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Interview with Jack Smyth of the Delaware State News, c. 1973 by George Backus, County Agricultural Agent.

Q . . . 12th, at my home on Moore's Lake in Dover, Delaware, and I have with me a person that we're going to talk about . . . talk with about the newspaper business and a few other things that he's been involved in over the years. Would you introduce yourself, please, Jack?

A Well, my name is Jack Smyth, the Smyth is spelled with a "y" instead of an "i"; actually my given name is Bernard John Smyth, which is the name of my grandfather who came here in 1848 from County Cavan in Ireland. My father's name was John Bernard Smyth and he was born in [sounds like "Trussan"], Pennsylvania while his father was working for the Pennsylvania Railroad and serving in the Pennsylvania militia during the Civil War. My daddy was born in 1862, and the reason that I'm still around is because he never got married until he was 52 years old. So we kind of skipped a generation in there. Shortly after he was born, however, his father and mother, who was a Katherine McLoughlin from County Donegal in Ireland, moved to Renovo, Pennsylvania, which was a new town at the time, established simply for the repair of Pennsylvania Railroad equipment. It was located on the west branch of the Susquehanna. My dad lived there all his life and died at the age of 79. Most of his life after working in the railroad shops briefly, he became a retail jeweler. Went to Philadelphia and learned the watch-making trade, later studied and became a doctor of optometry, which in those days was tied in pretty much with the jewelry business. And I was born . . . he met my mother when he was the chairman of the newly formed Executive Committee of the hospital in Renovo, which was just established, and they were looking for somebody to be its first superintendent. My mother's name was Alice Russell. She was born in Boston, again of Irish immigrant parents, and she had trained in Carney Hospital there and she came to Renovo for the purpose of becoming the first superintendent of the new hospital. And it was under those conditions that my dad met her and wooed her and finally married her.

Q How big was the hospital, Jack?

A The hospital originally was nine-beds [inaudible] . . . it was set up in an old residence which was established in 1910. It's still in existence.

Q I was just looking up recently about the hospitals here in Kent County, Delaware, and of the Kent General Hospital, which is probably . . . I don't know whether it's the largest hospital in the county or not, the one at Milford may be larger, but Milford I think happens to be today in Sussex County, over the Sussex County line, just over the line because, of course, Milford is the dividing line between the two counties . . . although the original hospital, Jack, in Milford was the Windsor Hotel, I believe . . . the top floor of the Windsor Hotel and it was formed I believe oh, somewhere around the early 1900's. And incidentally, you know, of course, that Dr. H. [inaudible] Wilson just died and was one of the founders of the Kent

General Hospital here in Dover and actually he took out my gall bladder. Incidentally, I don't think I've introduced myself yet as the interviewer, George Backus, the former Kent County Agricultural Agent. Now . . . all right, Jack, we've got you born, we've . . . where do we go from there?

- A Well, the first thing of significance that happened in my life was my . . . rather a kind of a tragedy . . . my mother died in the flu epidemic of 1918 when I was about $2\frac{1}{2}$ and only six months after giving birth to my only sister, Alice Constance, and she herself passed away at a rather early age in . . . she was only 44 when she died in 1964. We were . . . my dad being past 50 and being a widower after such short a married life had made up his mind he probably wouldn't marry again, and he had a sister who was married to a professional photographer and they were childless, so my sister and I went to Duquesne, Pennsylvania and for the next 10 years we were reared by George Nichols and his wife, who was my dad's sister.
- Q What was your dad doing in the meantime?
- A Well, he continued running the jewelry business. He was in partnership with his only brother, Jim Smyth, and the firm was known as Smyth Brothers. And we lived in Duquesne; he frequently came to visit us and we lived in Duquesne until 1926 when Nichols himself passed away and then we went to . . . went back to Renovo. But I was in the 7th grade in high school, so I went back there and graduated from there in 1933, the same year you graduated there, yes, George.
- Q That's right. In fact . . . when did you say you were born again?
- A 1915 . . . November 16th.
- Q Well, I was December the 23rd, 1915, so I'm a little bit younger than you are.
- A Right, by about a month, about five month weeks.
- Q Five weeks, yes. That's kind of interesting, I think, because I know when I first came to Dover in 1952, you were one of the first people I met. You had just bought the Delaware State News at the time.
- A Right . . . right . . . um hmm.
- Q Do you want to tell us a little bit about . . . would you rather talk about your jewelry business first or about the . . . how you got in the newspaper business?
- A Yeah . . . there's not much to tell about the jewelry business except that when my dad passed away, why I had several years of college in pre-med, but during the Depression years, college ended suddenly. I was there anyhow on a football scholarship and then suddenly when I shattered my shoulder . . . so I went to work in the jewelry business

and got married in 1936. And I worked for a while in the railroad shops, went back in the jewelry business, my dad died in 1940. And then I was drafted into the armed services in 1944. In fact, I was drafted twice, once into the Navy and then they decided they didn't want anybody over 28. So I was sent home again and then when the Battle of the Bulge came in December of 1944, why they took me right into the infantry. I took infantry basic training in Georgia and at that time I made up my mind I didn't like the jewelry business, didn't care personally for jewelry and felt like a hypocrite trying to sell it, and tried to decide then what I would like to do and I decided newspapering would be an interesting and worthwhile way of life. So I decided then to become a newspaperman. And I came . . . of course, we had three children at the time . . . I came back to Renovo and told my wife that I was going to sell the jewelry and go into newspaper business. That was met with consternation, to say the least. But I went over to State College and . . . to take a journalism course and was discouraged there by the head of the journalism school who told me that I could probably get better experience in a practical way. So I went to talk to a fellow named Ulrich [sp?] who was the editor of the State College paper and he advised me to buy my hometown paper, which was a daily, had been for 40 years . . . probably the smallest daily in the country. And it was a pretty small operation and pretty vulnerable as far as a way of making a living.

Q Do you mean small in size as well as in . . .

A Yeah, small in every respect. It was only four pages a day . . .

Q Was it a standard-size newspaper?

