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Interview with Ed Fields, 96-year-old black man of Middletown, Delaware, March 14, 1973, by Rebecca Button

Q This is part of the University of Delaware Oral History Project, an interview with Ed Fields in Middletown on March 14, 1973. When was your last birthday, Ed?

A My last birthday was the 9th of October, 1976. 1976--this is 197--no, it was in 1972, wasn't it? I was born in 1876. I was 96 the 9th of October. Is that close enough?

Q Could you tell us some of your earliest recollections, what it was like growing up nearly a century ago in Delaware at St. Georges--beginning in St. Georges.

McDonough A Well, when I was a boy, my father and mother lived around St. Georges there and my mother worked for a family name of Corbett and my father worked for a man name of McQuirter [sp]. And he used to walk from St. Georges to Odessa to see my mother once every week, then backwards and forwards. At that time there was no way for him to go because we had no convenient way to go there. And then there used to be a stage sometimes come from Odessa over to Delaware City to meet the Major Rybold, a man who used to come up in the mornings to go from Odessa to Delaware City, driving an old hack. Sometimes my father come back thataway. But he had no way of getting around. So most of my parents was raised around Odessa. My mother was raised in Odessa. My grandmother come from Baltimore and worked for Corbetts for years and years until she died and she was buried over here to Odessa in the Quaker cemetery. And my grandfather he--she worked for Mr. John Corbett and my grandfather worked for Mr. Dan Corbett. Either one worked for both Corbetts, but one worked for one Corbett and the other worked for the other Corbett. And when he taken sick, she died there and they buried her in the Quaker cemetery. My grandfather hated taking sick, why we brought him home to St. Georges and he stayed with us until he died. And then after that why Father moved from St. Georges to a piece out of town for a man named Mr. Henry Lester, and he stayed with him 'til well all the children were grown. Then when I got big enough to go to work, Mr. Lester took me into St. Georges to the creamery one morning and a man named Stuart Reynolds asked him was I any good. He says, "I don't know, you can take the boy and try him." And I went out there and stayed with him three years. Then I come back to St. Georges and went with his brother-in-law, Mr. Albert Gray. And I stayed with Mr. Albert Gray, oh about 15 years 'til all his children were grown. And then he moved to McDonough [sp] and I come down to McDonough and farmed there for a man named McCurdy on a little farm there for two or three years. And then I got to going with my wife in 1910 and I went back to St. Georges--1910 I got married on the 26th of September, that's right, 26th of September, and I went back to St. Georges and stayed until March, then I come to Middletown and worked for a man named Fred Beatty and stayed with him until practically all his family was grown. And then I went to Wilmington worked at the Police Department about seven years. Then I come back, then I heard of a school and stayed out there about 15 years. Well, when I was 80 years of age I was going from boiler room to the third floor until I retired. I

retired in I just don't know what year it was. But practically all my life I ain't been out of a day's work if I wanted to. So I've walked from St. Georges to Delaware City lots of times and go up and set around in the old fort and go over on the Delaware River, and boys and girls and backwards and forwards. Then I'd walk from. . . .

Q When your father left home in St. Georges to see your mother when she worked at the Corbett house as you said once a week, about how long would it take him to make that walk and were you at any time living at the Corbetts, or was that just your older brothers and sisters.

A No, I was living--me and my brother [were] living and staying at St. Georges with a friend of ours. And my father, after he quit work, he wouldn't come home that night, he'd go right from the farm and walk right into Odessa to see my mother at Mrs. Corbett's. See, Mrs. Corbett told him that my mother could stay there while my sister was a baby and they kept her right there until she was able to come back home to St. Georges. Then they brought her back home to St. Georges. Then my father of course he'd come from where he was working home of the night. But for about six weeks he walked from St. Georges to Odessa once a week.

Q Oh, that was just six weeks. It wasn't that she lived at the Corbett house and he lived in St. Georges.

A No. My grandmother worked for Corbetts for years and years. She come from Corbetts and stayed there for oh 'til all their family was grown. And she died there at Corbetts. And then Corbetts buried her in Quaker cemetery there in Odessa. But all the rest of us, were raised and born right on the St. Georges, my brothers and sisters.

Q Did your father have a house on a farm or was it in the town of St. Georges?

A Well, for a while we lived in town, but then afterwards he moved out on a farm. And practically all of us children were raised out on a farm, out on a farm of a man named Mr. Henry Lester. Mrs. Lester when we children was small, they had a great big lawn but she wouldn't let us children go out of that lawn to go uptown. She'd tell us, "You don't have to go uptown for no fun; you have all this nice great big lawn, you stay right out here and play. And don't go up to no town." And she walked out for us just the same as our mother and father would. So practically 'til we got big enough--old enough to go to work--then we all scattered around to different places to work.

