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INTERVIEW WITH MR. & MRS. ALEX COBB  
219 W. Main Street  
Newark, Delaware  
July 17, 1974

INTERVIEWED BY: R. Button

MC: Mr. Cobb  
MSC: Mrs. Cobb  
RB: R. Button

RB: This is an interview with Alex Cobb and his wife after their retirement from the University of Delaware on July 17, 1974, in their home in Newark at 219 W. Main Street.

Mr. Cobb, when did you first come to the University?

MC: I first became a member of the University staff in November, 1918, as County Agricultural Agent in Kent County in Dover.

RB: Where had you gone to college to prepare for this?

MC: Drew University. I was graduated in 1911. And in 1913 I became one of the first few county agricultural agents in the United States before the federal Smith Lever Act (?) was enacted in 1914. It was financed in Indiana by a special state appropriation at that time.

RB: Purdue was an outstanding agricultural school, was it not?

MC: (Response not clear)

RB: Right. It's one of the largest in the country?

MC: As far as I know it still is. Purdue and Cornell and Ames, Iowa, used to rank in my day.

RB: Did the work of the county agricultural agents start out when you started out with the program the way it does its work now do you think pretty much?

- MC: It was much simpler in those days really. Nobody knew what a county agricultural agent was in the first place. When you went out, the feeling of most of the farm people was that some smart aleck just out of the University was coming to show them how to grow potatoes.
- RB: Smart alecks? Ha, ha, ha.
- MC: Ha, ha.
- RB: Did you show them how to grow potatoes?
- MC: Ha, ha. Not until I got to Delaware.
- RB: Oh. Well, what did you do when you first hit the agricultural scene as an agent?
- MC: Well, I sat down and wondered to myself what I was going to. . . Well, to begin, I went up to the University to see George Christie who was the first Director of Extension at Purdue to ask him what I was to do when I was to go to Wayne County, Indiana. And, if you'll excuse the expression, he said, "Damned if I know because it's never been done before." Ha, ha.
- RB: Ha, ha.
- MC: He said, "So go on over and do it."
- RB: Did you go around and introduce yourself to the farmers and say, "I'm your agent"?
- MC: I introduced myself and I saw to it that it was publicized; and, of course, I was interviewed by the local paper, the Richmond Paladium, which was at that time about the size of our present Wilmington papers. Later I was employed on its staff for a year or so.
- RB: What did you do on the staff?
- MC: I was, well, my first year in Wayne County, Indiana, as County Agricultural Agent terminated abruptly by the political group that was in charge of finances of the county voting not to continue the office. That somewhat incensed the owners of the Richmond Paladium, and they decided to continue me on as County Agricultural Agent, pay my salary, and act as agricultural editor for the paper.

RB: Oh, that was an interesting experience, wasn't it?

MC: Yes, it was interesting and it was too good to last too long. I gradually became an under-the-mine (?) reporter. I even covered sports and the \_\_\_\_\_ and so forth.

RB: Did you leave that job to come to Delaware?

MC: No, I left that job to become County Agricultural Agent in Jackson County, Indiana, where I was for about three years.

RB: And did they know about county agents by that time?

MC: They knew better, except the night I arrived there I stayed at a hotel in Seymour, Indiana, because I knew there were no lodgings in Brownstown, which was the county seat, of about 1200 population. And I went to the barber shop in the morning, and when I was there one of the chronic barber shop hangers-on, an elderly gentleman, remarked to the barber something like, "I see where they got a fellow coming from Purdue to teach these people how to grow potatoes." Ha, ha, ha.

RB: Ha, ha, ha. He didn't know you had big ears. Ha, ha.

MC: No, well. The work was so entirely different than it is now. I don't know too much about it now except that it deals more with the economy and economics and land use and that sort of thing. Primarily we were interested in crop production, animal life improvement, and. . .

RB: And that's what they're doing now, isn't it? They're still reteaching and teaching.

MC: Teaching by doing. That's the key in the hold of extension.

RB: Uh, Norman Borlog, by the way, the man responsible for the Green Revolution, the man who produced the hybrid wheat. . .

MC: Yeah?

RB: He worked at the Du Pont Experimental Station for a year before he went with Rockefeller Institute. . .

MC: Yeah. Down there on Elkton Road?

RB: No, with the Wilmington one.

MC: Yeah? I know they had a plant that worked down here.

RB: Well, when did you decide to come to Delaware, and how did that happen?

MC: My roommate at Purdue, Emil Pence, came to the University of Delaware immediately on graduation in the station in the Agronomy Department, which had to do with soils and crops. And he later on became the first County Agricultural Agent in Delaware in Kent County. He and I kept in touch with one another. He left Delaware for a year or two to farm back in Indiana but then came back as the first County Agent and later as the first County Agent Leader which was the title we put to the administrative people. I had an idea it might be interesting to know something about how things went in some of the other parts of the country, and I more or less casually remarked to him one time on one of his visits back to Indiana or else by mail that I'd be interested in coming to Delaware if they had an opening. And sure enough the opening evolved and. . .

RB: And sure enough you came.

MC: Emil Pence, the first County Agricultural Agent, was responsible for me to become the third County Agricultural Agent in Kent County. A fellow named Zimmerley preceded me.

RB: Well, were you a resident in Kent County then or did you stay at the University?

MC: No, we lived in Dover along the Green.

RB: Oh, you lived in Dover on the Green.

MC: Yes, that's right.

RB: And, so that was before you came to the University. This was just when you first came to Delaware?

MC: Oh, the County Agent was still a member of the University Extension staff.

RB: I see. Although you lived in Dover, you were part of the University Extension.

