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INTERVIEW WITH HORACE DEAKYNE
New Castle, Delaware
February 11, 1974

INTERVIEWED BY: Rebecca Button

HD: Horace Deakyne

RB: Rebecca Button

RB: Mr. Deakyne wants to talk about New Castle, his home for his lifetime, and the home of his ancestors. Roughly, stories that he remembers beginning around the beginning of the century, from 1900 until now, is that right, Mr. Deakyne?

HD: (Completely inaudible)

RB: One thing you mentioned was the Kenny Bunkport, Maine, ice (?) coming to New Castle.

HD: Well, let me start this way. Our whole lifeblood centered around the river, from the time the town was settled until the coming of the railroads as we know them, the automobile, the highways. What the town always looked forward to was the arrival of the three-masted schooner with a cargo of ice which represented the town's ice supply for the summer. Now unfortunately I haven't found out the capacity, the tonnage capacity, of a three-masted schooner. But this schooner, I'm showing Mrs. Button a picture of one of them, one that came. As you see, she's well loaded, pretty well down in the water. And it came here in the late winter or early spring from Kenny Bunkport, Maine; and her sole cargo was ice. And this is pure recollection, but I would say the--and this, anybody who knows--the weight of a cubic foot of ice may contradict this, but I would say there probably 18 inches to 2 feet thick, about 2 feet, 6 inches to 3 feet square. And the schooner tied up at Delaware Street wharf, or the wharf at the foot of Delaware Street; and the cargo was consigned to Joseph H. King. He would have the entire cargo, and he would have farmers who were not busy right at that period come in with farm wagons, pulled by two horses, and they would rig up an unloading arrangement with a pair of heavy ice tongs on the end of a rope and the rope to a pulley and two horses hitched to the end of that. And they always made an ebb tide landing with the bow of the schooner downriver because the ice, the tide would be

HD: (Cont'd)

lower than the hull of the ship, and hauled up to a chute, a wooden chute, which was arranged in the rigging of the ship so that when the tide was high or low they could adjust the slope of it. And the velocity of the cakes as they went down the chute onto a wooden platform and they would be stopped there by a couple of men with tools with picks on the end and then pushed into the farm wagon. And they would come up Delaware Street to Water Street which is now the Strand and be taken to the icehouse. Mr. King's icehouse, which was on Harmony Street, where Philip Laird built the house now occupied by Hess Wilson and Bill McCafferty; and I should have those numbers, but I don't. But they are the two brick houses on the left going west from Water Street. And the icehouse was about 66 feet long, fronting on Harmony Street, and about 33 feet deep. And in back of that was a shed and the stables for their horses, which were used to deliver the ice around town. Farm wagons then, of course, were higher than the ones they use now and had wooden or steel tires on the wheels; and when they were driven up and down Water Street from the icehouse to the wharf or vice versa it made quite a noise. There was quite a bit of vibration. And that was quite an event of the town, and practically opening up the activity on the river after the winter here at the wharf. And the cakes, here's where I may be tripped up, the cakes weighed 300 pounds; and when they were unloaded into the icehouse which was probably--I haven't been able to find anybody who has the exact measurement--but the cellar or the excavation for that house was probably 20 feet or more below the street level. And then they would fill it by tiers of ice and then cover it with sawdust and then start another tier. And that represented practically the whole ice supply of the town for the summer. There was a well or two wells down in the bottom of the excavation, and of course there'd be some melting involved as it ran into the summer, and the water from the melted ice would be pumped out. The only other supply which would be around here would be small icehouses on farms that would be filled for the farmer's own use. Another small icehouse on the Wilmington Road, Route 9, about a mile outside of town where a pond was located, and it was owned by people named Elkington (?) who used it to manufacture their own ice cream here in town. I attempted to find out how long the town depended on that type supply; and the best information I can get is from Mr. King--he's one of Mr. King's grandsons--who was about 14 or 15 years old in 1920. And he feels that is when the manufactured ice was coming into use. And the hauling of a shipload of ice from Maine down here was discontinued. I haven't been able to verify that, but that is an approximation. Mr. King's grandson--the one I just mentioned--within the last few years has been up in Maine going over that ice country. And he told me that there has been a book published by Jennie G. Evertson, and the name of it was