Q How old were you when Mr. Lester asked your father if he thought you could make it?

A He didn't ask my father. Mr. Reynolds asked Mr. Lester did he think I was any good to be a houseboy. And Mr. Lester told him he could take me and try me. But I was a boy about 14 or 15 years of age. I stayed out there about--I know it was three years. I used to walk from St. Georges there on the other side of Kirkwood and then every other Sunday I'd come home, I'd walk back home to St. Georges, then about [inaudible--sounds like "an hour of a sudden"] on a Sunday evening, I'd start back to my work place.

Q About how long did you work when you were fourteen or fifteen during the day, and what did you do?

A Well, at them times the farmers used to get up around 4:00 in the morning. And I was the houseboy. Sometimes I'd go out and get the cows up. I'd get the cows up out of that warm place then I'd jump down on the ground and warm my feet because there'd be a little frost on the ground. And then I'd go in the house and help his wife to get breakfast for the men. Well we used to get up around 4:00 and by the time we got everything done and cleaned up in them days it'd be about 8 or 9:00. You see, at that time we didn't have no way of gettin' around with--there wasn't no automobiles and we didn't have no horses and buggles to go around in. So our horses was our feet. But we enjoyed life. Really, to tell you the truth, I really believe that the young folks enjoyed life better than they do today, simply because that they made their own pleasure and had nice fun.

Q Did you help with the milking again at 4:00--or did you finish your barn work after the morning?

A No, I didn't do any work outside. After I'd get up the cows for him, something like that, if the men were off, why I went in the house and helped Mrs. Reynolds to get breakfast. I was the houseboy; I washed dishes and helped her around the house. No, I didn't do any milking or anything like that. I never done any milking until later years, until I was working for Mr. Albert Gray, his brother-in-law. When I went down there, why. No, I was born and raised around St. Georges and I stayed--I was a right good-sized boy before I ever went out to work anywhere. Of course my father and mother worked on a farm. My mother for a while worked for a family by the name of Corbett and my father worked for a man name of Cothgod [sp]. And well, for years he worked on a farm and my mother worked out there and my mother was taken sick one time with my oldest sister, why she went to Odessa to stay with my grandmother at Corbett's, and she stayed there 'til my sister was about six weeks or eight weeks old. My father used to walk from St. Georges to Odessa once a week. And of course there was a stage come from Odessa to go to Delaware City to meet the old Major Rybold every day. The old man had a great big hack with two horses and a little bell on the end of the tongue--you'd always know when he was coming then.

Q Was he the man that took the mail to the packet? Was the Rybold a packet and did he wait 'til the mail from Philadelphia came back--^ewas that the mail trip?

A No. The mail trip, a man named of Johnson in St. Georges drove the mail wagon from St. Georges to Kirkwood. He used to go to Kirkwood to meet the mailman. See, this man I'm talking about was driving a hack. He just hauled people. But when it come to mail, why we had a mailman went from St. Georges to Kirkwood to meet the trains there. So that didn't have anything to do with the man from Odessa. One man drove a stage one way and one drove a stage another way.

Q Did you have a good, active black church community when you were young? Can you remember that?

A Church? Well, as far as church, when we first went to church we lived in a place called Herlich's [sp] Row--that was about three and a half mile from St. Georges--between St. Georges and Kirkwood. My mother and my mother's sister, they used to get up and walk from St. Georges to Kirkwood every Sunday morning to service. And later years there was a school between St. Georges and Kirkwood called--well, it was a school anyway. When they closed the school, the colored ones took it and called it Bell's Chapel. Then for several years--then after a while the people in St. Georges built a new school and they sold the old school to the colored ones, and moved it right down--not far apart. If they struck a ball, they could knock it out of their school yard into our school yard. And they made that as a church. Well, they had service downstairs and school upstairs. But the part of it was, when they moved that school, the men that moved it had some great big old tree limbs--trees, and sawed 'em off and made rollers out of 'em and rolled it from the edge of town clear over on the other side of town and set it down there and that was the school. And it was a church and it was there until about a couple or three years ago, 'til we had nobody to go--everybody died off in St. Georges. There ain't but one colored family living in St. Georges now. But for years and years. That's when--I went to school there and finished my school there afterwards. But when I first got to going to school, the thing of it was, we had a great big old building where we went but it was closed off to just one room. And we had it for our school until they bought that school there then.

Q Were there more colored families in St. Georges when you were growing up than there are now, more than one family? About how many kids were in your school room when you were young?