A No, no, it was a regular broad sheet, but only four pages a day, had been that way for years. And pages two and three oftentimes were never changed . . . they just stayed the same. And so really pages one and four were all they made up. But the family who had had it for many years, the sons had left Renovo and the widow was running it and she was glad to sell out if I would hire her as a proofreader. So she . . . I had no experience in journalism outside of being editor of my college yearbook, so she taught me first of all how to proofread. I went out and sold the ads, covered meetings, handled the circulation boys. We had about 1100 circulation at the time. The gross income for the year I bought the paper was \$14,000, which was what I paid for it. That included a building, two Linotype machines and a hand-set press.

Q Um hmm. O.K. I would like to talk to you for a minute. [Tape is stopped.]

A It was a small enough paper that I practically had to do everything myself and it was a great experience for me and I learned a lot in the seven years I was there. One of the great difficulties, of course, was that it was . . . as a railroad town, I could see especially with the arrival of the diesel locomotive that the town was doomed as an economic entity as far as the repair of equipment was concerned.

Because the diesels could haul the trains much further than the steam engines could.

Q [Inaudible] . . . a lot of cars.

A Hmm?

Q And pull more cars . . .

A Pull more cars and fewer changes of engines and much less maintenance. And so I started casting around and I found out that I so thoroughly enjoyed the newspaper business, I started casting around for another opportunity. And again Ulrich, who helped me . . . suggested getting started with the Record and helped me with a lot of my basic education there, was very helpful in getting me to decide on where I would locate in the future. And I was looking around for a small daily with potential that I could buy and operate. So I tried several places, took a lot of information and data, and each time Ulrich would turn 'em down saying there wasn't enough there, until in the summer of 1952 I happened to be up in . . . near New Haven, Connecticut and talked to one of the executives on the New Haven paper and he said to me, "You know, speaking of the potential dailies, Dover, Delaware, a state capital, is the only one in the '48 that doesn't have a daily newspaper." And he said, "I was down to Florida last year and going through there," he said, "the town is growing," and he said, "I think there's a possibility there." He said, "There's two weeklies there now, and of course, the state, being small, is dominated by the Wilmington paper. But they are concentrated in Wilmington and they don't pay a great deal of attention to the news downstate and the state capital." So I thought that was a natural, so in November, with this fellow, whose name, incidentally, also was Smith, except it was spelled with an "i," Bill Smith, we came to Dover and stayed at the old Richardson Hotel and looked around the town, looked at the plant. The paper at that time was owned by a John Hampton Barnes who was a son of the chief counsel for the Pennsylvania Railroad and lived out on the main line outside of Philadelphia. He'd been a commander in the Navy and had come out in 1945 and bought the Delaware State News from Mr. Wickes, who had owned it for many years, and then later added to the . . . by purchasing the Index, but he kept that purchase a secret, because he didn't want the businessmen in town to know. As a matter of fact, Barnes never condescended to live in Dover, so he wasn't exactly popular there and it was one of the difficulties we had in starting the daily was that there was a lot of ill will that Barnes himself had generated.

Q But you did keep it as a weekly when you first came here for . . .

A Yes, we kept it as a weekly for about six months as we made our preparations to go daily, to get the features and assemble a staff and get a feel of the town and so forth. Although we announced right from the start it was our intention to start a daily. We had . . .

Q I think it would be interesting, Jack, to point out where you first had your offices and plant.

A Yeah. Well, the offices and plant were on North Street right across from the Capital Theater, right across North Street from the back of the Capital Theater, and it was a plant that Barnes had bought. He'd moved the paper around the corner from State Street where the Wickes had had it, and built this plant there in 1947. And it was a fairly modern plant only five years old, but it soon became too small for our operation. Although there were a number of difficulties at the financial end of it, the acceptance of the paper . . . for instance I went around with one of the boys down State Street, which was in the heart of old Dover, talked to people about buying the newspaper, and 95% of them said that they were happy with it as a weekly, they wished we wouldn't change it, that they got all the daily news they wanted out of the Wilmington paper, which had a large circulation there. And in that respect I'm convinced now that if it happened been for the fact the Dover Air Force Base was being reactivated about the same time and the people coming in there looking for a daily newspaper and actually would buy the local paper without prejudice to find out the things they needed, it would have been a much tougher and harder struggle. Because I've learned since then that people's reading habits regarding newspapers are about as solid as any habits they've got. We went ahead and converted the Delaware State News to a daily. We kept the Index as a weekly for a number of years, but it gradually lost circulation and disappeared.

Q Well, I remember your having an awful lot of printing problems, Jack, in those early days. Do you want to talk about that?

A Yeah. Well, the mechanical problems were difficult. One of the factors, it was just a human one . . . on a weekly paper the people, all the people are geared for getting a paper out once a week. And so they work like the dickens for two or three days and meet that deadline, get the paper to press and then everybody relaxes. And it just threw 'em into a kind of a bind when they found that they couldn't relax when the paper went to press, they had a paper to get out the next day, and they should start working on it. But they wouldn't and the paper was late and instead of getting better, it became later. I can remember in the early days we would pass papers at 10:00 at night. And often one meeting that we would cover, we'd have it in the same night's paper as the meeting was. We got to be known as the Midnight Express. Well, we gradually worked those problems out and as the paper grew, the press we had was an eight-page press and it would only run 3,000 copies an hour. And as our circulation grew and the size grew, we found we'd have to get another press. And of course I went in with very little working capital and with a kind of a stiff mortgage, not from the bank, the bank mortgage was fairly favorable, but I had a second mortgage from Barnes that I would . . . they were very strict terms, and if I'd ever shown him a loss or [inaudible] they'd probably have taken the paper back so fast my head would have spun. So we didn't have a great deal of capital so we bought . . . the first press we bought, we put a building on the back and bought an old rotary press from Connellsville, Pennsylvania and we put that in, and it was 24-page capacity and a lot faster, but again it was teaching . . . with the rotary press you had to cast plates instead of printing directly off the type and there were a lot of new processes. None of the people knew 'em, really, and we would get some . . . still

had late press times and still had some bad printing jobs. Then to compound it all, why the people up at Wilmington, the union up there, the I.T.U., International Typographical Union, felt that the daily down here should have the benefits of their great union. So the first thing I know, I was struck by a strike and I refused to sign up with the union for the main and simple reason I couldn't afford it. I felt I was paying on the basis of what I could afford and so I probably had the first picket line in the history of Dover. And they were on the picket line for a couple of years. However, I was amazed at that time from across the country as the story went out, we got offers of assistance from other publishers and got other printers in, including two fellows from my paper back in Renovo, and we never missed a publication and kept the paper going through the years of the strike. And up to now we still have no union.