HD: (Cont'd)

Tidewater Ice on the Kenny Beck River; and it is one of a series of books on Maine's heritage. It's the Maine heritage season. I haven't seen it; he's going to bring it over and let me look at it. I want to get a copy of it because it was quite an event, as you can understand, in those days. And Mr. King was quite an active man, which we've discussed in our story of the shad fishing here. After the ice arrived, we'd get into shad fishing; and he was one of the shippers to the New York and Philadelphia markets. That would last into the early part of the summer; and then in the fall, he had a hog-butchering operation. So he had, he got to bring the ice down first, and then, of course, that would be utilized practically all summer. I would be actively engaged in that, and the wharf at the foot of Delaware Street as well as the river-front north and south of that was of very much interest in the winter when ships would be tied up here on account of the ice, usually in lots of three, by big ocean-going tugs of Philadelphia & Reading Coal & Iron Co. And the tugs were named for cities and towns in the area of anthracite coal regions. For instance, to name a few, one was the Gettysburg; and then there was the Tamacqua, the Catawiska (?), _____, and the Conestoga. Now, what tonnage they were I can't, I have no idea. But the tugs were able vessels which would run considerably over, oh, 100, 125, or 150 feet, real, real tugs. Another interesting feature of the waterfront here at New Castle was the icebreakers which used to tie up here. They were owned by the city of Philadelphia and were used to break up the ice so the ships could get through and keep the port of Philadelphia in operation. There were three originally, No. 1, 2, and 3. No. 1 is mentioned by the Fin who in 1965 wrote the city of Philadelphia asking for a picture and information on City Iceboat No. 1, which plied the Delaware in the Nineteenth Century. He said this was the world's first steam icebreaker. The Fin who wrote this book, I wouldn't attempt to pronounce his name, but it was Dr. Jorma Pohjanpallo, of Helsinki, Finland. And anybody who wants to wrestle with that can spend an evening trying to pronounce it. But there were three of that type; and one was used up around Horseshoe Curve, which is near Leg Island, to keep the channel open there. And the other one worked down around this section of the river. And the third further down the bay. No. 3 was sunk down around the breakwater, and No. 1 and 2 continued to operate. And the last one built was the John Weaver, and she was a steel hull and built like the Russian icebreakers were built. When the Weaver was built, the bow was cut under, and she would ride up on the ice and crush it rather than plow through it. The same principle

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was used in these icebreakers when they were trying to determine whether or not it was practical to bring oil by water from the Arctic Slope. They were built the same way, cut-under bow, and ride up on the ice and crush it rather than try to plow through it. Those boats were used in this area, and they used to tie up at New Castle at night. You hear all kinds of stories about ice in the Delaware and how it was frozen over here and so forth. And I don't think anything's ever true; with the amount of tide here, I don't think it was ever frozen over completely. Now, it's been frozen along the shore, and there'd be areas where you could skate if you wanted to risk you neck. But boys of my age didn't worry about that then. Of course those icebreakers outlived their usefulness when the ships were steel hull and the volume of shipping increased. I mentioned some skating on the river. One very interesting skater was Col. Joseph Harry Rogers who lived, after he was first married and moved into town, in a house which stood where the side yard of our house stands. It would be No. 19, The Strand. And when the Stockton House, which stood where our house and No. 23, which abuts Baggott Alley, the Stockton House, one of the old hotels which burned in 1870, and the house Col. Rogers lived in on the other side of our house was also burned. And then they moved into No. 15 and later bought the house at No. 11 which was where he lived until he died. And he was an ardent skater and a very excellent skater. And he and a man named Oppenheimer from Philadelphia--Abraham Oppenheimer, who was then 83, claimed to be the world's champion octogenarian skater. And that annoyed Col. Harry a great deal; and they carried on a newspaper feud for years about having a match, doing fancy figures and so forth on ice. And when they scheduled a match, something always happened like the ice was soft or something else would prevent them from getting together. So finally Col. Rogers went up to Philadelphia, accompanied by some New Castle people, my father and Uncle Jim Challenger (?), and my Uncle Ned Challenger who then lived in Philadelphia, and Earl Challenger, whose people's forebearers were from New Castle, and Earl's sister's husband, a fellow named Dana, were, accompanied Col. Joe Harry out to one of the lakes out in Fairmount Park. And Mr. Oppenheimer didn't show up; he claimed he was ill and the ice was soft. But anyhow Col. Joe Harry pulled his skates out of the cloth bag he carried them in and put them on. And when he skated he wore a black skull cap. He geared himself up in that and then amazed the people who had come, been attracted there because of this newspaper feud. And they were amazed at his ability as a skater. And Fred Reybold, who was then with the Newton North American--they owned North American in Philadelphia--always saw that he was present on an