A Oh, we had quite a people around St. Georges at one day and time. There was quite a crowd of them around there. But gradually they moved out where they could get work. Well, some of them went to Delaware City and went to building a port over there and kept moving and moving, 'til it got down to about one or two families, until then at last three or four years ago there was just one family in there. And she was converted into that church what we're talking about and she didn't live very far from that. She stayed there--couldn't get her to go from there; she stayed there until she died. And she just died about a couple or three months ago. But she had a home in there. I'd love for you to see the home. It's a nice home there. The thing of it was--let me tell you, there's a cellar down under there and there's a well down in that cellar. And if you wanted a cold drink of water, you could down there in that cellar and get as cold a drink of water as you'd want any time. Now I don't know how far that water come from. It must have come from miles and miles. But it's still there. I was up there once and her home is still there. But there's only one colored family living in St. Georges now out of them all. And I remember when they used to fox hunt. Boats would come through St. Georges pulled by tugs and mules on the tow path. I could lay on the farm where we lived, on Mr. Lester's farm, and hear the people going through the locks at night with mules and boats, we could see 'em. Then in later years there was a day boat and a night boat. Two day boats come. One was Lord Baltimore and the other was William Penn. Then they used to have excursions from Philadelphia to ~~Norwood~~ Norwood Grove. One'd come from Philadelphia to take 'em to Norwood Grove and one'd come

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from Baltimore to pick 'em up and bring 'em back and take 'em to Philadelphia. But St. Georges used to be a nice little town, a lovely little town. And I stayed there until later years. When the first--got old enough to be a trustee, they put me on the school board there. Then I stayed on there until I come to Middletown and was here about three or four years, they put me on the school board there for one or two years. And then when they had elections, I wouldn't run. Then after they got to appointing them again, why I was put on the trustee board again and I stayed on there until they integrated.

Q Your grandson was just elected to the Middletown Town Council, wasn't that right, and what is his name?

A Howard Young. Oh, yes, Howard Young. He was elected not long ago. And he--not only that--he down there at Smyrna, I think it's Smyrna, Delaware, with the boys correction school down there. He's been with them for quite a while. And his wife, she worked at Beacon Health Center for a long while, then she come back and she was in the bank up here for about a year, then when she had an increase in the family, why she had to give it up. But then they took her on again, she's working in Wilmington at the Bank of Delaware in Wilmington.

Q How many children and grandchildren do you have?

A Now you're asking me a question, 'cause I can't keep up with 'em. Well, I don't know. But one boy has eight and another one, my granddaughter, she has six, and well, now I tell you, I'm wrong. Them's my grandchildren. Now my great grandchildren, I don't know--there's a host of 'em. I just couldn't tell you how many great grandchildren I've got.

Q What do you see as really big changes in people's lives. You said the young people seemed to make their own fun. Certainly their work was harder, and in terms of opportunities like buying cars, things of that kind, certainly there were problems, big problems, weren't there, in terms of economics.

A Yeah. Of course when I come along, we didn't have any way of gettin' around. Of course the first thing to have was a dog cart and a horse. And when it got the coming of the cars, why of course a few of them got cars here lately, then there were more. But I remember the first car ever come through. A man name of--he worked for--Davison, worked for DuPonts. I remember the first car come through one Sunday morning with--he come through town with many of the people starting out going to church. They couldn't get nobody in church until the car went through town. That was the first car I ever saw. It was one of them old rubber tire cars, like a bookend, but I seen quite a few of 'em in. . . . But of course I still say, I don't think that in a way that our young folks have as good a time as we did when I was coming along, simply because that we made our own pleasure. We didn't depend on somebody else to make it for us.

Q What were your pleasures? When you wanted to try to have a good time with friends. . . .

A Well, I tell you. We had house parties and we--the children would bring something; some would make cakes and some would make lemonade and bring candy and we'd go to a house, a whole crowd of us, and the parents would let us take up the carpet and let us have a little dance around there until a certain time of the night, and then we all got ready and put down the carpet and went home. Our parents knowed where we were at. They didn't have to be in the night worrying and feasing where you were at, what you were into. Nowadays if you go to bed, why you're wondering where your children are in 'til they're in. So I really believe at that time the parents felt much more safer and enjoyed their children more because they didn't have to wonder about 'em. So I don't know. I just tell you to my mind I think we had a better time than the children do today, 'cause somebody always has to spend a lot of money to give things to their children. Our parents didn't have it, so what few pennies we had, we enjoyed it, just as well--more so than they do today.

Q What is your wife's name, Ed?

A Her name is Annabelle Fields now--it was Annabelle White, but it's Annabelle Fields now. No, after I married her, I come down to Middletown and worked for Mr. Fred Brady for several years.