Q And no pressure for one.

A No, there's no pressure for one anymore. And of course the printing industry itself, in the meantime, has been completely revolutionized and it's affected the union nationally as well as locally because so much of the Linotype is now practically a thing of history. The hot metal type is now gone. It's all cold type and most of the work can . . . it doesn't take a great deal of skill. An intelligent boy or girl can learn how to set the type as long as they know how to type. And most of the type now is set by feeding tape into a computer and there's been a real revolution in regard to both the composing room and the press room, where no longer we have the metal and the press, we just have the offset method of printing.

Q Now this also involved a move as far as your plant was concerned.

A That's right, yeah. When we were watching the progress of the off-set thing, which came in and really saved the weekly paper and [inaudible], of course, the small dailies, too, and as we watched it I realized that this was our future, too, and so when we could see our way clear, after unsuccessfully trying to put out a Sunday paper for Delaware, which . . . the old Sunday Star in Wilmington had folded, I think, in 1954, and in 1964 we attempted another one, and we took a \$25,000 loss as the idea was good but we didn't execute it properly. One of our main problems again was the mechanical . . . the press didn't have good reproduction and we tried to put a separate paper out and have it accepted upstate . . . and in the face of the good Sunday papers coming in from Philadelphia, we didn't have a chance. So we killed that paper, the Sunday paper, and then concentrated on building a new plant and putting in an offset press which now has a 56-pages capacity and can print 30,000 copies an hour, which is a far cry from the hand-set press back in Renovo and the eight-page press we first had in Dover.

Q What is your circulation now, Jack, if you can print 30,000 an hour?

A Yeah, it's about 28,000 on Sunday and about 25,000 on . . . daily.

- Q So that it takes you maybe 40 minutes to run off your [inaudible] news edition.
- A That's right. Yeah. In straight press-running time, yeah.
- Q And how many pages would that be?
- A Well, it varies according to the volume of advertising. We now run no fewer than 20 pages and usually in the middle of the week when the grocery ads are in, 40-48 pages. And oftentimes more than that in heavier seasons. So it's a much better operation in every sense of the word. And it's [inaudible] . . . easier to read and it's also a paper that people have found more acceptable.
- Q Nobody can argue with the quality of your pictures or the quality of the type, either, Jack.
- A No, that's made a big difference in . . .
- Q I've had the opportunity over the years as Kent County Agent to be in both of your plants, and certainly this new offset printing I'm very much for this, and I like the way that pictures are reproduced. It's not a series of dots as your old hot-lead process was.
- A Yeah, yeah, that's right. Yeah, it's a . . . technology has made a big difference in the newspaper business. One of the factors, of course, is that . . . what I like most about newspapers is the kind of people that I've known through the years. And I mentioned [inaudible] . . . I started to tell you, George, when we were at lunch, about Ulrich and a kind of a touching thing he said to me. A few years ago we met in New York at a publishers convention. We had dinner together and I said, "Bill, I look back through the years and I think of all the help you have given me, the good counsel you've given me and all the free advice," I said, "and there's no way I could ever possibly repay you." I said, "I just feel so far in debt that I feel helpless." And he said, "You can repay me," and he said, "There's a very simple way to do it." He says, "Help another fellow along the way. Help the young people in newspapers." He said, "If you do that, you'll repay me." And I think that's true.
- Q One of the things I've noticed, Jack, is that you've broken in more reporters, I believe, here in Dover than possibly anyone . . . more young reporters than anybody else in the state.
- A Yeah, that's true.
- Q And oftentimes it's your competition that hires away some of your good young workers.
- A Yeah, well, that's to be expected. And we realize this and many of the people with talent, they are not content to stay with a smaller daily, yet we're happy to hire 'em even under those circumstances, and they'll oftentimes tell us that. But we feel that it

gives 'em a great opportunity because this is an ideal paper for a young journalist in the sense that it's a growing city, it's a growing county, it's a small and growing state. And for a reporter to be able to get all those forms of government which most of these other newspapers report on . . . and then to have them in such a size that they can quickly get acquainted with the members of the legislature, of the county government or the city government and so forth. I know from my experience in Pennsylvania that I'd see a governor in a full year. And if you want to here, you can see a governor practically every day, if you need to.

Q That's right. And one of the things I've noticed, Jack, since I've been in Dover, you can be almost . . . you're never more than an hour away from home base if you're living in Dover.

A Right. That's a great factor. And this is the thing that people out of state find hard to understand. But it's a tremendous asset to the reporter.

Q Have we talked at all about your Sunday edition that you've gone back to?

A Yeah, that was a different . . . we approached it differently and in fact, it was really done after I left for Arizona and my son, who was deeply involved . . . Joe, who was deeply involved in the first Sunday that failed, took a different approach, and rather than put out a separate paper with the emphasis up in the Wilmington area, he just added another edition to the five-days we were already publishing, skipping Saturday, and simply incorporated it as part of the sixth day of the regular daily paper. So in that way he automatically, and of course some people resented it, but he automatically had a built-in circulation. But we didn't have it as a separate Sunday and just kept the thing alive and of course the advertisers, the merchants, were glad to accept it under that basis, because they liked Sunday advertising because they realized people had more time to read the paper and many people make their shopping plans for the week on the basis of their Sunday paper, and as long as they had that guaranteed built-in circulation that we'd already acquired with the other five days, well, it was an instant success. And it was the right formula, but whether we'd have arrived at that without that embryonic unsuccessful effort of eight years earlier, I don't know. But it's gone along very well, and of course now we do have Sunday circulation up in Wilmington and it's growing steadily and we cover Wilmington especially on the weekends pretty well and . . .