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occasion like that, whenever a person that counts, a spread in the newspaper, an article he would write, and then photographs of Oppenheimer and Col. Joe Harry. I tell a story, one of my favorites, that is very rarely believed, but it's an actual fact. One of my favorite skating places here in New Castle when the ice was good was what we called a narrow dike. It wasn't a dike at all; it was a stream which flowed under the original horse _____ from here to Wilmington. And the dike along the river bank was fairly deep in those days. As a youngster I was not allowed to skate out there. And I went out there, was taken out there one afternoon with Col. Joe Harry and Uncle Jim Challenger and skated there with them. But nobody believes the story I tell. I can tell it better, I think, if I talk about being invited to a dinner at one of our neighbors who was entertaining a relative of theirs who had a very good position at the Smithsonian. And she talked about their going to send a car over to Baltimore the following week to get a descendant of the author of the "Star Spangled Banner" to see if she had anything of his that would be of interest to the Smithsonian. And she was trying to figure out what generation she would be from, this man, this officer who was in command of Ft. McKenny when the "Star Spangled Banner" was written. I said that hadn't been very long ago. I said I went skating with a man who shook hands with Lafayette, the revolutionary figure. Well, I'm still _____ No. 1 in her book. But it was an actual fact. Col. Joe Harry was born in 1817, and Lafayette visited this country in 1824. Col. Joe Harry's father was a very important man in this area, and he was on the committee which was selected to greet Lafayette at the state line at Pennsylvania and escort him on to New Castle where he spent the night. And it seems incredible that I would have gone skating with a man who had personal contact with Lafayette because in a small way he was taken by Father with this group that met Lafayette at the state line and had actually shaken hands with him. And I am still _____ No. 1. But as a matter of fact, nevertheless I'm sorry to say I'm not old, but he was an interesting man to know. When he lived where our side yard is, he was a Southern sympathizer in the Civil War. And of course my grandfather on my mother's side was an ardent Union man. And Col. Joe Harry was great for buying a string of pennants. He always had a stand in his back yard (?) along the river. On holidays and that sort of thing and during the Civil War, he flew the "Stars and Bars."

HD: (Cont'd)