- MC: That's right. I had to come up here and march in the convention in parades (?) much to my astonishment which I had never done in Indiana.
- RB: Where did you live on the Green?
- MSC: Twenty-four. Twenty-four the Green.
- RB: Did you know Mrs. Ridgely?
- MC: Very well. Across-the-Green neighbor, ha, ha. We knew her and admired her very much.
- RB: How long did you live in Dover, and how long were you the Kent County Agent?
- MC: We were there three years. We were there from November, not November, December 1, 1918, to uh, I think we came up here in the fall of 1921.
- RB: Did you bring Mrs. Cobb with you or did she come with you from Indiana?
- MC: Not only that. We grew up in the same town, and I delivered milk to her hourse.
- MSC: Our families even had been friends for years.
- RB: Oh, that was nice.
- MSC: We had known each other since we were children.
- RB: When was your first. . . Well, then at the end of the time on the Dover Green, you came to Newark?
- MC: We came to Newark, South College Avenue.
- RB: When was that? Oh, in 1921.
- MC: 1921.
- RB: Could you tell us something about Newark in 1921? And what were your first impressions?
- MC: Go on, you had something.
- MSC: Well, it was definitely a small town and a crossroads. There was what is now Main Street which went to Wilmington and on out to the wilds. Then there was South College

MSC: (Cont'd)

Avenue which we called Depot Road because the Pennsylvania Railroad Station was where it is now but it was very important. A good many people commuted to Wilmington to work, and we didn't have any very nice stores in Newark then. And we had to go to Wilmington practically to buy a spool of thread. Now we have perfectly wonderful stores here.

RB: What were some of the people that you remember most vividly when you were here in the early part, in the '20's?

MC: You've got a better memory for people than I.

MSC: At the moment I can't think of people. We knew of course the college people right away, who were very nice to us and very good friends.

RB: Dr. Sifford, for example?

MSC: Oh, yes, we admired him.

MC: Young man from Dover.

MSC: We admired him very much and were very proud of him.

MC: Harry Hayward was Director of Extension and Dean of the School of Agriculture when I came here.

RB: How long was he Dean?

MC: I don't know how long he had been Dean. He was only Dean and Director about two years I think after I came. There was a typical faculty disagreement going on that terminated his stay. My interview with Dean Hayward to come to Delaware was a rather interesting highlight of life. Arrangement was made for me to meet him at Columbus, Ohio, during the National Dairy Show. He was very much interested in dairy cattle, and I was too as far as that is concerned. And I went to Columbus and checked into the hotel. I was sitting around. . . First of all, this was during the terrible flu epidemic during 1918. I remember the station in Columbus was full of coffins. And around about dinnertime that night I commenced to develop a sore throat and eventually practically lost my voice. I was sitting in the hotel lobby, and a young man came up to me and introduced himself and asked me if I was me. And he introduced himself as R. O. Boslin, who was then County Agricultural Agent in New Castle County, and a former Purdue grad. And he had been designated to entertain me until Dean Hayward showed up. And

MC: (Cont'd)

I whispered and tried to talk the best I could. And Dean Hayward did show up, and we talked for a few minutes. He said, "You have a very bad sore throat. I suggest that you come with me and we'll go into the bar." I thought, that's funny. He called to the bartender and said, "Fix this young man a tall, hot lemonade." He said, "Drink that and go to bed and meet me at breakfast tomorrow morning, and we'll talk about Delaware." So I did, and in the morning his remedy worked fine. I was able to talk very nicely.

RB: Well, he took care of first things first.

MC: That's right.

MSC: Yes, ha, ha.

MC: We ate breakfast. Nothing was said about coming to Delaware until we were finished. Then he said, "So you're interested in coming to Delaware." I said, "Yes, I think I am." And he said, "Emil Pence has told me a good deal about you. What church do you go to?" I said, that at that time I was going to the Baptist. We'd been brought up Baptist. He said, "He told me you like to sing." I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "What part do you sing?" I said, "I sing bass." "How soon can you come to Delaware?" Ha, ha, ha.

RB: Ha, ha.

MC: It turned out he was the director of the Presbyterian choir, ha, ha. That was my total interview for coming to Delaware.

RB: Ha, ha. First things first.

MC: Right.

RB: So you changed from Baptist to Presbyterian in a hurry?

MC: Oh, well that's another story, too. In the meantime in Dover we joined the Methodist church because the Baptist church didn't appeal to us in many ways. So we started going to a Methodist church here, but we shopped around and we'd had some experience in moving around with churches and choirs I'd directed. By that time I'd directed three choirs. Shortly after we came out here though, the Presbyterians approached me. Dean Hayward was gone by that time. And they asked me if I would consider directing their choir, and I said, "No. I'd had my fill of directing choirs for while. I'd better stick to my own business." Nothing was said about it

MC: (Cont'd)

for a while. About six months later I was approached again, and they said, "We'd still like to have you come and direct the choir." And I said, "No. I still don't feel that I want to." They said, "But the board had a meeting last week and decided to pay \$40 a month." I said, "I'll take it," ha. ha. We were somewhat hard up with two growing youngsters at that time. So I was bought into the Presbyterian church. Purchased is a better word, ha, ha. That's a little far afield from being County Agricultural Agent in Extension work in Delaware as compared to Indiana.

RB: That might be \_\_\_\_\_ (muffled) \_\_\_\_\_.

MSC: Yes.

RB: They wanted your voice.

MC: I found some things quite similar here. Methods of counting crops and livestock. Some were more advanced, and some were less advanced. At least we felt so. Orchard things were new to me. Orchards, peaches were still a big leading crop in Delaware at that time.

RB: When did the peach blight come?

MC: Oh, the peach blight came along way before my time. When the peach blight hit--you're pretty well informed yourself--the peach center was around Middletown in New Castle County.

RB: I know. They used to grow \_\_\_\_\_.

MSC: Oh, yes.

MC: And the blight came along, and put a stop to it. They didn't have a remedy for it.

RB: Chestnuts had happen the same thing, didn't it, chestnuts?

MC: That was a different kind of blight. They happened about the same time, I guess. Well eventually they developed maybe a better method, but they were successful in growing them in Kent and Sussex Counties, and that was the big center of fruit production when I came here.