Q Do you have any Wilmington offices?

A No, none yet. We have a reporter full-time up there and we do have a circulation office in Newark and so we're gradually making some in-roads up there.

Q Jack, I'll have to correct you a little bit. In Delaware, it's not New'ark, it's New ark. If you remember years ago, Newark was originally two words. This was back in colonial days. And if you'll

read your Delaware history, and I have a copy here that you might borrow if you want to, why it explains some . . . how some of these towns were named. I think we have some of the most interesting names of towns in Delaware that you'll find anywhere in the country. As a matter of fact, I also have a book here on . . . it's entitled Delaware Place Names, that I got from the Superintendent of Documents in Washington. It explains the names of places like [sounds like Hardscrackle] and Mastons Corner and things of that kind . . . and Silverstick Road I think is in there, I'm not sure but there is a place out of Mastons Corner . . . incidentally, I don't know whether you know where Mastons Corner is or not and I'm not sure it is . . .

A Down in Sussex, I guess.

Q No, it's in Kent County. It's halfway between Felton and Harrington [inaudible] . . . west of the dual highway.

A I see.

Q You're probably two or three miles west of the dual highway when you get there. I mean, to get to Mastons Corner. Of course it's . . .

A It must be over near Killen's Pond, in that area.

Q No, Killen's Pond is to the east.

A Oh, that's right.

Q By the dual highway, yes. And Mastons Corner used to . . . well, it still is primarily a farming community and it's nothing more than a crossroads, a country crossroads still. There was an old store there. The building still stands. And as late as, oh, six or eight years ago, you could go in that store and buy high-button shoes there if you wanted to go get them. I forget the man's name who ran it . . . let's see . . . it wasn't Maston. Minnick [sp], that's what his name was. Because his son now works for the Lake Commission and has for years. [Phone rings.]

A I'd better catch this phone.

Q O.K., let me turn this thing off.

Well, we were talking a little bit about Mastons Corner and Hardscrackle and some of these other places. But Hardscrackle is, of course, down in Sussex County and it is between Laurel and Georgetown, roughly halfway, and just up the road from the University Substation Farm. Have you ever been there, Jack?

A Oh, yeah. I've been there. I knew where that was, but I wasn't sure of Mastons Corner. But Hardscrackle always fascinated me because it was probably . . . it was surely named through some depression or panic as they used to call them back before the turn of the century.

Q Well, we'll look it up maybe and see what it is. I'll make a point of looking it up and write to you if I don't see you.

A O.K.

Q O.K. then. Well, now, Jack, we've still got a fair amount of tape on here, on this particular side, so . . . I think we do, and when it--if it doesn't, why we'll just change the reel.

A I think we exhausted this pretty well . . .

Q No, we haven't.

A Oh, haven't we?

Q We haven't talked at all about the expansion of your Delaware State News into a larger organization.

A Well, that indirectly came about through the improvement in technology, the improvement in printing. When you put in over a quarter of a million dollars in a newspaper press, you want to make money with the press or justify its existence by keeping it running. And a small daily, and I think we were around 18,000 at the time the press was put in, meant that it would run less than an hour a day, and so we were looking around for additional publications. And of course one of the beauties of the offset method is that a lot of weekly papers could actually make up their pages in their own plant and then bring the sheets to the main plant . . . in fact, all over the country, many weekly publishers and some daily too would get together and finance a central printing plant where all the papers would be handled by one press, since either the film or the pages could be bought and brought in and photographed. So that was our situation in 1967 when we moved into the new plant out there on the corner of New Burton Road and [inaudible] Lane. We just had, of course, our own publication. We didn't even have the air base weekly because we'd lost that to another offset operator in Maryland. Then the people at the air base said simply that they'd rather have the paper in offset and they told us that when we went offset we would get the publication back, which we did. Then we were looking for other publications . . .

Q The title of that particular publication, before you get away from it, is the Airlifter, and it's still going.

A Yes, um hmm. Yeah.

Q As a weekly.

A Right. And so we . . . most, of course, weekly papers in the area were already being published by other . . . a fellow named Hofstetter [sp] was the pioneer . . . up at Elkton . . . was the pioneer of offset in the area and he gradually either bought up or contracted for practically all the weekly papers on the shore. And in fact he was printing them as far down as into Virginia.

Q Accomack?

A Accomack and so forth. I understand since then Accomack and . . . has its own press, but at the time they were taking their sheets and going clear up to Elkton. And then he bought out the Easton Weekly and put another press over there. So the Milford Chronicle was being printed there and the Georgetown . . . Sussex County and Georgetown . . . he ended up owning the Laurel paper and ended up owning the Seaford paper, and this was all before we got into offset. So there were really no papers available for us to add to our press, so we were over and . . . it happened that one of the fellows that had been with the air base paper before we had it was a fellow named Bob Reed, and he had made up their paper while he was stationed as a sergeant at the Dover Air Force Base. So Reed seemed like a damned good newsman and so he said to me before he left before assignment in Japan, "When I get out of the service, which I will after this tour of duty, I'll retire, how about a job?" And I said, "Bob, if there's an opening, we'll see that you have a job." So he came back shortly after we became . . . put in the offset press in and we just didn't have an opening and he mentioned he was stationed . . . or had settled over at Bowie, Maryland. He said, "They have a couple of lousy papers over there." He said, "Maybe we could buy one of those." So we went over and took a look with the idea that this would be a paper that we could print. And sure enough they were pretty bad but they also wanted a price much higher, so we started our own paper and we called it the Blade, the Bowie Blade. So we have been publishing that and that was our first venture out of Delaware. So we had the [inaudible] . . . and then the New Castle Gazette got a new lease on life and they started to publish with us. And then we were getting some other smaller publications. The Crisfield [sp] paper was for sale, we bought it down in Crisfield, Maryland. We've been printing that there and printing the Bowie paper there and we print the New Castle paper and then the Airlifter. But the other venture into Arizona were mostly because I went out there and I didn't want to retire and never played golf or anything, I wanted to keep a hand in newspaper business. So we bought a few weeklies out there and we've been losing money with them ever since. But we hope to get 'em turned around. And Joe married an Air Force . . . daughter of an Air Force major who retired to Florida. He went down to Florida and looked around at newspapers and saw a couple down there that were reasonable so he bought those and the Florida operation down at [sounds like "Bocachobey"] and Arcadia and . . .