My grandfather was one of a group who came down and bawled him out and hauled it down. And Col. Joe Harry never forgave or forgot, but in later years he must have mellowed because my grandfather had a drugstore and he had a big stove in the center and the men would congregate there in the evening. And Col. Joe Harry would come up every night and make conversation and he wore, he always wore a vest and a watch with a heavy gold chain. And he'd go out on the steps and take out that watch and say, "It's 9 o'clock, time all honest men were in bed and thieves were on their way." He'd invariably go through that ritual every night. I neglected to say when I talked about the ships tying up here in the ice that the officers would come ashore in the evening. There'd always be a group of them around that stove. And, as a child, I spent a great deal of time there. I look back on that as a very pleasant experience, to hear those fellows. And when they did away with the stove, Dr. John Jammer Black, who had an unusually well known position here and way ahead of time--he was in the forefront of the early days of the tuberculosis fight--and when he'd make his rounds in the morning in his carriage and with his driver. And incidentally, he lived next door to where we are now. And he would stop back at Grandfather's drugstore and write his prescriptions. My grandfather's drugstore was at 9 E. 2nd Street which was then Market Street, in a store and dwelling built by his father. And I don't know whether it would be of any interest or not, but I live in a house, No. 21 The Strand, which was part of the site of the Stockton House which was built in 1870. I was wrong in saying it was built in 1870. It was burned in 1870. He would stop in my grandfather's drugstore to write his prescriptions, and he was there one day and there were some workmen in the store making some changes; and my grandfather and grandmother were still living in the dwelling part of the building. And their son James, who carried on the business until his death, was there. And Doctor said, "Jim, what are you doing?" "Well," he said, "Ned and I," who was his brother, "are going to put in hot water heat for Mother and Father." "Well," he said, "does that mean this stove has got to go?" Uncle Jim said, "Yes, Doctor, I'm afraid it does." "Well," the doctor said, "Well, Jim, where are us fellows gonna spit?" Dr. Black was a very unusual man, capable, able, recognized in his profession. And the house next door where he lived is a big house. Most of these houses along The Strand then had basement kitchens on account of the river flooding, and he had a basement kitchen. He had a _____ right across the back of the house, so he'd sit and look at the river. And he had a patient there one day who was having some digestive trouble, and the doctor had just given him a long talk on how nobody should eat fried food--it was not fit to be put in your stomach. And he was just about winding up when Kate Russell Smith, who was his cook, came up from the basement kitchen,

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stuck her head in the office there and said, "Doctor, how do you want those catfish cooked tonight?" He said, "Fry them til the tails drop off." He wrote, uh, two of his books were published: Eating to Live or Living to Eat and the other, Forty Years in the Medical Profession. And he had a good farm about two miles out of town, and it was very; one of his prime interests besides his profession was the raising of fruit trees. And Morvin and he would drive out there often. Another interesting character who lived uh, well, had he been there, yes, had lived at one time, had he been _____ Water Street, which I still call it, is now The Strand, of course, who had his place of business at what would be 25 The Strand, that is right adjoining Packet (?) Alley, was David Bowden, who came here from a farm in the Glasgow area. And that was quite a business when the ships, this would be in the, after the middle part of the last century, ships would stop here and buy from him and the ship chandler; and he had a real business. And he'd have these painting barrels, and these linseed oil barrels, some would be beverages in barrels. It was a hangout for a great many of the old-timers, and he lived at 3rd & Delaware in the house of Nicholas Van Dyke where the wedding of Ann Van Dyke and Charles I. Du Pont took place in 1824. He would take the boat when he wanted to order supplies, take a steamboat to Philadelphia. And at that time, the time I'm talking of, Mrs. Bowden had died, and she was living with his daughter Agnes. One morning he was preparing to take the boat and go to Philadelphia and it was still dark--it hadn't gotten light--he'd had his breakfast and was putting on his outer clothes to go to the boat and he was bald as a bat and wore a wig and said, "Agnes, what's the matter, I can't get my hat on this morning." And she looked at him and said, "Father, no wonder, you have on two wigs," which wouldn't have worried him a bit, so he took one off and put his hat on and went on to board the boat.

We started out by saying that this would be happenings and personalities of New Castle around the turn of the Century, and I mentioned nothing of businesses. It has been suggested that I might speak of some of the changes that have taken place since that time. And I think a very major element in the change has been the almost complete wiping out of small, individual businesses. I have a directory, and unfortunately it doesn't have a date; but a great many of the establishments I remember, and I can date them approximately. Of course, the early business establishments