RB: Was that a major part of your work then, a new kind of work for you?

MC: A new kind of work. I had to get my ear close to the ground.

MC: (Cont'd)

And, uh, of course let's straighten out the three phases of agricultural work as conducted by the land grant colleges, which were the colleges that were sent up under the Land Grant Act of Congress in 1867, I think it was, which allotted certain lands to the universities. These could be used in many forms to set up agricollleges that would teach agriculture and the mechanical arts. So that it divided into three steps after Extension was conceived. The research job in the experimastation (?) sought after facts, conducted research, and developed new varieties and new methods. The college itself, in its classroom work, taught those known facts to students who went back and became farmers or leaders. The Extension Division took those facts and bypassed the classroom. It took the facts directly to the farmers as individuals or as groups. And we taught to a certain extent by demonstration. We'd say, "John Jones used a particular new type of fertilizer on his farm."

RB: And this was why we developed into the largest agricultural producing country? Probably.

MC: Well, it certainly had a good deal to do with it. And when John Jones got his demonstrated plot started, we invited his neighbors to come down and observe it two or three times during the season as an example of what we did. And Extension was taking the information from the experimastation and classroom to the farm family in the form of the County Agent working with the men and home demonstration working with the women and later 4-H Clubs working with the children. Did I make that clear?

RB: Yes. You began your County Agent's work in Delaware in Kent and then, when you moved to Newark, were you still based, were you working still mainly in Kent County?

MC: No, I came to Newark as no longer a County Agent but the State Leader of the 4-H Club work.

RB: Oh. And was that just started then in 1918 or 1921?

MC: No, 4-H clubwork started in. . . Well, actually, it started in 1906 before there was any federal legislation. It started in 1906 in Texas. Ummm, I forget the man's name who innovated or discovered the means of combatting the

MC: (Cont'd)

boll weevil in cotton, and he went, used this demonstration method to show how that could be handled. And in New York State then some individual show was started, but it really began in 1914 with the passage of the Smith Lever Act which granted federal extension service under the Department of Agriculture and created monies for the setting up of extension services in several states which became known as cooperative extension work because the finances in most states were borne cooperatively by the federal government, state appropriations, and county appropriations. We still have some small county appropriations here in Delaware which have helped get the legislation. I know because I was located in Dover at the time it was brought up.

RB: When was that? That was before '21 then?

MC: That was in 1920, I guess. It was known as the Farm Bureau Bill. The Farm Bureaus were organized about that time. It was an organization of farmers that worked cooperatively in, oh, sundry activities, such as crop production, crop marketing, or purchase of livestock. And they, theoretically, were an advisory group to the extension service and to the County Agricultural Agent. Very often he served as secretary of the County Farm Bureau or County Farm Bureaus of the State Farm Bureau and still are today a good, strong organization.

RB: Did you find a ready reception for the 4-H program?

MC: It went like wildfire right from the start. It started in Kent County in Houston. Dewey Sap (?) was the first boy 4-H Club member and Corn Club member, and I had the pleasure of meeting his grandson not too many years ago who was attending agricultural school here.

RB: Oh, now he is?

MC: Yes. That was three or four years ago, I guess. The work. . . 4-H clubwork is very simple. In those days it consisted of corn clubs, dairy clubs, uh. . . Dairy and livestock clubs were the big clubs. We didn't have much beef cattle in Delaware at that time. Girls were cooking and sewing. Cooking included canning fruit, and canning clubs and so forth and so on.

- RB: Well, did you miss some of the Indiana farm life with large fairs and larger operations or did you like the smaller state?
- MC: The operations were not any larger on the farms. The farms were not as large as some of the farms here. Some of the farms around Middletown were 200 or 250 acres, and the average farm in Indiana was probably around 75 acres.
- RB: You mentioned M. O. Pence and R. O. Boslin, and you mentioned a man whose name was T. T. Martin and what did they call you when you worked professionally at the ag school? Did you have a nickname, or did you go by initials too?
- MC: Well, friends called me A.D.
- RB: Well, did that go with agricultural faculty, do you think--using initials?
- MC: H, ha. I don't think so. Because later on when I worked in Washington with the Treasury Department, everybody was initials and violated the franking privilege by signing their names that way or using their first names instead of using full names to write letters.
- RB: Well, how did that have any connection with the franking privilege?
- MC: Franking privileges are very specific about what the franking privilege can be used for. You couldn't arrange to have a luncheon meeting and say how much the lunch was going to cost. That was advertising.
- RB: Oh.
- MC: I'd better not go into that. It's very detailed, ha, ha.
- RB: Oh, well.
- MC: Governmental policy.
- RB: Well, what about your. . . Then you worked with the 4-H program and that was beginning in '21, was it?
- MC: No, it began in 1914 when \_\_\_\_\_ was agricultural agent in. . .
- RB: No, I meant when you came to Newark, when you took over after having been Kent County Agent.

MC: Yeah, I became State Leader succeeding T. T. Martin.

RB: Right. Well then how long did you do that job?

MC: Oh, well, I'm not quite sure. It lasted on until I left the University in '43. I was Boys Club Leader in 1921 until about 1925. And then they combined 4-H and County Agent work, so I was State Leader of County Agents which was County Agricultural Agents and 4-H Club Agents in 1925 to about 1929 when I was made Assistant Director of Extension which gave me some administrative authority over all three phases of Extension work: 4-H, home demonstration, and County Agricultural Agents.

RB: Well, the Extension program was expanding all this time.