Q Are there any local people that have moved down there, Jack?

A Yeah, we had from Delaware . . . well, we had Jim Tomey [sp] down for a while and then we still have Paul Bogus [sp] who is a son of people here in Dover. And a fellow that I knew back in Renovo is in charge of the operation down there. He came in one time and wanted to sell ads on a Saturday afternoon. He lived in Williamsport, his name's Dave Fleming. And so he came down from . . . when we started the Bowie paper we needed a good salesman . . . I had him in mind at the time. So he went to work for us in Bowie and then when the Florida thing opened up, he's been down there and is general manager in charge of that operation. And Jim Tomey was down for a while and then of

course just a few weeks ago, why the Millsboro paper was up for sale, it was owned by the Milford radio station. And it . . . we bought it.

Q Of course, you know that the Harrington paper has just changed ownership.

A Yes, uh huh.

Q That's an interesting thing because it's one of the few papers that I know of in the country that's still not offset.

A That's right. And in fact some of the fellows from our plant that used to run Linotype machines are down there helping keep these Linotype machines going . . . [inaudible] Farrow I guess is the . . .

Q Yes. I taught him in school, incidentally, and I always knew him as Gilmore Farrow . . . his father was Harry Farrow, and he was very much . . .

A Is he Clara Farrow's son?

Q I really don't know.

A I remember Clara who used to run the old [inaudible] had two daughters . . .

Q No, no . . . different Farrow. Different Farrow because his mother was the school nurse at the Harrington School for a great number of years.

A Oh, he's a Harrington native.

Q He's a Harrington native.

A Oh, I see.

Q And of course he came up here to get into . . . well, he was gonna be a lawyer at first and I think he took his bar examinations and didn't pass them and so he got into the real estate business with Ralph Fisher and I imagine he's still in real estate to a degree. But he says now that his primary interest is going to be the newspaper. But I certainly hope he goes to offset because we both realize the problems you have as far as getting parts is concerned, particularly for a paper today.

A It's going to be worse all the time, because those Linotype machines, for instance, I'm sure are soon going to be museum pieces.

Q I may tell you this. I was down at Harrington not long ago on Commerce Street, which is the main street in Harrington, looked in one of the store windows and I saw an offset press sitting in the store. So maybe Gilmore, as I know him, is probably going to shift over to his own equipment. It will still never be more than a weekly, I don't think he intends to make it more than a weekly, but

he could put out a pretty good weekly, I think, with his . . . with offset equipment that's on a smaller size . . . [inaudible] smaller than what you have.

A Oh, yeah, I'm sure he could. And it's a good move for him.

Q Yes. So . . . and I expect he plans to hang onto it for a while.

A Very good.

Q I haven't met any of the people in his organization yet, but . . .

A Well, the Burgess boys had it for so many years that I don't know too much . . .

Q Did you ever know Harvey Burgess, the father?

A No, I never did. He evidently passed on before I got here.

Q He was quite a character, Jack, and he was quite a public speaker. Years ago in Delaware we had quite a few people who went out and made speeches, and Harvey Burgess was one of these. He'd got to service clubs all over the country and he'd leave the paper at home to Carington, his son, and to his other son, Lenny, who set type--and incidentally, drank a lot--and sometimes we'd get quite a hilarious newspaper because Lenny ever once in a while would take a turn at writing about his wartime experiences and oh, they were kind of gay.

A Yeah, I can imagine so.

Q Incidentally, you had some great experiences, too, in the state news in the earlier days, as I remember.

A Yeah, I drank quite a bit in the early days of my newspaper, and as a matter of fact, I have always been quite a drinking man because I had a fixed notion, somehow, since I had never had a hangover or headache or any apparent ill effects from it, that I could handle booze pretty well. So I had no hesitation in drinking in the art of newspapering. As a matter of fact, I used to pick up a lot of tips, information, stories, just as you mentioned today you do in a barbershop, I always found that a good source, and bars, too, because liquor kind of loosens people's tongues and they say some things that . . . I can remember I think the best story I ever broke in the days of our newspaper back there, a political story, was a slush fund that the Democratic Party had and there were a lot of people . . . the Democrats were having a convention here in Dover and in the old Treadway Inn there was a party going on and I was drinking along with Jim Miller, who was my managing editor, and we were with a bunch of top-knotch Democrats and one of them started talking about this secret slush fund that Garret Lyons, who was then the state chairman, had. As soon as this fellow started talking about it, I realized I had a heck of a good story and I . . . it just sobered me up. I can remember exactly what he said and I was

able to sit down and write a story that very night about the whole thing. I asked him questions and we came out with a banner headline the next day about this thing that none of the Democrats knew, and he probably would never have said anything about it, hadn't been for the booze. So of course then, finally after a number of adventures and misadventures and so on, I never really . . . outside the fact that people knew I was drinking, I was able to keep my . . . keep at the job each day and I was able to avoid any serious trouble for the newspaper. For instance, we never had a libel suit, never even one filed against us until after I quit drinking, and then, of course, it was a kind of a freakish libel suit. Somebody . . . one of our reporters, old Harry McSherry, was covering a J.P. hearing where a couple were arguing about something and they'd lived together, and Harry mentioned that So-and-so was So-and-so's common-law wife. So the girl sued us and to our consternation we found she had a case because in Delaware there's no such thing legally recognized as a common-law wife. She had a libel suit on her hands, but it never . . . we never paid any damages for it and it ended up she left for Florida. And that was the only libel suit that I ever encountered in all the years that I've been in the newspaper business.

Q Well, now, there are a lot of . . . how many newspapers do you have in your chain now?

A Well, we have eleven at the present time, all weeklies except the Delaware State News, which is a daily. However, on August the 1st we're starting another daily or changing another weekly over to a daily in Arizona, in Phoenix. And of course this is . . . for me it will be a great experience because it will be something like history repeating itself.

