



## **Citation for this collection:**

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

## **Contact:**

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library  
181 South College Avenue  
Newark, DE 19717-5267  
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)  
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec>  
[askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu](mailto:askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu)

## **Terms governing use and reproduction:**

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. [askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu](mailto:askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu)

## **A note about transcriptions:**

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. [askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu](mailto:askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu)

# Dr. James E. Marvil

[00:00:00]

Interviewer: This is an interview with Dr. James E. Marvil ophthalmologist of Louis. A graduate of the University of Delaware, 1926. Dr. Marvil is a very important part of the Louis Historical society; he's a collector and writer of stories of ships, building of ships, ship [inaudible] [0:00:29]. Dr. Marvil when you are talking about the Louis Historical Society incorporated in 1961 how would you characterize it now in terms of its healthy state and it's project state?

Dr. Marvil: When the Louis Historical Society was first formed in 1961 we had about 25 people who decided to form the society and at that time we had one house, the Burt Ingram House which has been given to us. We have gradually accumulated other houses until now we have a total of around 12 different buildings and projects.

We have a total at present of just a few less than 500 members in the society. We have many educational, affairs we have craft demonstrations, we have lectures by competent authorities such as the winter tour guide program which is given in our society every spring. We have monthly meetings, we have dinners, we have light ship parties. We have many other things which contribute to the culture and education of the area.

Interviewer: On the roster of the historical society do we find old Sussex names, Louis names? For example the Lia Burton Painter bequest which the historical society lists as having made possible in 1968, the completion of the Ingram Burton house restoration. What are the people involved here? The complexion of people as Sussex countians?

Dr. Marvil: Many of our members and officers and active workers are native Delawareans, many from Louis. We also have many very interested people from out of the state of Delaware. Mrs. Lia Burton Painter who made the painter bequest in 1968 was the daughter of Dr. Hamrod Burton who lived next door to the Burton Ingram house.

Mrs. Painter left us some money to finish the Burton Ingram house put on the addition to replace the one that was burnt in 1922 and she also left a large quantity of very fine early Delaware furniture which had belonged to her ancestors and to her husband's ancestor.

Her husband was Dr. Roland Painter of Georgetown who was a grandson of Governor Samuel Painter who was the Governor of Delaware in the 1820s. On her mother's side of the family, Mrs. Painter was descendent from the Rodney's from Ruth Rodney was the daughter of Thomas Rodney who was important in the war of 1812. He died in 1820, he's not to be confused with the Thomas Rodney of Kent County.

However he was very important and had some very fine furniture which is now in the Burton Ingram house. It had possibly been left to him by his father, John Rodney. Thomas Rodney was a brother of Caleb and Daniel Rodney who were governors of Delaware during the early 1800s.

Dr. Painter's most important piece of furniture is a quinine walnut table in the living room. And there are many other very important things descendant from that family. There is a very fine snuff box belonging to Caleb Ross, who was the father of Governor William Ross. There's also a punch little belonging to one off the Cowlicks. Phillip Cowlick was an early registrar of Ds at the courthouse in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**[00:05:52]**

Interviewer: What about John Leech and his furniture collection? How did he happen to leave that to the historical society?

Dr. Marvil: The Leech's had a summer place in Louis on Louis Beach for several years. About 10 years ago they decided to sell the property here and move back to Wilmington and because of their close friendship with some of our members of the society they decided to leave several of their fine possessions which they had accumulated over the years.

Probably the most outstanding off the things which they left would be three Cornelius oil lamps which have marble bases, brass columns and beautiful prisms all the way around the base of the shades.

There is a Chinese, either 18<sup>th</sup> century or early 19<sup>th</sup> century screen which is also very handsome in the dining room. In our cannonball house the Leeches made a donation to us of a Spanish money chest which is made of hand wrought steel. This has been authenticated by representative of the Metropolitan Museum in New York as being a chest from the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and is reported to have been used in the Spanish Hamada. It is a very heavy piece and rests on beautifully carved wooden feed.

He Leeches also gave a pair of William and Mary reproduction side chairs and several impart chairs which are reported to have been descendant from members of the George Washington family.