MC: Very much so. The Extension program when I came here consisted of a director and the State Leader of County Agents. The State Leader of Boys Club work. And the State Leader of Home Demonstration work period. That was it. Now I attended a recent meeting of Extension Fraternity for old farm extension workers here. I think there were about 60 people present. So it has grown quite a bit. There were no specialists. We had the first specialist apply to the Extension Service in oh about 1929. A poultry specialist. And he was supposed to know the whole works about the poultry business and transmit it personally and through the Extension agents as well. That's the best way I can describe that. And later on they developed dairy specialists, oh there are a whole flock of them now. I wouldn't begin to try to enumerate them. There were. . . Part of them were part-time Extension and part-time experimastation, entomology I know. Men who headed up the entomology work. Got part of his pay from Extension and part from the Experimastation. Now the same was true of the agronomists. I don't remember, now, that's too far away.

RB: You mentioned that you worked with the U. S. Treasury Department.

MC: That was after 1943.

RB: And what was. . . You were there then during the war?

MC: Why, very much so. I became. . . Well, first of all, my first experience federally began in 1934. I was invited by \_\_\_\_\_ Working here in a small state in Extension, you had, where they didn't have specialists in lots of things, you represented a lot of things somebody had to do. Represent some of the economic factors and land use planning factors, and so

MC: (Cont'd)

as Director, or Assistant Director, I got involved in a number of different kinds of activities and meetings. And all up and down the . . . were groups of the original thirteen states, the Northeastern Division. And I got to know the heads of the agricultural departments of the various states and extension work and something about their work. Well I was invited to join the old Federal Emergency Relief administration in 1934. I requested a six-month leave of absence, which was what they suggested, to work under an old friend, Harry Hopkins. And as, they didn't use the word director, I was Advisor or the Thirteen Northeastern States \_\_\_\_\_. My title was Advisor for the Rural Rehabilitation Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. That was my title, ha, ha. And. . .

RB: That was a place you could have used initials, ha, ha.

MSC: Ha, ha, yes.

MC: We did, F.E.R.A. and R.R.D. and so forth.

RB: Well, that was a tremendous job, wasn't it?

MC: It was a big job. They were moving the Relief people from one of the Pennsylvania branches when the mines were closed. They moved groups of families down to West Virginia and set up a farming community. It helps out the community. Oh they learned crop weaving and furniture making, and the agricultural part came in and they raised gardens and milk. To get milk, I bought I don't know how many milk goats for one outfit that was foreign-born people who were familiar with using goats.

RB: Did you find that a very creative thing to do?

MC: Creative and challenging and there was a lot of money wasted. People were reaching out. The money was allotted to the states and, . . .

RB: You needed to use it, and you needed to get it to those people.

MC: They had a hurricane up in Maine that blew down a whole apple orchard. It blew the trees down, and through the governor up there they put in claims for the loss for all those apple trees by the hurricane through the guidance of the Rural Rehabilitation. I never could quite figure that one out. I'd better not into too much of this detail because it involved too many things.

- RB: But it is important historically, about the new approaches toward. . .
- MC: Yeah, there were lots of things done. We traded Pennsylvania coal for Alabama cotton; we set up a slaughterhouse arrangement in Boston. They had a bunch of unemployed butchers who banded together, and they shipped in \_\_\_\_\_ cattle from Minnesota. And they slaughtered them and sold them and made . . .
- RB: And you were head of the program for those, the thirteen states, the Eastern Division?
- MC: For the Rural Rehabilitation end of it. I had to take people, the State Advisor, or the State Director, \_\_\_\_\_, and it was a very complicated thing. It worked. . . To a certain extent, I don't know how permanent \_\_\_\_\_.
- RB: Was that about the first major cooperative effort of that kind, a coordinating effort between states?
- MC: I don't know. It was the kind of cooperative that we'd been teaching and asking the farmers to work together and combine their activities.
- RB: What did you do after that federal job?
- MC: I came back here to the University until the Treasury job developed, and then I was Regional Director for the same reason. Again, for the rural sale of war bonds. There were war bonds then.
- RB: Oh.
- MC: And that ran from West Virginia to Maine.
- RB: Well, did you have to go up and down there? Did you keep traveling?
- MC: Did I have to go up and down! Presque Isle, Maine, at 32 below zero! Ha, ha.
- MSC: Ha, ha.
- RB: Where were you, Alma, while all this was going on?
- MSC: Right here, ha, ha.
- MC: \_\_\_\_\_ library.

RB: When did you start working at the library?

MSC: I didn't think you would ask me that because I don't remember.

RB: Would you say in the thirties?

MSC: Do you remember?

MC: I don't know. Before I went to Washington?

MSC: I was a part-time worker, just, not full time; and I had told Mr. Lewis when he asked me if I'd like to work that I didn't know an earthly thing about library work, and he said. . .

MC: That wasn't exactly true because she was "Mrs. Library" for Newark Library.

MSC: Not then. I began at the college first.

MC: In your Century Club experience, didn't you \_\_\_\_\_ the library be moved out of private homes into the old Academy Building?

MSC: Oh, no.

MC: Yes you did, ha, ha.

MSC: Ha, ha. Anyhow.

MC: Don't record the private discussions, ha, ha.

MSC: I loved working at the college library, and Mr. Lewis was very nice to me. And at the Christmas holiday he had me come down to the library and stay right with him for the week, and he taught me all I knew. And he was very kind and very helpful. And then they employed me at very low wage, but at least it was something.

RB: It was interesting to do?

MSC: Oh, very.

MC: She's a bookworm.

MSC: And I was sorry when I became the age that they had to retire me because of age.

MC: So then she went back to her first love, the Newark Library. She was Assistant Librarian. She had been on the commission for I don't know how many years.

MSC: Here in Newark.

MC: Working for the governor, wasn't it? She carries Card No. 1 for the Newark Library.

RB: Do you?

MSC: They have just been very nice to me.

RB: Isn't that good!

MSC: And I. . .

RB: Did you go to the dinner in June--or in May? The Library, Friends of the Library dinner?

MSC: No.

MC: We didn't go this time. We have been to. . .

RB: I really think Card 1 should be there.

MSC: Ha, ha.

MC: Card 1 was getting a little ripped, older and the like. . . Am I Card 2?

MSC: No, I don't think you are.