Q Are you going to be the editor?

A No. No, I'm not. We have . . . I believe now that my best job that I can do is advise these younger people that come along, let them . . . just kind of sit back and let them make their own mistakes and just try to prevent 'em from making too serious ones.

Q Don't you feel that you learn best by making mistakes?

A Oh, absolutely, and I allow 'em to make 'em. I don't try to run the papers for them. But I let them know that I'm there and if they want any advice or so on, that I'll give 'em the best that I can, but that won't prevent 'em from making mistakes, too.

Q Let's talk a little bit, Jack, about some of your editorial policies as far as letters to the editor and so forth, like this thing.

A Well, I was . . . even before I got into the newspaper business, I was always astounded, in fact kind of insulted . . . I can remember reading the Harrisburg Telegraph one time when I was still in Renovo as a jeweler, and I noticed a letter to the editor was set in six-point type. To my mind that was an insult to the reader that anybody would take a letter from a reader and put it in the smallest possible

type, obviously to save space and to discourage readership. And I felt a reader who took the time to express his opinions to a newspaper deserved better treatment than that. So then when I became an editor, I thought that this was one thing I would always do, would be to run as many letters to the editor as I possibly could. And one of the things that's come about is that you do. When people recognize that they'll write a letter and it'll get in the paper, that encourages them to write. Now, we've wasted, I'm sure, a lot of space on some unintelligible letters and some letters that rubbed people the wrong way and some letters that don't make sense at all, and yet at the same time we get an awful lot of good letters [end of Side 1 of tape] . . .

. . . whose role was to allow for an exchange of opinion, different viewpoints to be presented no matter how assinine some of them may even seem to the editor. I don't think an editor is . . . in the sense he has the all-seeing wisdom to decide this person's opinion should be expressed and the next person's opinion should not be expressed.

Q He can't play God, in other words.

A That's right. And I don't think that the ownership of a newspaper or the title gives 'em that right. So I've always allowed within reason, as long as there's not libels concerned and so on, I've always believed that they should . . . and I've always had an innate . . . which has never been disagreed . . . confidence in the good common sense of the average American citizen, the reader, that he can take and look at a letter and he'll say . . . he'd laugh and say, "Well, this is nuts," and I think most people would agree with him. But the fact that it appears in the paper doesn't give it any special significance, and I think most letters . . . most editors think it's their duty either to re-edit . . . edit a letter or rewrite it or . . . and distort it. And I remember one time I had an old lumberman up in Renovo who always signed his name W. F. Peasley. And he was a lumberjack and an illiterate.

Q Do you remember how this Peasley was spelled?

A Yeah, P-e-a-s-l-e-y.

Q O.K.

A And he would bring these letters in and they were even hard to decipher. He'd write 'em in pencil and I would sit down and retype 'em. And one day I was doing that . . . and correct his spelling and correct the grammar . . . one day I was doing that and I said to myself, "I'm losing this guy, I'm losing the real Peasley." So I made it a rule then to set his letters just as they came in. And I left the misspelling and it made a lot better sense, because here was a man with a lot of good ideas, good basic intelligence, and had difficulty in expressing himself but yet made himself clear with all his grammatical errors and with all his misspellings and so forth, and it became so people looked forward to his letter. He had a good sense of humor and he had good ideas and strong opinions and so on. And

I made up my mind from then on . . . now, when people would write me a letter that was either too long or it contained something that was potentially libelous, I always felt, too, an editor should have the courtesy to call the person and explain those things and say, "Now, I'm gonna send this back and here's the part I think might get us in trouble. If you want to say this about somebody, express it in a little different terms," and so on, and usually it worked because a person appreciates it. Nobody wants to get sued. And they usually write a letter in the heat of anger and then by the time you get it back to 'em, they're cooled off, and sometimes the criticism is warranted or justified, but it's [inaudible] in terms that are not libelous or are not particularly offensive.

Q Well, Jack, let's put a peg on one particular piece that I'm sure you're familiar with, [inaudible] Layton, in Dover. I mean, what is your opinion as far as his material is concerned over the years?

A Well, I always disagreed with him. I think he's a fellow with a great deal of basic intelligence but he's so warped and so prejudiced in his actual hatred of the Jewish people and I guess the Catholics and the blacks that he . . . that he . . . again beyond all good sense and all good reason. Yet I always published his letters simply because they . . . people would recognize this and knew that they were dealing with a bigot. And so the bigot had the right to express himself. The only difficulty I would have with Layton would be that he would get to be repeating himself. He wouldn't be saying . . . he'd say the same thing over and over again and blame all the world's troubles on a Jewish conspiracy and all this and I would say, "This is repetitious and there's no point in doing this all the time. If you have a fresh thought, a fresh idea, something worth . . . why don't you [inaudible] with that?" But I never turned down his letters.

Q Now, as I understood it, he used to have all his material checked for libel.

A That's right. That's right, yeah.

Q But this was about all.

A He never wrote a libelous letter . . . and of course I would watch his letters very closely. He did write one and we published it in the early days of the integration situation where Brian Bowles came to town. Well, Brian Bowles was a white racist and you'd think he and Layton would hit it great. Layton for some reason resented Bowles coming into Delaware and stirring up trouble at the time of this school integration thing in 1954. So he wrote a letter and called him a . . . called Bowles a convict. Bowles had served a sentence in the . . . had been jailed in Baltimore, but when we found out about it, it was on a misdemeanor charge and my lawyer promptly told me that this was libelous per se, that a fellow has to be convicted as a felon before you can honestly call him a convict. So he sued Layton, Bowles did, but he came in and told us that our treatment had been . . . of his crusade, if you want

to call it that, or his rabble rousing, had been fair. He realized, too, that he could sue us for libel, but he said he wasn't going to do it. And that was the closest we ever got to a libel suit in my drinking days. And that's the reason that I think after that Layton always had very careful [inaudible] . . . because I think Bill gave him a heck of a scare.

Q But then, too, in recent years, why Joe has had to change the policy on Layton, or at least he said so in the paper.