Interviewer: When a visitor visits the historical area in Louis what seems to occur is the idea that everything was moved, that moving day down here might mean just moving your whole house with you. And a good question might be what would be the cost over a period of time. Or what would be an average cost in the 60's to move a house?

Dr. Marvil: The houses which have been saved by having to move our properties were the only specimens of their type available to us and because of that we thought since they were outstanding examples of the period that they should be saved. The cost of moving the houses depend a great deal on the size, the distance they have to be moved and how many utility wires have to disturbed in order to move the houses.

In the case of the Burton Ingram House which was the first of ours which had to be moved about two blocks, the cost for that for moving and restoring the foundation was in the neighborhood of \$6000. The Blacks mans shop which was moved about three blocks since it's a low tight building and utility wires did not have to be disturbed it was moved for less than \$500.

**[00:10:18]**

The country store from Thompsons Crossroads up above Milfried was moved here for a cost of less than \$1000. The Rabbits Fair House was moved from about 7 miles in the country, it was moved intact with the throat of the chimney, the brick noggins between the walls was brought when it was moved. The total cost for moving it plus the foundation was approximately \$6000.

The first officers and workers of our society were Mrs. Ruth Chamber Stuart has been one of our guiding spirits during our entire life as an organization. Mrs. Stuart's sister, Miss Sarah Chambers was very active when we first organized we were short of funds to do any work. Because of this about 15 or 20 of us decided to sign personal notes at a bank to get some working money for working capital and to restore the Burton Ingram house which was the first property offered us.

It was to be bulldozed to make way for a so called modern type store and the owner of the Burton Ingram house had offered to donate it to our groups with \$400 in cash to help start the ball rolling.

The rest of the money we obtained from a bank loan which we signed individually but it was never necessary for us to pay the amounts due on the bank loans after several years they were given back to us when the society had enough assets to stand on its own feet. We borrowed whenever necessary to buy more property when the cannonball house became available we bought it for \$16,000 and borrowed the total amount at the bank with no problem.

There were several other people who were very active in getting started, at that time we had painting parties, brick cleaning parties, brick laying parties, and many other forms of work which we could do on Saturday afternoons and sometimes other occasions. Later we were able to get this work done by mechanics.

The second project was the country store which was to be raised and we were able to buy that building for \$1 and pay for having it moved, after that the Blacksmith's shop was given to us. It had been used as a garage although it was first built and used as a residence on Chester Street, about two blocks away from the Burton Ingram complex.

The next house offered was the old plank house which was on Palatan Road in the back of a residence. It was about 200 feet away from where it now stands, the property was to be sold and the owners Captain James Richard and Captain George Hubert Orton Junior, brothers who are pilots of the Bay and River Group were members of our society and offered this to historical society if we would move it and restore it. It has been thought to be probably one of the earliest Louis buildings and no authority thus fore has been able to fix the exact date that it was built. Because the Swedish type of construction lends itself to setting a period anywhere from late 1600 to early 1800s.

**[00:15:27]**

The Rabbit Fair house was next, it was at a location called Rabbits Fairy about 6 miles to 8 miles away from Louis and the direction of Millsboro and one of our members, Franklin Pierce who was a director found that a local fire company had been asked to burn this building. We contacted the owner and he said that he changed his mind and decided that since we wanted to buy it he would sell it to us for \$150. We purchased that and moved it here.

After that we bought the cannonball House and after restoring it we decided to use it for a Marine museum which it is still being used as.

Actually our marine collection has outgrown the house, we need a larger building now to house it. In 1976 Mrs. Ruth Stewart is executive vice president and is of great help to our organization because of her knowledge of Louis and Louis history. Webby Cacam Jr. is a patent attorney from Washington DC who has a summer home at Rehoboth, he is very interested in our society and he's one of the vice presidents.

His title also is chairman of all of our society museums. He's basically interested on article things and three years ago arranged for us to be given the lightship over falls which had been named the Boston lightship and several other places which the lightship served.

He has in the last week or two arranged with a government agency to have our society be given two large copper plates which were used to make nautical maps of approximately 1850. Our society will receive two of these copper plates which we will display and also two paper charts which have been made from them.