MC: We don't go as often as we used to and as far.

MSC: Or at night.

RB: No. Well, umm. . .

MC: Well, we jumped from agriculture pretty quickly.

RB: Well, I was just thinking about realizing that you really remained based in Newark even though you had these federal jobs. And your children were growing up and going to school here.

MSC: Yes.

MC: I had to live in Washington for the Rural Rehabilitation job in '34. That was my basic headquarters, and I traveled back and forth to work from Washington. Later on with the Treasury, I still lived in Washington in a 2' x 4' room. I think Newark was basically my headquarters, but I spent more time in Washington because they went and decided I had some kind of an economist quirk, and we

MC: (Cont'd)

were doing a lot of statistical work. I produced a map of the United States showing the agricultural income by counties.

RB: Oh.

MC: For the whole United States, which was quite a . . .

RB: That took a lot of time, didn't it? Like the geodetic survey!

MC: Oh, several months. Other than. . . I did it in color, different color for the different, \$500,000, or \$1,000,000, and so forth. Handed it over to my director, and he said, "That's very pretty, A.D. Did you know I was colorblind?" Ha, ha.

MSC: Ha, ha.

MC: I had to do the whole thing over again, in black and white and crosschecks.

RB: Well, was it published in the black and white because he was colorblind or was it published in the color?

MC: Oh, it was published in black and white, photocopies, and distributed to various states. The big one was framed and hung in the office of the National Director. That . . .

RB: Do you think it's there now?

MSC: I doubt it.

MC: I don't know whether. . . The office has been moved so many times, I doubt very much. I don't know where the office is now.

RB: What about your children? You said you had two children?

MC: Three.

RB: Three?

MSC: Our two older children are graduates of Delaware, and then our younger one, who now lives in Houston, Texas, decided he wanted to go to Florida. And he's a graduate of the University of Florida in Gainesville.

MC: That was because his sister was living in Florida and he visited down there and. . .

MSC: And loved it.

MC: He had a better course down there than what he had. . . What he was interested in was forestry at first, but he changed over to \_\_\_\_\_ architecture and majored in that and graduated in that. But it's a far cry from what he is now.

RB: What's he doing now?

MSC: He's with the Veterans' Administration.

MC: Yeah, but that title always gets away from me.

MSC: Oh, it's miles.

MC: He has the overseas okays for all the federal loans that are made for federal housing for veterans.

RB: Oh.

MC: \_\_\_\_\_ (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ finance officer.

RB: Wow.

MSC: Wow, is right!

MC: Memory is running out again. There were several interesting things that happened in 4-H in my time. One thing, when I took over, each 4-H Club group--a club would be a group of children mixed or maybe all girls or all boys or eventually they got them mixed up, which was natural at that period of adolescence. The local leader--we had a local leader, unpaid, a volunteer leader for each group. It was being done the easy way by having a schoolteacher. And the club meeting was held in the school, presumably after hours; and the teacher was the local leader. Well, it got terribly mixed up with schoolwork and some school administrators claimed it interfered with schoolwork. And some teachers didn't know or care anything about or didn't want to know anything about what they were trying to do. And some parents were kind of disaboberated (?). So I set out to establish local leaders who were farm people--men and women--and not of the school department. We eventually got it disassociated; and that's the way it is now and it's so much better. Yet, people whose whole lives were dedicated to that. . . I knew one who just died this last year. I can't think of her name now. She'd been a local leader with me back in the twenties and was still a local leader when she died this last year. So we got it disassoci-

MC: (Cont'd)

ated from the school and avoided some confusion there between that and the F.F.A. work which is the teaching in high schools of agriculture. Another thing I saw develop was the Harrington Fair which has become one of the finest--it's called a state fair now--it was one of the finest county fairs in the country and was recognized as such at one time.

RB: They had harness track, didn't they?

MC: They had a local harness track down there. Some of the local boys used to have Saturday afternoon racing. They decided to have a fair.

RB: Oh, did the track precede the fair?

MC: The track was there and. . .

RB: Oh.

MC: The inside of the track was planted with wheat.

RB: Oh.

MC: They'd harvest the crop of wheat in July and have the fair in August, the first one. It was a pretty good fair, too. I worked very close to those things. Ernest Raleigh was secretary of Kent & Sussex Fair Association which was what they called it. And I helped with the preparation of the first premium list. I also helped with the first judging. And we held our 4-H Club. . .

RB: My grandfather, Fred Brady, was active in that.

MC: Yeah.

MSC: I bet he was.

MC: We had a 4-H Club Department set up within the Fair in a special exhibit for their produce and livestock and canned fruit, everything that they could produce. And they ordered special premium money for the 4-Hers not competing with any other open classes. The first exhibit was held in a couple of abandoned cattle sheds. They were probably full of fleas, ha, ha, ha.

RB: Hot!

MC: That wasn't so good so I was instrumental--I have to use that word--in having or in planning the present 4-H Club building. I suggested those plans to the directors and it was built accordingly, primarily to suit the needs of the type of exhibits that were put on plus educational sort of things that were put up. There were some mistakes in it. The windows were too high, or not high enough rather, and a few things like that. But that helped to strengthen the work and get public opinion in back of it as much as any other one thing. The cooperation of the Fair Association was wonderful. \_\_\_\_\_ in 4-H that goes on today. I can see the idea of perpetuating 4-H interest after they reach the age--the ages were from 12 to 21, I think, 20 or 21. And after that they were out. So I decided to outline an organization to be known as the Links in the 4-H Club Chain. And each year we had elected from each county--I don't remember whether it was three or four--Youth Links that were decided by the club members themselves or with the aid of the 4-H Club Agents. And we had a rather impressive ceremony up here, the Annual Boys Club Camp, I think they call it now. We called it \_\_\_\_\_ Three Days on the Campus. And that final night we inducted the new Links into the Chain. We all got out on the campus in front of. . .

MSC: Mitchell Hall.