A Oh, yeah. He's not only changed policy on Layton, but he's simply told him he couldn't write letters anymore if he . . . if he was criticizing any race or any creed or anything like that, that his letters were acceptable, but not on those terms which was . . . which was almost impossible for Layton to write a letter without that kind of bigot. And I'm kind of inclined to agree with that part of Joe's policy in that Layton had had his chance to say things and all he was doing was just like a tired recording repeating the thing.

Q And they were always very long.

A Yeah, and Joe's excuse . . . well, not always . . . he would get some pretty good short letters out sometimes. In fact, I can remember he used to send a week's supply at once, some would be long, some would be short, and I would use them all. I don't regret having used them because I think that . . . I used to get a lot of criticism. I'm sure we lost a lot of advertising, especially from Jewish merchants, who very much resented it. But I felt, too, that I don't think that it hurt the Jewish people. As a matter of fact, if anything, it would gain sympathy for 'em because any person could quickly spot this guy as a bigot and so the only waste was a waste of space in the paper, as far as I was concerned. I thought the people that said, "You know, I never read Layton anymore because I know what he's gonna say," and I says, "Exactly." I said, "That's where he loses his effectiveness." But Joe of course felt that it was a degregation to the paper and of course while he's running the paper, there can only be one boss and he's the editor of it. Now, he had a darn good excuse when Layton brought out what was proved to be a historic falsehood about Benjamin Franklin anti-semitic views and it was proved wrong and Layton wouldn't correct it. In fact, he tried to repute it, and that's when Joe said, "No more." And of course that had . . . that stirred up a rebellion on his own news staff and everything else, which I think was all good because I think the more we get to discuss and argue these things, the better we understand 'em. They're pretty important, I think, in our way of life.

Q I don't think there's a livelier newspaper in the state than the Delaware State News.

A No, I'm sure that's true. In fact, looking . . . you look at newspapers every place across the country and there's very few newspapers. One of the difficulty with newspapers, and I think of many businesses and many facets of American life, is this trend towards bigness. Even we're guilty of it in buying these newspapers. Of course, we feel that the newspapers we buy will be able to be independent as far as the editorial content is concerned, and I'm sure that's true. And I'm sure in many

of these other things. But the economics of so many businesses are such that they just . . . and the tax laws are such that it's the little guy who's just being squeezed out. And he doesn't have the resources or anything else, and I know I had a number of offers through the years of selling out to the New York Times and to the different chains, the Knight Newspapers and different chains across the country, but I always felt that as long as my son was interested in the thing, why it would be good. And then of course the other thing that happened is that you go beyond Joe, you wonder who will keep the papers going. And the thing I don't want to happen is that . . . which I've seen in many other papers, is the first generation's fine and then if you have a son or two or a daughter or two, the paper is run all right, but then it starts to dis-integrate. The different shares of stock go to different members of the family and some of them just take it as an inheritance and they have no interest in the paper at all and the paper ends up unfortunately and almost inevitably being run by bankers, accountants, lawyers or the whole thing together, and that's disastrous for newspapers because a newspaper is a unique type of business. It's the only type of business in the country that has a constitutional mandate of keeping the channels of information between the people and the government open.

Q Would it be too much to ask you, Jack, how many stockholders you have in your corporation? I'm sure you're incorporated, aren't you?

A Oh, yeah, we've been incorporated ever since the beginning. And I was the only stockholder up until the time that I realized that if I should die and the paper became more valuable that Bill Davis explained to me that if I should pass away that I wouldn't have enough money to . . .

Q [Inaudible].

A Yeah, right. He told me, you know, if I should die that minute, that my heirs, that is my four children, would have to sell the newspaper to pay the taxes. So through a series of tax approved things, I started to give shares of my stock. And then when I got this heart condition, I felt that if Joe was gonna run the papers, he should be in charge. So while . . . Bill planned the thing so while all four of the children, that's the three daughters and the one son, had equal shares of stock through a device of a holding company known as the Smyth Holding Company that controls the other shares, Joe alone has the decision-making power. So if there's any . . . ever dividends--and we've never declared any dividends--if there are any dividends declared, they will go to all stockholders equally. But as far as any decisions, the three daughters or their families can't outvote Joe.

Q Let me switch gears on you a little bit, Jack. We often hear about the state of Delapont. Do you want to comment on it?

A Well, my experience is that if it is a state of Delapont, it's certainly a benevolent thing. I think the DuPont family and the DuPont corporation has leaned over backwards to avoid that. I think that actually the . . . it's a kind of an unfair term, but it's an inevitable term, because when you have such a big worldwide corporation in such a small

state that people rightly or wrongly are going to arrive at that conclusion. And of course it's inevitable too that they would have a great deal of power. But I don't think that they've ever used it . . .

Q [Inaudible]

A Yeah, in a way. I know if they had wanted to in the early days of the Delaware State News, if they'd wanted to, they could have probably crushed us economically, just put us out of business. But they didn't. They didn't even . . . they had Charlie . . . you remember Charlie Baker, he was their leading man down here, a fine newsman . . .

Q Yes, real good one.

A Yeah, but the point is, that's all they had down there, see, and my feeling is that of course when we grew and started to take more and more circulation away from them, then they put a bureau down here and they have a darn fine bureau and there's good competition between the two papers, which is healthy. I think it's made a better paper of the Wilmington paper and I think it's kept us on our toes. So we've always emphasized the local scene. We don't pretend to go up there and do anything in Wilmington, but at the same time we've pretty near . . . we pretty well dominate the state capital as far as readership is concerned. In the early days, of course, they could have run us right out of town if they really wanted to use the economic power. Matter of fact, my first contact with them was when . . . actually when one . . . this guy, the circulation man, went around to the news dealers and told them, "If you put that new daily on your newsstand, we're taking our Wilmington papers off." And of course that was a stupid thing to say because right away the news dealers would call me and tell me this and I would say great because that's nothing . . . you know. And they'd say, "We're not gonna do it." And I says, "I don't blame you, I wouldn't either. Don't let 'em push you around." And of course I liked to have the sympathetic role of the underdog, but by gosh, it got back to the DuPont Company public relations department and a fellow named [sounds like "Rice Yaner"] called me and said, "Is this true?" And I said, "Evidently, I've got calls about it." And he says, "Could we have lunch?" So we had lunch in the Dinner Bell and Yaner explained to me, he says, "As a representative of the DuPont Company, while we do own the Wilmington papers through Christiana Securities, as a company we keep an arm's length relationship. We don't ask them for anything or do anything. But we don't want them to do anything that will reflect on us." And he said, "This is obviously something that's . . ." he said, "at this very moment we're fighting out in Chicago that antitrust thing between DuPont and General Motors." And he said, "How does that help us with our case if we're accused of pushing a little competitive daily in the state around?" So he said, "Let me assure you that you won't be bothered with this again."