Captain Efferyin Walls also a vice president has been chairman of our Burton Ingram complex which includes Burton Ingram house, the rabbit's fairy house, the log cabin and the old dairy or milk house which is in the back of the rabbit's fairy house.

Captain Walls is a Bay and River pilot and he's very good at decorating Burton Ingram house and our other buildings. Mrs. Gramon Carey has been recording secretary for several years and she is very capable about taking notes, minutes and is generally helpful in many ways.

Kenneth Doe is a former corresponding secretary. He's now in charge of our projects which include mainly Delaware Arts Council projects. These provide square dances, craft demonstrations, and many other entertaining types of presentations which are given during the summer months.

Mrs. Eagle McIntyre is treasurer and has been very helpful in many ways doing this type of work. Mrs. Harry Clarkborden the IV of North Delaware is one of our trustees and was donor of funds to start and maintain our guide program for the first several years which we had in the summer. Professor C.A. Bonine was one of our charter members and was the guiding force in excavating the location of the 1631 Dutch Fort. Which was established by the Debris in 1621.

[00:20:57]

Edmond H. Harvey, president of Delaware Lands Incorporated has been very helpful about plantings and that type of work for our society. Mrs. William D. Collins is a former treasurer and is also very knowledgeable about Louis. Charles S. Horn Junior, he's now deceased. He was an expert on Louis and Rehoboth history.

Miss Connie Hurdle has been treasurer of our country store committee since its inception. Henry P. Marshall is probably the town authority on early Louis history. Captain G. Hebert Horton is chairman of our lightship over falls and he's a retired Bay and River pilot.

Morris Revnes the former Hollywood producer settled in Louis four or five years ago and has been very helpful in being chairman of our annual dance which our society has held annually and with the money. 3,000 or \$4,000 raised from this event the money has been very helpful in maintaining our properties.

Mrs. Donald Sherow is now our country store chairman. Professor Ward Tensor has taken over the chairmanship of the 1631 Fort site and has been responsible for putting up Dire Ramah with an explanatory Bill Borden decided down at the site of the 1631 fort. Fredrick P. Whitney is an attorney who has been very helpful in taking care of all legal matters which we have asked him to do.

In considering the future of our society, the future has to be keen with the so called progress of the area at this moment. The mayor and councilor are trying very hard to interest the oil industry representatives to locate in Louis. Most of our good thinking people would object to this very strangiously but we have been told that if an oil company does locate in Louis it will only be for helicopter pads and boat docks. Officers perhaps on shore they tell us that this will not be the site of a refinery or tanks to hold the oil. We hope that that is true.

The University of Delaware's Marine college is in its first stages and is scheduled to expand greatly in the next few years, we think that is a type of progress which would be beneficial to Louis it would bring the proper type of people who would appreciate the architecture which is still left in Louis and that in the future buildings will be erected that would blend with the ones which are here now.

**[00:25:22]**

We are education oriented and try in every way possible to teach the best of the past for the future and we are very pleased that we are

getting younger people in our group each year to help take the place of older ones who have to drop out because of age and health.

The pilots are probably the best known group of Louis residents they have been in Louis since the earliest times the first pilots are supposed to have been the Indians who taught the white man how to avoid the shores in Delaware bays. The first white man to come in Delaware Bay that we know about was Henry Hudson who spent the night here in 1609. He sailed out the next day for what is now New York and is possible that the reason he did not terry in the Delaware bay is because of the shallow areas which he did not know how to avoid since he had no pilot with him at that time.

Pilots have been very necessary and before the days of Boise and modern aged navigation mini ships went on ground or landed on shawls. Many of the shawls in Delaware Bay were named for people such as Myer Mall. At present there are six lighthouses in the Delaware Bay the first one is the harbor refuge light on the outer break water which was completed about 1900. And about ten miles up the bay is Brandy Wine Light which is built on Brandy Wine Shawl. The deep water channel runs approximately a mile west of Brandy Wine Lighthouse. The next lighthouse is 14 foot Bank lighthouse which is five miles above Brandy Wine, it is on the west side of the channel.