MC: Mitchell Hall. We joined hands, lit the candles, and taps sounded, and it was kind of impressive. And the idea was that these, becoming adult people, would continue their interest in 4-H and help out. One of the evidences of that is, as far as I know today, at least the last time I attended the fair at Harrington, the 4-H Links were conducting a very successful restaurant down there that served meals to most of the people that ate at the fair.

RB: Good!

MC: And raised money that went towards supporting Boys Club work.

RB: Did Links go out of Delaware? Did other states take that idea up?

MC: They had different thoughts. It became an all-star in Maryland and, ha, ha, I didn't like Maryland's system. Sorry, Maryland. I don't know whether it's going on today or not. But they had an Indian arrangement and they had. . .

RB: Oh, like Pocahontas?

MC: They had war dances and, oh, war headdresses; and they had big chiefs. And you became an all-star member which corresponded somewhat to our Links. I didn't like that Indian chief. I thought they'd better stick to 4-H.

RB: Mmm, hmmm. What are some of your ideas now? You've had a long life and a long career in agriculture. What do you see as the biggest problems that were seen in American agriculture?

MC: Keeping agriculture going for one thing. Uh, uh, production at light levels. . . I guess I'll go back to the time when Henry Wallace was Secretary of Agriculture and produced the oh, AAA, in American Agriculture administration with the idea of maintaining an even production. If we had too much production, slow it down. If we didn't have enough, hoop it up. That was after World War I. And that resulted in a lot of criticism. These stories about burning little pigs in straw stacks and so forth which weren't true. It became a political football to a certain extent. But agriculture has progressed with the times, and the need for land-use planning--I dabbled with land-use planning at one time. George, uh. . . There was a combination of little jobs thrown in my lap. Land-use planning in Delaware in 1938 or 39, along in there, was a tremendously proper (?) idea. And I believed in it, and. . .

RB: And you still do?

MC: I still. . . Well, everybody does now. Land-use planning is a big project everywhere, rural and urban.

RB: Do you see, in Delaware particularly, a major threat in terms of the argument about the coastal zone and developers moving in to open land?

MC: Well the coastal zone doesn't affect agriculture too much as I knew it. Marshland agriculture affected was ducks and muskrats.

RB: Well, what I was really thinking about. . .

MC: Fish.

- RB: Was taking over what will happen if they changed it. It would seem to me that the oil coming in and tanks that will be built to hold the oil and other kinds of arrangements around those, big things will take over some farmland.
- MC: It won't be that much agricultural land, I don't think. As I know. . . If I know the geography, that was. . . The things over in Delaware City didn't infringe on too much land. The land that Shell bought down around Smyrna was marshland. . .
- RB: Oh.
- MC: It would have to be filled in and what. It would have to be close to the water, and close to the water in Delaware is marsh. Unless they've changed things.
- RB: Well, what about development. Do you see Delaware as threatened or not?
- MC: The threat to Delaware agriculture is population. You've got practically no agricultural. . . Comparatively, you've got no agriculture in New Castle County today. North of the Canal, it's all people--houses and condominiums and roads.
- RB: Mmm, hmmm. Well, what happened. . .
- MC: In other words, when I came here there were around 16,000 farms in Delaware. Today, the last figure I saw, which was a year or two ago, was around 6,000.
- RB: Uh, Mr. Cobb, what does that mean? Is it possible that we'll have so many people that we won't have enough land to grow food for them? What will happen?
- MC: We've still got lots of land. We've still got some wasteland in Delaware. I've seen a lot of land in Florida, even as rapid growth as Florida makes it, and it can be utilized by clearing up the land. I traveled across the country--I haven't done very much of that in the last five or six or eight years--but you see plenty of land that can still be utilized and. . . It'll be a difference now, though. If we're not doing it already, I wouldn't be surprised but what we are, the good deal of milk that's coming in to the homes in Delaware, is coming from as far West as Michigan and Wisconsin and have been for a number of years. And butter, and whoever, nobody ever bothers making butter in Delaware anymore. Not for forty years. No more creamers. The dairy industry has \_\_\_\_\_.

MC: (Cont'd)

And that middle section of the country. . . . You won't see very many dairy herds any more. Up here the price of labor has restricted that, and there was a tendency towards larger farms. But the small farm of 100 acres will not produce enough to justify the cost of the equipment that has to go into it. The minimum figure on equipment that I've seen somewhere is \$70,000 just for machinery to operate the farm because it's a one-man job. The owner operated it because he had to compete with industry for labor. The farm laborer is nonexistent.

RB: Then what is the answer to all of that? Is there going to be conglomerate farming then?

MC: We have large farms here, like the Townsend farms in Sussex County and a couple of big farms in Newton, \_\_\_\_\_, Bridgeville, and they operate a good poultry and farm machinery business as a company. What's going to become, that's the big question that I wouldn't dare contemplate at all because too many minds are involved in trying to figure that out that it's a county agent's program. The experimastation program was involved not so much in getting new varieties of grain or better varieties of things as they were with better land use, the better use of what we have.

RB: What about the possibility of smaller, less expensive, equipment? Don't they make any small tractors?

MC: There isn't any such beast. The tractor won't bale hay. You take one machine into the field and it harvests the grain and thrashes it (?) and bags it right as it goes through the field and dumps it all up into a wagon that goes along behind it.

RB: But it's very expensive.

MSC: Yes.

MC: Very. Thirty or forty thousand dollars. I don't know. I'm too far away from it.

RB: When did you retire?

MC: I was retired in 1957. Well, after the Treasury Department as director for the Rural Program of War Bond sales in the Northeastern states, that dwindled, disappeared as such at the close of the War and a lot of the field work was done

MC: (Cont'd)

away with and right conveniently when that happened, I was invited to continue as director for the thirteen Northeastern states in the Farm Labor Program which was being conducted by the Agricultural Extension Service nationally. To meet the crisis which developed during the War when farm labor had all gone to work industrially, we were importing Jamaicans and Puerto Ricans and heaven knows what other ends of the earth were in here to pick apples, harvest crops, tomatoes. . .