HD: (Cont'd)

were down here on The Strand along the river and then they moved uptown, up Delaware Street. And this list, as I say, unfortunately is not dated, but there must have been between 50 and 75 small businesses, ranging from grocery stores, butcher stores, bakeries, even down to notions and dress-making, bindery. We were practically self-sufficient in those days because we were isolated and people didn't get out of town. And now we don't have, we have only one that I can think of, a neighborhood grocery store, which is . The area around us has been built by these developers, and these small shopping centers have come into being, and people have to go in their cars, have to go out there. You can't walk downtown to go to the grocery store even. And it has made a marked change in the character of the community. In those days we were more closely knit. People bet their money here in town with these small stores, and they were an interesting part of our community life. And I would say that that change began to take place shortly after the turn of the century when the steel foundries came here. There has been quite a transition period with some of them. I know one steel foundry came here shortly after the turn of the century and was known as a , a steel foundry specializing in manganese casting. And then the business was sold and the name was changed to Edgar Allen Manganese Steel. Then it was bought by--have I mentioned him, Edgar Allen? Edgar Allen, then it was bought by American Brake Shoe. American Brake Shoe became Abex Corporation, and now it's a part of the Illinois Central conglomerate. That was the history practically of all our industry. It was either phased out or been gathered up by a conglomerate. Now you don't hardly know who owns what. And I think that has been a factor in the change. I know in a case of American Manganese, Mr. Gibbons was. . . . When it became American Brake Shoe, Mr. Gibbons, who was president and chairman of the board, was a great believer in these industries having good community relations. He was followed by Capt. Dunn, who was a Yale man, played football there at about the time of Albie Boot (?). And he took a great interest here. He'd come down and invite some of the townspeople to have lunch with him. He had a real interest in the community as well as these jobs in the steel foundry. And we had a woolen mill and a cotton mill, and they were a major source of employment for both men and women. Of course their history is recorded in Sharp's and Conrad and many of the Delaware history books. But they were swallowed up by the larger corporations. And one of the major ones was the Morris Tasker Tube Works and of course that's recorded in these Delaware histories that I spoke of. But they wound up being bought up by U. S. Steel

HD: (Cont'd)

and then closed down by larger corporations. That was a distinct blow to the town. That occurred very shortly after the turn of the century. Then about 1904 the Ball (?) Steel Foundry came here, and then that was later bought by Penn Seaboard (?). Penn Seaboard went broke and closed down, and it had one or two owners after that. Now it's Chicago Bridge & Iron, who run an operation that is very creditable for the town. Adjoining that was the Deemer (?) Steel Foundry which was phased out, well bought by American Manganese during World War I. And then after the War, they sold it; and it's changed hands two or three times. Now it's a carpenter warehouse. It makes a marked change. And transportation has had a marked effect on these changes in industry and a place of employment for local people. Now, with the automobiles and type highways we have, it's not unusual for them to have a job say 25 or 30 miles from home. I can think of some fellows here who worked at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and commuted. And some of them down at the air base down in Dover. And that's made a marked change.

New Castle was known for the number of characters who lived here. And that developed from when we were self-sufficient and self-contained. And some of the boys would go to Wilmington Saturday nights to do their playing. And one of them who was particularly interesting to me. . . This fellow had gone over Saturday night and gotten "within his cups" (?) and gone down to French Street Station and taken the midnight train over here which was the only means of public transportation. And French Street Station was then on the street level; the elevated hadn't been put through. And they found he had missed the midnight train. Well, there wasn't anything else to do but start to walk home. So he heads up French Street to Market and over Market Street Bridge and he said he walked and he walked and he walked. And when the sun was coming up he found he walking back north over Market Street Bridge. Somewhere he got turned around on his way over and spent the rest of the night walking.

I have been asked the question whether there are many people who would have been characterized as natives a number of years ago. And there are very, very few. To see three or four real natives who have had roots here for a matter of generations. . . If you see three or four of those together on Delaware Street, it would be

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very, very unusual. I can well remember in the mornings when the ladies of the town would be presentably dressed and come down to the shops and place their orders and stop and chat or stop and visit, make a short call on a friend or something like that. And that's clear out of the picture now. And it made for an atmosphere which is entirely different now with so many people who have only been here a matter of a few years, let alone for generations. And I am very unpopular when I characterize somebody who aspired to prominence. They need a map to go up Delaware Street, which is not very well received--that kind of comment. But it is entirely changed, to say nothing of the style of attire.

(END OF INTERVIEW)