The next one is Mayer Mall which was named for Niha Mayer Mall, the Mall family is still well known in Louis, the story is that Niha Mayer Mall's ship grounded on this shawl and after that the shawl was called Mayer Malls and the lighthouse is still there bearing Mayer Mall's name.

The next one North is elbow cross ledge which was struck by a ship a few years ago and the house was knocked down leaving only the base coast guard erected at tower which bears a light at present.

The last lighthouse is Ship John which is opposite Smaner and apparently a ship named John came to grief on the shawl which bears the name ship John. Another shawl in Delaware Bay is called Joe Flogger Shawl the story is that Joe Flogger lost his ship on the shawl, probably his life.

The pilots are about 95 or 96 in number in 1976, they are a very tightly knit group, they work hard when they work and they frequently do not get home for two or three days at a time then they will have enough time off to be sufficiently rested for the next ship. The pilots have a large mother ship called the Pilot Booth Philadelphia which was stationed outside the breakwater and cruised around where necessary until 1975



when the crew members of the ship struck for more wages and better conditions et cetera.

**[00:30:20]**

The strike is still going on and the pilots are taking care of the chores of running the small motor launches which vary in size from 50 feet to 65 feet. This ship takes the pilots out to the ships beyond the breakwater and the deep water and also pick up the pilots coming down from Philadelphia and Wilmington and take them ashore.

The old pilot booth Philadelphia is now tied up at a dock and is used as a floating hotel for the members of the pilot association. Pilots have the latest electronic types of communication they all have walkie-talkie telephones and they can communicate with all of the pilots who are on the Bay and River Delaware.

This is especially important since in time of fog each pilot can tell the other exactly where he is and in case of any possible collision it's possible for them to take the necessary safeguards. However there are other pilots called muddies referring to mud bank pilots. These men are very capable retired merchant ship officers who work for ship owners who do not wish to engage the regular pilots.

They are taken up by Captain David Harpman who has ranger one and ranger two. In a small way he performs the same function as the pilots association of Bay and River Delaware. Captain Harpman also has radar but as far as I know he does not have verbal communication by walkie-talkie to talk to all the pilots.

Louis was a ship building town in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and 19<sup>th</sup> century but because of the shallow water in the canal of Louis and Broad kill River, large ships were not built in Louis. Two mastered schooner were the largest that I have been able to find records off. However upstream from Louis about eight or ten miles up to broad kill the little town of Milton still stands and is being now discovered by tourists and by people who wish to restore nice little houses.

Milton was a home of at last 250s large sea gulling ships which were built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many three mastered and a few four mastered ships were built. A captain Clark Conwell a former navy of Milton has written a book called Ships and Men of the broad kill about 10 years ago. It was out of print by the time it was released. Only 100 copies were done and Captain Cornwell who now lives in Corte Madera,

California is threatening to put out another addition. I've run out of words, he only put out 100.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Dr. Marvil: I've been asked to talk about the books which I have compiled, the first one is Sailing Rams which is a history of sailing ships built in Sussex county. Mostly in the 1800s, these ships were built on the [inaudible] [0:35:09] River and branches such as Broad Creek. Broad Creek is at Bethel, Delaware which is halfway between Loral and Seaford and contain the shipyard which was first started by my grandfather Jonathon Moore in the 1850s.

**[00:35:34]**

His son John M. Clayton Moore, my grandfather, was a former school teacher who decided to build ships and invented a special type three mastered schooner which could get through the locks of the Chesapeake Delaware canal. These locks were less than 25feet of clearance and the ships had to be narrower than 25 feet.

In that way they could go through the canal either to the Chesapeake Bay or to the Delaware Bay. About 36 of the rams were built at Bethel and they were built of Delaware Oak and when the Delaware Pine in the right sizes had disappeared then shiploads of North Carolina Pine was brought to finish these ships.

The masts were shipped in either by sailing ship or by rail from Oregon. They were 100 feet long and many of these masts are still in good condition. There is only one of the Bethel ships left to float that is the Victory Chimes which was built as the Ebanon Mon in 1900. This ship is at Rockland, Maine owned by Captain Fredrick B. Guild and he has renamed her as the Victory Chimes. I have asked Captain Guild why he didn't like the name of Ebanon Mon and he said that that name sound too much like the name of a pair of mules.