Q Jack, you'll remember that Irving Shapiro was one of the lawyers who prosecuted for the government against the DuPont Company on that particular divestiture from General Motors.

A Right . . . um hmm.

Q And what's your feeling about the fact that he's now the effective president of the DuPont Company, the first Jewish president, by the way, of the DuPont Company. Do you have any feelings on this one way or another?

A No, except that they obviously recognized him as a darn good man at the time that they were appearing before Judge LePlace [sp].

Q Have you ever read the book . . . oh, gosh, what is the name of that thing . . . William Allen White wrote it about the . . . I have it back there on the shelf . . . something about . . . not The Ugly American, 'cause that was about Southeast Asia, if I remember it . . . but William Allen White wrote a book about corporations, large corporations and Americans and how Americans get absorbed into a large organization and lose their individuality. And they cite the DuPont Company as their prime case.

A No, I never read that book.

Q You didn't?

A No.

Q Maybe I'd better lend it to you, because it's back there on the shelf and we'll let you take it when you leave here. And I hate to keep you here any longer than necessary. I don't know whether you have any further thoughts that you would like to express, Jack? Either about your family or anything else that would be of historic interest.

A Well, I do think that there's a crying need in these days for more individualism and an opportunity for people to express themselves. I have a feeling both from a viewpoint of unions and government and corporations that our biggest peril, really, is bigness. The newspapers in the role of trying to inform people simply themselves become overwhelmed by the degree of bigness and try to get and explain the complexities, for instance, even of the tax laws alone is a tremendous undertaking. I've known so many journalists who feel they have to become attorneys before they can become good journalists and it's simply because things have become so complex. And then you talk about the apathy of the American people, I think there is a degree of helplessness, and I think that the main thing that has to be done in newspapers and [inaudible] . . . of journalism is to kind of drive towards getting things down to simpler terms, simpler bases and kind of return the management affairs to the local level.

Q Let's take an example, Jack, on a national issue, and I would like to know how you feel about it, Watergate.

A Well, I think Watergate is the greatest civic lesson the American people have ever had, and my hope is that it'll awaken them to this very thing that I'm talking about, how a government becoming so big and so complex also breeds corruption, because as [sounds like "Lord Acton"] says, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." And you have

powerful government on any level, you start to lose accountability. Men are just . . . just being human beings. History will tell you that they get too much power, it just changes them. It changed Richard Nixon, it changed all the men around him. They had . . . they completely lost their moral sense, they completely forgot what they were . . . they were there for the glorification and edification of Nixon, who they believed in, you know.

Q Do you think that he will be impeached?

A No, I don't think so. I think . . .

Q Would you say he was a victim of the system?

A Yes, I think he's a victim of the system.

Q I'm inclined to agree and I've so written to the . . . our Congress . . . congressional people.

A Yeah. I think it would be a mistake to simply say he's a bad man and everything has come from him being a bad man. I think he was . . . but I think at the same time that he should be an example of what's wrong with the system and we should learn as much as we can from this and change the system accordingly.

Q Do you have any recommendations on how this might be changed? Have you thought about that at all?

A Well, I think we're starting to move in the direction of having things change. One of the things that I think is atrocious as a newspaperman is the degree of government secrecy on all levels. You know, closed school board meetings and council executive sessions and all these things. It seems that when a fellow becomes elected to a simple little job in the town, he doesn't want anybody to know how he's conducting . . . he wants his job as a councilman to be conducted with the same degree of secrecy as he runs his hardware store and so on. And it's awfully hard for people to make a difference between private life and public life, where the public servant ends and where the private citizen begins.

Q Well, Jack, I don't have my flashlight here so I can't see how much tape is left. There is a fair amount . . . I'll wait 'til there's about half a reel, but we don't have to go . . . [inaudible] . . . and you've got other fish to fry this afternoon . . . and I should like to thank you for participating in this discussion, I'd like to thank you for my lunch and I hope that we can get together again.

A [Inaudible] . . . it's always fun and I really enjoyed this and as you know, I enjoy discussing these issues and I appreciate the opportunity of getting some of my ideas and background on tape. I think it's a good project.

Q You know, one of the things, Jack, that you said years ago and I had it retyped and I have it framed that you . . . it's one of the best compliments I think that I ever got from anyone, that you never met me . . . I don't know whether you remember it or not . . . that you'd never been to

a meeting or talked to me that you didn't learn something.

A Um hmm, that's true.

Q And I always felt that this was the greatest compliment that a person could get and particularly a person who had a life dedicated as a teacher. So I thank you very much for this . . .

A Oh, that's all right. It's well deserved, George. Despite some bad setbacks, you continued that way. I learned a lot from you today and it's always good.

Q Well, at least we're both [inaudible].

A Yeah. Thank goodness for that.

Q O.K., and maybe . . .

A I bet you never had a tougher guy take that test, though.

Q Oh, yes, Jack, we have had much tougher ones. The night my son was married we [sounds like "inducted a bunch of turtles"] up in New Jersey. Oh, my. This was in a motel and I guess it ran until about 2:00 in the morning. That was a mixed group and it was a party and . . . well, we really had a good time. Well, thanks again, and we'll get this thing typed up and I'll see that you get a copy of this.

A Great.

Q Maybe you'll even want to print it, I don't know.

A Yeah, never can tell . . . never can tell.

Q O.K., then.

[END OF INTERVIEW]