RB: That began that trend then, that we still have?

MC: Migrant labor thing developed, and the same problems were existing in 1946 and '48 and I worked with them, just as they have today. Proper housing. Up in arms to do something about it, and they're still up in arms doing something about it; and I don't know whether they've done anything about it or not.

RB: One of the problems there, isn't it, is what you said about competing in the labor market? If the farmer does everything he is supposed to do for the migrant laborer, he has a hard time breaking even in some cases, doesn't he?

MC: That's right. The farmer has got to make a living. He can only take so much for labor and meet the expense for equipment and marketing and so forth. That's one of the big problems to be resolved. But anyway, I spent two years on that deal, seeing the Maine potato growers get pickers. We took trainloads of people. . .

RB: Gosh!

MC: . . . From West Virginia up there. . .

RB: What a job!

MC: Well, that was a wonderful job. We had the labor camps. They had to be equipped with cots and blankets, cooking utensils, find a place for them. One day I went to the office and the boss said--I forget the fellow's name--but "So and so is sick. You're taking over the Army surplus job, getting camps equipped." Maine wanted 300 Army cots for potato pickers, and some place else wanted 1000 cups. Cups without handles of all things. Cooking equipment.                     . We bought a VA hospital in West Virginia for a farming camp (?). We bought some outfit down in Maryland, southern Maryland, had a farming camp; and we imported Jamaicans for the fruit-picking areas of West Virginia. And as soon as they landed, they went on strike for more money. And they spoke the most perfect English and resented very much the color lines that were being drawn so we had a merry time, but we got the crops

MC: (Cont'd)

harvested. That ended in. . . Things seemed to fall in line very nicely, and about the time that ended the State Director of the Savings Bond Program--the War Bond Program had become the Savings Bond Program--resigned. And I don't remember which came first. I think Alma called me up and said she heard about the resignation and maybe wouldn't I like it and come back to Delaware again, ha, ha. I'd been commuting all this time but weekends.

MSC: And here I'd been staying.

MC: Wit Cobb (?). And I thought that was an excellent idea; and I guess within an hour after her call, the old boss over at the Treasury Department called me and asked me the same question. And I thought that was very nice. It actually was a promotion. So I became State Director of the Savings Bond Program in 1948, I guess, and remained so until 1957. I always maintain I wasn't a salesman, but I had good luck. I had good active local leadership, and the record shows that we sold \$130 million worth of savings bonds while I was around anyway. And I was told by my Washington director when I came up here that. . . Well I asked, I said, "What's the situation in Delaware?" I guess things hadn't been going too well. I had heard. "Well," he said, "Delaware ranks forty-eighth," and he said, "Well, A. D., it's all the way you can do is to go up."

RB: At that time, that was the lowest state.

MC: Yes.

MSC: That was all we had.

MC: And I had the satisfaction of being called up to stand up and take congratulations at a national convention in Duluth, I think it was, of all places. The records were just in for that year, and Delaware was No. 1. And I turned it over to my successor as No. 1.

RB: Wasn't that wonderful!

MSC: Wasn't it?

MC: That's not the total number of bonds sold, but . . .

RB: Rank per capita?

MC: Rank per quota.

RB: Per quota.

MC: We were assigned a quota every year; and the more you sold, the bigger the quota got.

RB: Isn't that great?

MC: It felt good.

RB: Well, then, you were here in Newark as the Director of the Savings Bond Program, or was that in Wilmington?

MC: That's right, that's right.

RB: In Newark?

MC: Yeah. I used a Washington office \_\_\_\_\_ once in a while to get some information quick if we needed it.

RB: Well, then, you actually left the University when?

MC: '43.

RB: '43.

MC: Yeah.

RB: But you always liked the community of Newark?

MSC: Oh, yes!

MC: Definitely, that's home. Home to us and home to the children. \_\_\_\_\_ (unclear)

MSC: We love Newark.

RB: Well, what about it, though? Haven't you considered being where it's nice and warm, where your children are? Or do you just have so many friends. . . ?

MC: We've been down there where our children are, where it's nice and warm. It's a lot hotter and more uncomfortable than 90 degrees is here. Old palm trees rattling. Too much sameness. Not enough \_\_\_\_\_. But, oh, at

MC: (Cont'd)

night we used to go back and forth for a month in the winter time sometimes (?), and it was a little bit cold coming back; but it was nice to get back. And, people. I've always felt that, if I've cultivated anything, it was people.

RB: Well, what about the . . . Do you go to the Presbyterian Church up here on Main Street now?

MC: I certainly do. We just had a meeting of the old-timers that have been their members more than fifty years, and it turned out I was the oldest man who had signed up.

RB: You've seen many changes during your career, beginning when the County Agent's job and Extension were nearly new. What about some of the personalities that you worked with that you might not have mentioned?

MC: Well, personalities go hand in hand with some of the activities which have been important to the development of agriculture. At the same time I came to work in Kent County, M. C. Vaughn, Malloy Vaughn, came to work from Mississippi in Sussex County. R. O. Bosman was still County Agent in New Castle County at that time. The three of us worked as a team. We traded knowledge and backgrounds to a certain extent. I had a background in dairying and in particular alfalfa growing. I sometimes went down into Sussex County and worked with Vaughn on those problems. Bosman was also interested in dairy. We didn't have specialists, as I mentioned some time ago. We had to be specialists for each other. One thing that we all engaged in that has become very important in Delaware was the introduction of varieties of soybeans which would be more adaptable to uses which were being developed for soybeans. Soybeans have been grown in Delaware before we came here. There was a yellow bean. But there was a black soybean that was bringing much higher prices. In the Middlewest, they were ground up for livestock feed. So the University Extension Service obtained several bushels of black soybean seed and distributed them among the three County Agents. And we took those seed and inoculated it for the nitrogen-producing bacteria which it takes to grow a good \_\_\_\_\_ crop which in those days was done by taking some soil from an old alfalfa bed that had the nitrogen in it. Boy,

MC: (Cont'd)

we did roll it with a rolling pin on the desktop or on the floor until we got it dust-like. Then we dusted that seed with this nitrogen-producing soil.

