapel called him Colonel
almost invariably after the first few months that Mr. Mapel came. And Mr. Mapel, as executive editor, was...brought a great many changes. And Mr. Cummins, I think, in fact I know, from his own conversations with me, was very much hurt by the fact that he was considered old fashioned and hadn't moved with the times. And gradually Mr. Cummins was relegated to sort of a...almost a kind of a museum piece, and had scarcely any functions at all, and it really broke his heart. And I could see the man just deteriorating year after year. And when he died, I think it was really a relief to him, because he felt that his child and his whole world had sort of been shoved out from under him...pulled out from under him. I don't think Mr. Mapel really had any understanding of what he was doing to this long, long experienced newspaperman who sort of lived, breathed and almost existed for his job. But that's the way it happened. And Mr. Mapel brought in, soon after he came, an assistant named...let's see...not Morris, Morris came later...his name just escapes me...

Q What about the competition between the editor of the Journal and the editor of the Morning News on the city staff--how did that go?

A Mr. Mapel who was a man physically even taller and not as heavy, but very very big, and was the only person I've ever seen, until the advent of Dick Sanger, who could top Mr. Cummins in height, Mr. Mapel brought in as an assistant to him, a very friendly and likeable assistant editor, named Martin Klaver. And I remember in one of Mr. Mapel's columns which he...soon after his arrival he wrote a personal column of the various items...you might call it a general column of this and that around the town...and he mentioned, in introducing to the public in his column his new associate Martin Klaver, he said, "such and such took place when Marty Klaver and I were deckhands on the Good Ship American Boy," which was a reference to a nationwide boys magazine of the late 19...which I recall was in existence in the early years of the 20th Century, and perhaps I think finally suspended publication about perhaps the time of...a little before World War II. And the reference in Mr. Mapel's column was the fact that he and Martin Klaver had been associated in some editorial capacity for this nationally circulated monthly boys magazine called American Boy, which was something on the order of the Youth Companion of my childhood, but written more specifically for boys. And Mr. Klaver was a very quiet person that had a hearing impairment which made it difficult to talk to him without shouting, but when you got past that was more approachable and in many ways was one of the most likeable editors as well as one of the best informed that I can ever remember in my whole experience. But Mr. Mapel was like a big shaggy dog. He was friendly to everyone, and personally I don't remember anyone that was more popular with the public or with the staff than Mr. Mapel until the advent of a successor of his named Fendel Yerxa, who was also a very big man physically and in his prime--I'd judge in his late 30's or early 40's. And when he succeeded as executive editor, he introduced many innovations and changes for the better I think most people would agree. But the competition, to get back to your question about the competition, I think there was a distinct let-down, or drop, in the competitiveness of the news staffs when the...after the merger took place and the Every Evening and the Journal were one newspaper, one afternoon paper. There wasn't the same competitiveness between the Morning News staff and the Journal, the Evening Journal
staff, because as I used to say, we both ate our oats out of the same feed bag. We were employed by the same company, and while there was a theoretical competition as between the morning paper getting beats or scoops on the Evening Journal, and likewise the Journal tried to get scoops on the morning paper, if we covered our time spans...of course were different, naturally, one being an A.M. and one a P.M. newspaper, but I never felt that the competition of the Morning News with the Evening Journal was ever as fierce as between the old Every Evening and the Evening Journal, which were afternoon competing newspapers. And some people said...in the city, used to laugh and tell us, "Well, it's all a shadow boxing." And they'd say, "What difference does it make if we give you the story now or the Journal, with a bigger circulation, gets it tomorrow afternoon?" And we constantly had to fight that situation, which wasn't quite the same as when the Every Evening had an afternoon keen competitor in the Evening Journal, and there were two separate P.M. newspapers. And I would say in that sense competition...Now, there was a lot of competition between the editors of the Morning News and the Journal, and Harris Saminsky, who was the city editor of the Journal after he had been an assistant of the old Every Evening. Harris Saminsky's period of city editorship of the Evening Journal was marked by...in his case...he had so many news contacts, far more than any one reporter had...he would frequently tip the news staff off to stories that friends of his had phoned into him, or possibilities of stories, which the men that covered the district never would have heard. And in that sense he was competing with the Morning News city editor, John Mowey, and later Carl Weiss, and later Emerson Wilson, to get these good stories, exclusives, for the Evening Journal, and freeze the Morning News out. But that competition very infrequently was between the reporters of the morning paper and the afternoon paper. It was more often a fight between the city editors through their access to news tips...or friendships, which led to news tips...and then of course they would put the reporters on the story. But mainly the competition I always felt degenerated from a competition among the reporters of the two evening papers, to a competition between the city editors of the Morning News and the Evening Journal--became an intra-family competition, rather than in inter-newspaper competition, between ownership and editorship, which was...distinctly of two newspapers. And I think that more or less to perhaps a little complacency on the news staffs of both the Morning News and the Evening Journal because we didn't have a direct competitor who was, you know, sort of a man-to-man opposition on our news beats. Because, for instance, the Evening Journal men and women, occasionally they did have women reporters, would be through their work and gone before we started our Morning News shift, from the early afternoon into the wee small hours of the morning. So that we covered without any competing reporters, gumshoeing around with us, and trying to dodge the opposition or give them the slip. We were just like a crew in a factory who worked on a morning shift into the early afternoon and then from the early afternoon until the late evening.