Q Where was your first house in Middletown?

A Well, my first house was right up here on Anderson Street. I can take a stone's throw from where I got married to where I live now. I lived with my mother-in-law for four or five years, then after I had a family, why the family next door moved out and I moved where the other family lived. Then when my mother-in-law died, I moved in there and I stayed in that house 'til these last few years, until we bought property down here. But I lived on this street the last sixty-some odd years.

Q What about some of the people you've known through the years? You've lived here for so long, all your life in Delaware, are there some people you especially want to talk about?

A Well, yes. When I was living in St. Georges there was a family name of Reynolds and a family name of--oh, I can't get all my families together right now. But St. Georges used to be a nice little town too. Now in the wintertime they used to do a lot of fox hunting. I'd see 'em fox hunting, they'd get a fox and turn him loose and let him run for a long then come down to the canal and he'd swim overboard and some of them would grab up a hound and throw one of them over--it used to be quite a sport. Then in that locks I saw one time bring a whale--took two barges to bring him through there. He was big enough to have a little dining room in his mouth. We used to go down there and look at that old big whale. So St. Georges used to be quite an attractive place.

Q Did they stuff the whale?

A Oh, yes, they had the furniture--they furnished his mouth with furniture same as a house. Yes indeedy. People come from everywhere to see that whale. It took two barges to hold him and there was quite an excitement. Then they used to fox hunt around there a lot. Then in the wintertime,

the big sport was--people from Chesapeake City, Summit Bridge, St. Georges and Delaware City, on that ice pond there they had taken--drive a great big pole down in the ice and let it freeze, and put some ropes on it for swings for the children to swing around over the sleds. And they'd sleigh on there with horses and sleighs. And then there'd be from two to three hundred people from everywhere skating on there. Of course I never learned to skate. I'd stand on the wharf and keep a great big fire for them to get warm by, but it certainly was [inaudible]. I was always afraid of the ice. Then that ice finally would be so thick when the people filled their ice houses, we'd go down there early in the mornings and cut up ice and haul ice to fill up people's ice houses.

Q What was that water--what was that where you were cutting the ice?

A Right in St. Georges on some of the ponds there. People used to fill ice houses--everybody them days had an ice house.

Q Did the canal ever freeze?

A Oh, yes. That canal would freeze over, lawze mercy. There wouldn't be no boats go through there sometimes 'til way into spring. They had to have tugs go ahead and cut the ice so the boats could get through there. Yes indeedy. Anytime that three or four hundred people can be on the ice and skating, that ice would be pretty thick.

Q Oh, you were talking about skating on the canal. I thought you were talking about in ponds. Well now have we had any--has the canal been really frozen over in recent years?

A No. We don't have as much freezin' as we did then; we don't have as much snows. 'Cause I saw a time when you could walk for I don't know how far on the ice--snow would be so deep that you had to take and cut little roads through there and people put lights on their wagons so that they could see one another. They just cut paths. No indeedy. No snow now like we had them days. No indeedy. Why you could go out over snowbanks, higher than the fence, big enough you could sled over.

Q When they cut the ice, how did they do that, and did every farm have to get its ice in? Did anybody try to corner the ice market? Did they all have plenty of ice to cut?

A Well, I'll tell you. The people around there had ice houses on the farm and they'd take and put boards down and make a float and they'd saw the ice in blocks. And then they'd have a horse to draw it to the hill and they cut 'em in blocks, and the wagons, lots of wagons would be down there. Sometimes they'd have bright lanterns on the wagons so they could see. Everybody was trying to get down to see who could get the first load of ice. No indeedy, that ice--sometimes a piece of ice would be--well, I don't know how many feet long they would be. And then they'd take 'em and bust 'em up in chunks. Now if it was cold, you could take the ice and handle it with your hand and load your wagon with your hands. But if it kind of warm, why you had to take a fork and load your ice wagon. But lawze, I saw a wagons after wagons--a wagon after wagon hauling ice. It was quite a sport; people enjoyed it, wanting to see who could get the

first load of ice. So it used to be quite an enjoyment.

Q When you cut it, what did you cut it with? How did you do it, and when you said you put the boards out on the ice and then you said the horse would draw it in, was that sort of a barge? How did people get out on the ice and how'd they get back?

A Oh, it was easy enough for 'em to get out on the ice. They'd take and saw it in--well, blocks. Oh, they'd saw a great long piece and then they'd have a thing like a hook to hook over it, and then have a rope on this hook and the horse would pull it ashore. And then when it come ashore, the people would take it in forks and bust it up in certain pieces.