RB: Was that pretty primitive? The way of doing it?

MC: Yes, it was pretty primitive. Nowadays you can buy it in a can. And we had distributed these soybeans in small samples so we got the orders (?) to growing enough to produce more seed. Eventually, whereas the old yellow soybean had been selling for about \$.75/bushel, we were selling and shipping the black soybean out to the Middle-west for as much as \$3.50 and \$4.00/bushel. And soybeans were becoming more important as livestock feed, but Henry Ford was also making automobile bodies out of it. And they were making soybean flour. And gradually the soybean business developed; new varieties developed here at the Delaware Experimentation Station until today soybeans have become almost if not quite the most important grain crop in Delaware and supplanted corn and wheat. You don't see very many wheat fields any more. You see lots of soybeans. It's become a very important part of our agricultural production. And that was due primarily to the work of those of us who were primary Extension workers that helped do that. I think perhaps I had a little bit to do with the improvement of alfalfa varieties. I had had some experience on my home farm in Indiana in the growing of alfalfa and realizing the value of the right seed and proper use of lime. In Indiana I had ordered special varieties of alfalfa seed from Nebraska which did very well there and I tried it out here eventually. It resulted in--I think we had two freightcar loads of alfalfa seed brought into Kent County. It took the place of the varieties that were being used and turned out to be much more satisfactory. And to save money, Vaughn in Sussex County brought \_\_\_\_\_ seed up from his experience in the South. And \_\_\_\_\_ is now being grown in lower Delaware as a pasture crop with considerable satisfaction. Incidentally, as an interesting thing, his son, who had been working for one of the oil companies in Saudi Arabia for many years. And he visited his son three or four years ago; and, as a measure of good faith, he took along a small three- or four-pound bag of \_\_\_\_\_ seed and gave it to the commissioners of agriculture of Saudi Arabia to help improve their pasture crops. I don't know how well it worked.

RB: They don't have to worry too much about improving many crops right now.

MC: Oh, we changed the complexion of hog production, hog breeds, hog breeds at least. \_\_\_\_\_ hogs were in, were more generally in use apparently in Delaware when I came here. And they were for good looks except for a very pug nose, also for very small litters and. . . I had been working with a Pole & China (?) Hog Owners Association in Middlewestern Indiana. And they conceived the idea of bringing in two carloads of red Pole & China sows to be sold at auction no matter what they cost. The Pole & China Association purchased them as an advertising stunt. And those sows did their work, and we got those Pole & China pigs pretty well all over the state. They're a heavier breed, very productive.

RB: What about hogs; do we have much of a hog production in Delaware now?

MC: Have what?

MSC: I don't know.

RB: We don't have much hog production in Delaware now, do we?

MC: We've got one man down in Sussex County, that the last I heard of, had 300 sows and two litters apiece with an average of five or six per litter, that's a lot of pigs.

MSC: We don't see them as we drive.

MC: No.

RB: No, and we don't smell them.

MSC: No.

MC: No.

RB: In Hohokus, N. J., (?) remember when they had all the pig farmers there?

MC: \_\_\_\_\_ slop \_\_\_\_\_. They had a little of that around Wilmington years ago. Now you don't see them. They're restricted to people, specialists.

RB: Oh, it's not profitable for the individual farmer now.

MC: Rapa Brand scrapple went off and \_\_\_\_\_  
 I don't know if they raise hogs, but they provide a market for a large amount of hogs which probably are raised pretty locally in Sussex County. Beef cattle, at the time when we were first starting in with our county agricultural experiences, they said it was not profitable to grow beef in Delaware. Pasture was not too good, and competition from Western beef was too strong. Somehow or other, beef became rather popular. With the scarcity of labor, the dairymen could no longer get anybody to handle these milking problems. And, even with the milking machine, which was \_\_\_\_\_, it was a seven-day-a-week job which the dairy business is. So a lot of them changed to beef cattle and utilized newer pasture methods; and we have a lot of beef cattle down here in Delaware. \_\_\_\_\_ pure red animals for sale for breeding purposes, but others for meat \_\_\_\_\_.  
 The change. . . Strawberries at one time was a leading crop in Delaware. That's disappeared along with the fruit business, the peach business, the. . .

RB: Because of the harvesting problem of labor mostly?

MC: Partly. Partly labor and partly the ease of transporting things in cars with the refrigeration. Strawberries from Florida are a matter of just a few hours. Even air enters into it now, and oranges which were a delicacy are plentiful the year round. It's just the competition because of transportation. But we can probably get to the point where we could sum the whole thing up as far as I'm concerned or we're concerned. Even though I've been away from the agricultural program actively for over 30 years, I am still interested in it. I try to keep in touch with it, with the developments, and take a certain amount of pride in having been a member of an organization that has brought about so many changes for the betterment of agriculture and rural home life and a better understanding on the part of all people in the state of the problems of agriculture and the importance of its operation. It's been interesting to us to have been a part of it and to have become Delawareans. Actually, I discovered after I came here some time that my great grandfather had immigrated or migrated, whichever's the best word, from Wilmington in 1820 on foot with his brother. Walked to Pittsburgh, built a raft, and floated down the Ohio River and built a flour mill. And Grandfather was married, and Grandmother was born. And when she was two years old, they got homesick and came back in a buckboard to Wilmington to visit their home folks. So when

MC: (Contd)

people in Delaware accuse me of being a foreigner as they used to in years gone by, I said, "I'm no foreigner, I just came back home where Grandpa came from." But, we've loved Delaware; and Delaware has been good to us.

(END OF INTERVIEW)