Q Did you develop a kind of a special life as a night worker? Was it very different? Did you go home to your family every night?

A On the afternoon papers, both the Journal and the Every Evening, you made very sure before you left your house to go to the office at 5th and Shipley, to get yourself a pretty big and very filling breakfast,
because you might never see a lunch and might have to go from breakfast time to six or six-thirty at night, barring a chance to grab half a sandwich, or guzzle half a glass of milk, perhaps, in between the editions, which would take you from breakfast time into the early afternoon. There was very little time for any formal lunch. In fact, even the editors as I recall grabbed a sandwich right there at their desk and a glass of milk or a soft drink. They never could go out to a restaurant. I think later Harris Saminsky used to go out to lunch and perhaps occasionally Mr. Griger in the later years, in the late 1930's, the '40's and '50's, when customs changed. But it was very hectic to ever get anything after breakfast until dinner. On the afternoon paper. Now, the morning newspapers...or at least the only morning newspaper that we had, the Morning News in Wilmington, city...was a different matter. There, you had covered your afternoon and your beat or special assignments, by 5:00. You got into the office, you rewrote stories that had been clipped from the evening paper or papers, depending on what period it was--before or after the merger, then you would...that would take you on to maybe six, six-thirty. Then you had a chance to slip out and get a decent supper, or dinner if you wanted a big meal, at a restaurant if you wanted to. Or occasionally you could have time to get home if it wasn't too far from the office, and you could eat a regular dinner maybe from 6:30 til 7:00, or 7:00 to 7:30. Then you'd come back and get your night assignments for evening meetings, and you'd at least had a pretty good dinner or supper to tide you over until you got home. Now, in the old days when the reporters on the...both on the Every Evening, the Evening Journal and the Morning News, were nearly all of them bachelors and in their early 20's, after work was the only time for much socialization, or socializing I guess would be a better word, socializing. And that was...the staff of the Morning News, I remember, particularly, would gather...as I say, mostly all were bachelors then...and maybe four or five of us and occasionally some friends of ours who were night people, night workers, would gather at some restaurant that was an all-night restaurant, like the Presto Restaurant on Market Street at that time, between 8th and 9th, and we'd have sort of a snack, maybe a glass of milk or something like that, and then we'd sometimes repair to someone's apartment or house, if they had a family could tolerate a little noise and could sleep through it, and we'd often play poker from maybe 2:00 in the morning until 6:00. And poker parties at...Marty Levin, who's now a copy reader on the News Journal newspaper, works daytime, lived at 8th and Adams in an apartment house, and we would go there frequently for poker sessions, and then another member of the staff had an apartment on 10th Street between Orange and Tatnall, and we'd go...we'd make a sort of a circuit. And we'd go there maybe the next week for poker parties, which weren't held every night after work, but maybe three or four nights out of six. So that that was...night workers, we tended I think to be a little bit more detached than the day people, because due to our hours in those days with the Morning News...the news staff never leaving the office before 2:00 and frequently 2:30, and some often stayed until the second edition at 3:00 in the morning...we led a different sort of life entirely from the day side, as we called it, from the Journal and Every Evening and later the Journal alone. And we had fewer friends for the simple reason that you couldn't accommodate social life to people who worked daytime and
went to bed at 11:00 at night. You couldn't make friends with them when you went to bed at 2:00, or 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning and got up at ten or eleven. So that there was a distinct difference in the staff. And I remember the coffee drinking by the morning newspapermen--I never was much of a coffee drinker...I was a tea drinker 'cause I was born in the Orient--but the coffee drinking was...at first startled me. I remember one fellow named Al Wise, who was from around Westchester or Malvern, Pennsylvania, covered police and the courts for a number of years for the Morning News. I counted up on an average evening and early morning that he would drink between twelve and fourteen cups of coffee--ordinary coffee cups--six, seven ounce cup size cups. And I just couldn't understand it. And yet he didn't seem very jittery or nervous...smoked a great many cigarettes, as did most all of them except...I guess...I think John Hill and I were the only non-smokers on the Morning News for a long period of years...perhaps Emerson Wilson for a while. But those...and then frequently after repeal...after Roosevelt...Franklin Roosevelt...and the repeal of the Prohibition Amendment to the Constitution, speakeasies sprang up and I, who had never had anything to drink except milk and tea and perhaps grape juice in my life, was introduced by one of the Morning News reporters, Clyde Young, who also covered police for the Morning News at that time, who knew every speakeasy because of his contact with the police--most of the speakeasies operated with the tacit permission of the police force...