Q Well, in other words the horse was on the shore. Oh.

A Oh, yeah. He would be on the shore. The horse would be on the shore. All our wagons and everything would be right along the shore. Oh no. People would go way out and saw ice, and just about [inaudible] like a big-sized cake, about like a door.

Q Did you ever hear about when they used to fish for eels with silk cloths--with a sparrow on the twig? Someone from Odessa was telling about that. Did almost everybody go fishing once a week, and talking about refrigeration, was the ice gone in the ice house by the time you went back to get the new batch?

Q When you filled the ice houses, why you'd take and put straw and stuff all in it, and then that's where the people--you see, people didn't have no cellars and places, no place to keep, so when you filled the ice house, you covered it over with straw, then you put your milk and cream and all that stuff down in there. Whatever you had. Them ice houses was for to put your stuff in, like your milk and stuff to keep it cold. They had no other way to keep it. And then you was talking about eels and that stuff. Well of course, when it comes to--an eel's the same as a snake, only eels are in the water. And you catch them with a hook and line just the same as you would a fish. One time we all went a fishin' with some fellows worked on Quarry's Track. And one fellow--and we pulled an eel out of there and that fellow liked to run his head off--he was scared of an eel same as a snake. But you were talking about--I want to tell you. You know Dr. McCoy's place, if that track was today, I don't know where the people would go. And he had a tractor there several years ago. He had to haul people in wagons and trucks hired a lot of wagons and trucks to haul the people from the train to that track. And he had--long been four and five thousand people there. It was the biggest race ever--he had a mile track.

Q Where was that? Was that for trotters?

A Oh yes. He had a regular race track, a mile track, in a circle, come right around, a kite-shaped track. Oh lawze, yes indeedy. There'd be hundreds and hundreds of horses there, oh yes. Now a lot of people don't know it, but Dr. McCoy has a mansion there that there ain't many mansions around like it. You can see the roof of that mansion for miles and miles when the sun is shining. It's one of the prettiest mansions--and I helped haul the sand

when he built that mansion--Dr. McCoy he used to live in New York; he was a doctor in New York.

Q Where is the McCoy house and does someone else live there now?

A Well, I don't know who lives there now. After Dr. McCoy died, his daughter and her husband, a family name of [sounds like Scanethacus] took that place and stayed there for years and years. Then Mr. Gafelson [sp]--now I don't know who lives there now. I haven't been up thataway for a long while.

Q That place is between St. Georges and Kirkwood and it has a tile roof over it? And did you help to build it?

A When they first built that place, I helped haul the sand and the bricks, and carted 'til it was built. And then after it was built and he got the track there, I used to always go over there and cut grass and stuff for them horses in there. I worked on that farm for him for years. He was a great man. Doc McCoy was just one great man. When he come home from New York, he wouldn't even go in and see his family 'til he went around and looked at all the horses. And then after he went down to the stable and looked at all the horses, then he'd go up and see his family. But he sure was a horse man.

Q Did Dr. McCoy have regular races? Was it, you know, like a season of races?

A Well, yes, Dr. McCoy had a regular race track. He kept horses--oh, he bought horses--people come from everywhere with their horses the whole year round. Then certain seasons--certain part of time his horses would go off other places and train but he had a regular track there. Oh he had four or five hundred head of horses there--brood mares and everything there, yeah.

Q Do you remember who some of the other men who kept horses around that same time--some of the other men around Middletown, St. Georges area.

A Well, of course outside of Dr. McCoy's place, here in Middletown a man named Biggs used to have horses. He used to come up there with 'em a certain time of the year when they had big races. Everybody brought horses, I remember there'd be horses from Kentucky and everywhere up there for them races. No, my lawze mercy. If that track was today and people had cars and buses and things, there would be no way of getting there to it, just be no way of gettin' near it; that's all there is to it. People wouldn't believe it. Well, I'll say this about St. Georges. Ain't many towns that are any more reliable and better than little St. Georges.

Q You're remembering St. Georges and some of the customs that you remember when you were young. What about the camp meetings and the special kind of celebration that went along with those?

A Well, we used to have--most every church pretty much would have a camp meeting. Now the place they call Zion--that's between St. Georges and Ft. Penn--they used to have a big woods camp meeting, then, further on down, but the largest camp meeting that I know right around would be Middletown, here. They would have a camp meeting here, oh, there'd be thousands and

thousands of people here. But people would come--before they had buses and things, people'd come over in trains Saturday night and then the conductor would come up--some of 'em would come up to the station and tell 'em what time the trains would be going out so they could go and be ready to get down at the station. But we used to have pretty big meetings here, and things like that.

Q What would the meeting be like? What happened?

A Well, they would have services. Some places would have tables to feed the people and things like that. But when I first come here there wasn't no electric here. They had to take and have big torch lights on the posts for people to see. But . . . after a while they got electric here, but you'd be surprised what a change it was in these last few years. But camp meetings kind of died out now 'cause they don't have that anymore.

Q Did the people come by buses? What kind of food did they have, and what kind of preaching?

A Oh, now you talk about service; they had service them days. Well, first, they used to come by train first. Then after a while, lately, they used to come--people out around would come in in wagons and things. Then lately they got hiring buses and things like that.

Q Where was the site of the camp meeting? Where did they hold it when it was in Middletown?

A On Locker Street. Well, as far as, you're talking about eating, they had everything for you to eat. You didn't have to go away hungry. You had plenty for to eat. But there used to be quite a crowd, quite a crowd of people come here.

Q The date for the camp meeting, it was the third Sunday in July, was that it, and when was the August quarterly meeting in Wilmington?

A The camp meeting here in Middletown was always the second and third Sunday in July. The August quarterly meeting was always the fourth Sunday in August. Of course this was quite a large affair too. We filed in thousands of people there.

Q Was that just Delaware for the quarterly or was it just one particular kind of church? Was it a lot of black churches meeting together or was it just Delaware--what was it?

A It was the Delaware church. [Tape stops here, picks up in mid-sentence as follows] . . . church at 6th and French.

Q Did you and your wife try to get to the quarterly every year, much as you could, and did you get to the camp meeting?

A Far as going to the quarterly meeting, my wife go--I worked in Wilmington, I hardly ever went there. I worked at the court house for about seven years. She'd be going and I'd be coming home. So I didn't bother much about it.

Q What about early days?

A Well, I never went up there much no way, 'cause I'd be on this end. Course after we had children, I'd let her go up there sometime. I'd go up there, but not very much. Later years when the quarterly meetings she'd go up-- why I was working at the court house for seven years and I'd be coming home and she'd be going.

Q You did a lot of cooking, Ed, during your long life of working experience. Do you have any ideas on contrasting the food we eat today with the kind of food you were used to then?

A Well, when it comes to talking about food today and of yesterday, why there's quite a difference. When we was coming along the people raised their own vegetables and they canned their own tomatoes and put up their own apples sauce and stuff like that and killed their hogs, they'd have their own spare-ribs and sirloin and when they want some good meat, they'd go down and bring up a ham and cut a couple of nice big slices out of it and they'd have-- there's quite a difference in food today and was a few years ago. So you can't comparison today with them 'cause there's quite a difference. And if you wanted a good meal, you'd have nice sausage and nice cake, corn cakes in the morning for breakfast and nice syrup, so we had quite a meal. There's quite a lot of difference with food today and with then. Go out and get your own asparagus and beans and stuff so there's quite a difference. Everything today you get out of the store, it ain't like it was then when you growed it yourself. So it's quite a difference.

Q What about people keeping oysters in the cellar, for instance.

You just said they'd go down in the cellar to get a ham. Did you hear about people keeping oysters in the cellar over the winter?

A Well, no, not so much about oysters. Those things--you have to be very particular with things like that. But far as fish and things like that, they used to get great big shad and all those things, pike fish, but not much about oysters. The fun of it was though one time I went with a Rotary Club to a party they had and they had me to open some oysters and I was hammerin' on an oyster and a man named Mr. Shellcross said, "Ed, let me show you how to open oysters." Finally I had to [sounds like "fed 'em"]; they'd been all day getting three or four oysters. So he showed me how to open the oysters.

Q Which Shellcross was that?

A Mr. James Shellcross.

Q Where was the Rotary Club party? Where did they have their parties?

A Place they call over there by Churchtown, Mr. John Spicer, who is an undertaker up there in Wilmington there had a cottage down there and he used to always take me with him all the time on Saturday evenings and over Sunday. And on Saturday the Rotary Club would come down there to have a party. And I used to cook and stay there with 'em. Of course I did a whole lot of cooking around here. Even we used to go with the Boy Scouts around with

them. I've been practically everywhere as far as around here cookin' and carryin' on. I've had quite a time of it cookin'.

Q Someone was saying that in Middletown, in the early 1900's, the gypsies came and camped. Can you remember about that?