Q Was it true, the legend about the sellers of the alcohol during prohibition days, coming into the lobby of the hotel and being met so that orders for liquor could be given? Did you ever hear of that?

A I don't have personal knowledge, but through scuttlebutt or grapevine avenues, it was understood that the upper crust of Wilmington and suburbs, all during the years that I was in Wilmington before repeal, in other words from the summer of 1926 'til repeal which I believe was in 1933, their supply, particularly of imported Scotch whiskey and Canadian whiskey, never really suffered much of a diminution, because the traffic, over the Canadian border particularly, was handled by bootleggers from the Canadian border and then others took it over from New York or Philadelphia to Wilmington...or from Baltimore, which had avenues to the sea of course through the harbors, and little coves where rum runners put it. And the Delaware River was known as a rum running center, too. So it's true that from hearsay--I don't recall ever seeing it myself--but that there were surreptitiously case loads of Canadian and Scotch whiskey came in and...whether...I don't recall that they necessarily came into the DuPont Building, although other friends of mine on the paper said they had seen cases unloaded into the basement of the DuPont Building, and then they were distributed. And I do know, because I knew them personally, that there were two very elegantly dressed men, big men...and looked like businessmen...who were the bootleggers who supplied the wealthy business and industrial leaders in Wilmington and their families who liked Scotch and Canadian whiskey, and these men would take orders almost every afternoon in the corridors, or the lobby...in the lobby of the Hotel DuPont, or the corridors of the DuPont Building. And I have personally a hundred times seen people go up to them and seen Mr. So-and-So and Mr. So-and-So, the two bootleg representatives, take orders for so many cases of Scotch or so many cases of Canadian whiskey, and later through overhearing conversations, I knew beyond any doubt that that was
their job. They were the liaison people who did furnish the supply of good quality...the upper crust never relied on the bootleg stuff that came in through American channels. Now that was served and often even that was cut with water at these bootleg places in various parts of Wilmington city and on the edges of town. But those who could afford never had to go down to that level, although I saw members of upper crust Wilmington families quite frequently in a speakeasy, and I recognized them, although I never let on that I knew them, in the speakeasy that Clyde Young took me to, in the basement and first floor of a building wedged in behind St. Patrick's Church at 15th and King Street. Then there were cases of some upper crust people who had friends who would get the cases of Scotch or Canadian whiskey over the border, and then they would send some member of their family in a large car that had a big luggage compartment to pick it up in Niagara Falls or Hamilton or some town close to the Canadian border and bring it down here. And they were never...I never heard of them ever being intercepted or stopped by Revenue agents or anyone...it seemed to get here safely. That was just one little evidence that the Volstead Act, the Prohibition Act, wasn't really very much lived up to, even in a small town like Wilmington. But we didn't have the night clubs in the sense of crazy speakeasies like New York, where you had to be recognized by the man at the peephole. Although, one speakeasy--or two of them here--did have peepholes, and you had to be identified before you could get in, because occasionally the police would make raids, and the people who as we used to say didn't pay their dues were raided maybe every six months or five months.

Q Was the reporter population of the paper in Wilmington and the desk men for example, the copy desk man...did people come and work for a long time, or was it more a transient paper?