A No, not right around here they didn't. Course in these late years they haven't been here so much, but I guess they were for a while. No, talkin' about gypsies one time, I was tellin' about the gypsies, between St. Georges and Kirkwood one time there used to be a couple or three hundred of gypsies out there trading horses. If you had a good horse, you better know what you was doin' when you was a tradin' or they'd get the advantage of you. 'Cause if they had a horse and he had the heaves, they could stop them heaves long enough to get you swapped with 'em. But they used to be--of lawze mercy--a lot of them around. But we don't see very few of them. Well, once in a while, they'll come around here in the summer sellin' chairs and stuff they make. Some of 'em brought some chairs for--some of 'em had made. But we don't see so many of 'em any more.

Q You were a trustee of the Middletown School. Can you remember when you first went on the school board and when you stopped and some of the changes.

A Well, I don't know what year, the first year I was. I was here in Middletown about three years before one of the trustees resigned and I filled out his vacancy and I was on there about a couple or three years. Then they got to electin' trustees or having elections for 'em, and I didn't run for election. But of course then the man who did come up, he only beat me by one vote and I stayed at work. But then after they stopped having elections and the judge appointed 'em again, I was appointed on the trustee board again and I stayed on there until they integrated, and that's been quite a good many years. But I was on there--been on the trustee board close to 40 years or more. Then not only that, when I was in St. Georges, I was on the trustee board there. Then you had to raise \$50 and the state would give you their amount which wouldn't be but about \$150, a couple hundred dollars, for a teacher, but you had to raise your \$50 and go meet the auditor. Well, you had to have every penny to the minute when you met him. And he stayed at Kirkwood and you'd go out there and meet him, and if you didn't have that \$50 raised, you wouldn't get the teacher's salary. But teachers now get a right fair sum to what they did when I first was on the trustee board. 'Cause I know when a trustee--when the state didn't give the teachers over \$300 for a whole year.

Q About when would that have been that a teacher would get about \$300?

A Well, I just can go back to how long--that's been several years ago, 'cause I was a right young man then on the trustee board. Of course at my age now, 96 years, why that's been a good many years. 'Cause I've been in Middletown close to sixty-some odd years and it was several years before I come here at Middletown.

Q Was that just to hire one teacher in the St. Georges school?

A Yes, they only had one teacher. Of course then--when I first got going to

school, why they didn't have no janitors or nothing, and the ones right in around close, they'd make the fire one morning and someone would make it the next morning. And they'd go there, and those who were away, why we'd set up there and get ourselves warm, then we'd move back and let the next some of 'em get warm. But that was all. They only had the one teacher, that was all. But they had schools in different places. Now they used to have schools in St. Georges, Delaware City, McDonough, and every town pretty much had a school. Now of course they all go to one school pretty much, different schools.

Q You've always been interested in gardening, haven't you, Ed?

A Yes. I love gardening. In fact [inaudible] where we're at, we used to grow all our vegetables and stuff, tomatoes and corn. And for a while, when they allowed you to raise your hogs, I used to raise my own hogs, but after the town got so it growed so, why they wouldn't let you grow hogs or chickens or anything like that. In fact now we haven't got anyplace for a garden because people are building so around, and we just don't have anyplace for anything, practically, now.

Q What was it like in the morning when you had to get up and fix the fire and you had to fix the coal oil lamps and how did people do their washing then? And of course, what about, after all, outhouses?

A Well, years ago people had wood fires, they'd get up and make wood fires, and people used to use tubs and washboards. And they'd have a great big barrel to set under rain spouts and catch a lot of rain water. It was more purified and clear than the other. But folks in generally--we didn't have much coal. When I was a boy, it was hard for a man to get coal, 'cause there wasn't no way of gettin' it. You'd go out and get plenty of wood and have wood fires, but we didn't burn much coal. Father, I remember-- I often thought about it, when girls would have boyfriends and we all--you couldn't stay in the house, a girl couldn't stay in the house and not go to church. They'd send all the girls and their boyfriends ahead then they'd scuffle down behind them. Go to church with 'em and when they'd go home, he'd go downstairs and after he got his clothes changed and put a little wood in the stove, heat up the house a little bit, then the girls would know when he put the last stick of wood in the stove so they'd give the boys their coats and they'd get ready to go. Nowadays it's quite a different life. Yes indeedy.

Q About how much wood would you have to use to keep a couple of rooms warm during a day. Didn't you have to keep a really big supply going?

A Well, at that time the people used to have--they used to cut the trees down and use the trees for rafters. And you could get all the wood you wanted for 50¢ a load or you could take a couple or three dollars and you could get four big loads of wood and all you'd have to do was keep you at the woodpile cuttin', but you had plenty of wood. You'd never be without wood, but the coal would be our biggest problem. In fact you didn't have the money to buy it 'cause pea coal [sp] would be \$1.50, nut coal \$3.00 a ton, but you didn't have--we wasn't makin' much money to buy coal so people would buy and burn plenty of wood. But we always kept good and warm.

- Q What was the worse time that you can think about? Did the Depression hurt you very much as a black person working on farms and for people in houses? Did you feel it very hard?
- A No. During the Depression I got along about as good as most--in fact if anything else, I worked right along. People here in town that had jobs, they'd give me a little something to do. So I never did suffer for nothing during the Depression. They didn't have to give me and my children anything at all. Of course farmer folks who I used to work for named Mr. Brady, you know, they used to give my children plenty of clothes so they had plenty of clothes and kept warm. So as far as we being in need for anything, I didn't need anything at all.
- Q Do you think that perhaps people sometime today are used to wanting to many things? Do you think they're in a bind because they're used to getting too many things?
- A Well, let me tell you. One time--me and the minister used to sit down and talk, and I'll never forget as long as I live, we was getting ready to have a rally at the church and I said, "I'll give as much as any of the rest of 'em." And he waited 'til all the folks got out. He said, "Ed, let me tell you something." He said, "Don't you say that," he says, "simply because some people were better able to give. So some people may not have the same responsibilities as you." So I think sometimes that that's the trouble with us. We'll go out and see somebody's child have on something and they may not have but one or two and we have four or five and we try to get our children just what the rest of 'em [have], so it just keeps us under a strain. So I think give 'em just what they need, so they look nice and respectable, not try to dress 'em like somebody else, 'cause somebody else are more able to support their children and don't have as much responsibilities. So I think sometime we make a great big mistake.
- Q Do you see anything very good about today--things that are happening today.
- A Well, I think today the people got more future or life ahead of 'em than they had years ago. But if they just take advantage of 'em and do the right thing, and get theirselves qualified for it, they got an opening for a good job if they just do the right thing and try to treat their fellow man as they wish to be treated by. I always believe in treating people right. I don't believe in misusing people and treatin' 'em wrong, even a child. Here in town, I guess I'm every child's grandpop when they come by--every child here calls me grandpop.
- Q Ed, you were saying that the children up and down the street that don't even know you call you grandpa, and I noticed that when we were driving in that there's a street named for you here.
- A Yes. They named a street after me, Fields's Terrace, and one of my granddaughters lives right on our street so anytime they hunt for her, they all say, "Where's she live on Fields's Terrace?" So the town did name a street after me, so I appreciated that very much.
- A Did that happen at the time you resigned from the school board?

- A Well, yes. When they was building the school out there, Redding School, I was president of the trustee board and there was a president of the building commission. And then later when they got the street comin' through there, then some of them put in a petition that the street should be named after me. So the town granted the name.
- Q Before we finish, Ed, can you remember some other events of the times that would be different. For example, did they race on Main Street with horse and sleigh in Middletown the way we've heard?
- A Oh, yes. Years ago people used to race up and down the streets here in Middletown. Then not only in Middletown, St. Georges and lots of places. If you had a good horse, you could have quite a race, 'cause the roads would be nice and full of snow and leveled off, and there was quite a race along there. People used to have some pretty good horses. They enjoyed it. Of course in these last years, we don't have any snow much and people--in fact there's so many automobiles it would be kind of dangerous for 'em to do so. But that used to be quite a sport, sleighs and racing, years ago. Well, in fact in St. Georges when I was--it was my home where I was born and raised--it used to be a pretty good sport. And I don't care what you say, people enjoyed sports. 'Cause wintertime it was fox hunting and summertime it'd be swimming and all those things. So it used to be quite a lot.
- Q Were you going to say something about the St. Georges bridges that you remember?
- A Well, let me tell you. The first bridge that I saw was in St. Georges. It used to be a bridge you turned off by hand. You turned the bridge off then there'd be a big wicket, oh, four or five foot wide, maybe more, then the boats come from Chesapeake City, going to Delaware City, they'd lower it, then when the boats got in there, before they went out, they'd lower it again, and the boats would be so far down you couldn't see 'em--barges. Then later they built another one. But it went up and the boats went under it. It collapsed and one or two fellows got killed by it. But that's all--this bridge there now is the third bridge that's been up there since I can remember. It's quite different up there. One time they was loading a horse on a day boat, getting ready to take him to Delaware City. Well, it got filled up. It got one horse on and they was putting the other one on and he wouldn't go on. And he fell down in the water between the boat and the bridge. And they had to take him and swim him clear around the water and bring him back and back him on the boat, 'cause they couldn't lead him on there. But that was the greatest excitement I ever saw with a horse. puttin' it on the boat. But he fell right down in--but they got him out. Now nobody might believe it, but a horse can swim a long while as long as you hold his head up.

[END OF INTERVIEW]