A Stanley Walker, the editor of the New York Herald Tribune for many many years and probably one of the greatest city editors in the 20th Century, had an article in the American Mercury, I remember, when George C. Nathan was the editor of it, and the old-time newspapermen of the early 20th Century were always marked by a dissolute drooping brimmed beat-up hat that looked like it had been slept in in the park for 20 years, and a copy of the green-bound American Mercury sticking out of their overcoat of suit pocket. Well, Walker, Stanley Walker, who wrote an article for the American Mercury called "Cirrhosis on the City Desk," which referred to the fact that most newspapermen in the 1880's, 1890's, and perhaps up 'til at least a year or two after World War I, were often rolling stones, particularly the reporters, copy readers, and often the printers in the composing rooms and pressrooms where an itinerant corps of men...I don't remember ever meeting any women that were itinerant newspaperwomen...but for many years, up almost 'til the middle 1930's, even the Wilmington papers had every...of every few months, or every six months at least...some new man would arrive from Lord knows where, anywhere from San Francisco to Pittsburgh to Mobile, Alabama or to Albany, New York. And to those of us in the know it was obvious that these were one of the rolling stones who didn't stay on one newspaper very long anywhere. Any newspaperman or woman who had been in the business, say 10-15-20-30-40 years in the period perhaps from a little after World War I up until the 1960's, necessarily if he...particularly if he ever covered courts or police, would have some very harrowing painful stories to write, and others that were
pleasant and happy, as life is, frequently. And in that category I think a person who had had very little personal direct acquaintance with death, since I was too young for World War I and just too old for World War II and had never been in any major earthquakes or natural catastrophes where people died in front of your eyes, as one man who had very little personal familiarity with death until the deaths of my parents, at whose bedsides I was present, the shock that came to me with the first very painful story that I had to cover for the Every Evening was a trio of teenagers...two girls perhaps 16-17 years of age, and a boy about 18, who either...the boy that was the driver and they had either...he had either driven his small coupe automobile off the Park Drive at Van Buren Street and into the City Race by accident of not judging the curve, or perhaps may have been under the influence of bootleg whiskey at the time. But I remember Coroner Nichols, Coroner of New Castle County at the time, phoning me before I left the Every Evening to say that he had three fatalities from drowning, and if I came right down to the morgue, which at that time was in back of his offices on 7th Street...excuse me, between Shipley and Orange Streets, that he'd give me the details. And so I hurried down there, or up there from the Every Evening, and laid out in his morgue were these three teenagers, still dripping wet from their immersion in this car in the City Race, which at Van Buren Street and Park Drive was perhaps 8-10 feet deep. So the car had been totally submerged when it ran off Park Drive and into the City Race. And I remember these girls, dead girls, and the dead youth, with the water...their hair plastered and wet to their heads, all makeup if they had any removed from their faces, and their clothes plastered to their bodies, because they were still dripping wet--they had just been pulled out of the Race by the police a half hour before. And it was my first closeup view of not only the finality, but the cruelty, of sudden death, and particularly death by drowning. So that that stands out, and I guess I can always...in fact I can shut my eyes and see those three teenagers any day or any night in my life since. Then of course anyone that covered police would have murder cases and murder trials which would stand out in your memory. And I think one of the most harrowing cases of murder that I personally saw the victims of were a mother and daughter, a mother perhaps 39, 40, the daughter maybe 16, who were found dead in the mother's apartment at 8th and Washington Streets over a confectionery store there, and soft-drink counter, sort of a soda shop type place. And I had heard about it the moment I went to the police station...this was, I would guess, maybe about 1932, '33. And...with the tip that there were...a double fatality in an apartment house at 8th and Washington, I ran literally from the police station at 10th and King to 8th and Washington, and I got there just as two detectives were going up the stairs ahead of me, so that I arrived there simultaneously, really, with the police. And when they opened the door of the apartment house where the landlady had smelled the gas, and then had called the police suspecting that gas was missing...we ran in, and I remember the mother and...this mother and daughter had very obviously died from inhalation of gas from an oven in the kitchen. All the doors and windows had been stuffed with paper. And I remember that they were in nightgowns, and the faces and legs were the color of a cooked lobster-brilliant red. The gas evidently, which I had never had experience for, had colored them a vivid red. And then a few minutes after getting the names of the mother and her daughter, the detectives decided that the mother, in despondency, had committed suicide, and had, as it were,
either with the daughter's acquiescence, or more likely had taken the daughter with her in death...in other words, she may have murdered her daughter and she might also have had a suicide pact with her daughter, we never could find out. And while we were still...I was getting details from the detectives, the father of the girl and the separated or divorced husband, rushed in, who was a minor official in a big company in Wilmington, and I remember his exclamation of anger mingled with sorrow when he say, "My God, why did you have to take her with you?"--meaning his daughter, with whom of course evidently he had a happier relationship than with his ex-wife. And that to me was...almost as harrowing an experience as the drowned teenagers.

(Tape runs out here--nothing on reverse side.)