Captain Guild takes out tourists all week in the summer, June, July and August and leaves Rockland Main on Monday mornings and returns on Saturdays. He goes with the wind depending on the weather for that day. Mrs. Moore and I spent a week on the ship last year and found it a very pleasant way to get away from televisions, telephones and motor noises. Sailing was very pleasant on this ship.

Ships were, ships built at Bethelware good sailors and they held up well as long as they were given proper care. In most cases after motor tracks and railroads took the business away from the sailing ships then a few captains tried to keep them going and as long as they did get a minimum of care they were able to make a little bit of money.

The last ship was the Janet D. Bell sailed by Captain Charles Heath of Salisbury who sailed the Janet D. Bell until about 1960 when poor health forced him to give up the ship. In addition to the ships that were built there is a section devoted to the men who built the ships, how they built them, what order also the instruments that they used in sailing and navigating and the men who sailed ships built in other sections. About 1900 many of the Bethel captains bought four mastered sailing ships which were built in Maine, most of them were built in Bath Maine.

Many paintings of these ships still remain paintings that were done by Antonio Jacobson a famous marine artist. Paintings that Jacobson charged \$10 for now are bringing 5000, \$6000 at marine auctions, auctions of marine art. Well I can get that, I'll get one in just a minute.

**[00:40:38]**

Interviewer: Well just talk about what.

Dr. Marvil: Stop this for a second. In 1965 I was able to get published a book called Pilots of the Bay and River Delaware which was made up of material that I had collected over the past many maybe 10 or 15 years from conversations with pilots. Photographs of things that were still here at the time and also everything that I could collect. Which had to do with the early pilot schooners and going up through the period of steam which started in 1896 when all the pilot schooners were retired.

Before 1896 there were about seven or eight wooden pilot schooners. The name of one of the most important one was EBW Tunnel, The Thomas [inaudible] [0:41:54] Thomas Howard and several others. These ships were 80 to 85 feet in length and 20 to 25 feet in beam. They were eight and a half feet usually in depth.

Most of these ships were built either in Philadelphia or in New York. And in 1896 the pilots who had been competing fiercely with each other for the business of guiding the ships coming into Louis up the Delaware Bay and River to Wilmington Philadelphia and now as far as Morrisville, New Jersey where the steel refinery is, formerly had gone as far as 300 miles

at sea looking for ships to bring in and sometimes two pilot schooners would arrive at the same moment and the custom was the pilot who was able to put his feet down on deck first would get the job of bringing the ship in.

In 1896 they all joined forces and commissioned the building in Philadelphia, of the first pilot Philadelphia which they were only able to keep for a short time. This ship was 165 feet long and for the time was the last word in a safe pleasant pilot boat.

The United States government commandeered this ship at the time the Spanish American war and the pilots were forced to have another ship built. They had a duplicate of the first Philadelphia build they renamed the second one Philadelphia and used it until 1945. After 1945 they scrapped the power built Philadelphia and bought from the United States government the former Ice breaker.

The Mohawk, which has very heavily built steel plates and steel framing. This ship has been de-sliced in the early 1960s and is now tied up at the dock as I mentioned formerly because of the strike. The pilots have purchased a lease or an option to buy land near the present ferry docks and plan to be shore based. They expect to have docks for the small pilot launches and to dispose of the pilot booth Philadelphia which is being considered as a replacement for the Biltmore pilots who are interested in negotiating a purchase with the Delaware Bay and River pilots association for this ship.

**[00:45:40]**

The ship is made up of photographs taken by the write up with creeps for the pilots. Many of the things that the pilots took with them the foul weather gears since open bridges was accustomed till 20 or 30 years ago. The knack of piloting ships and also an anchoring ships special arrangements or special knowledge needed to do this properly and the pilots know more about that than anyone else.

When the ship approaches a dock they do not do the docking themselves they have a docking captain come aboard who takes over and gets the ship at the dock safely. The pilots are required to have a state license and the new ones are not very fancy but the ones in the early 1900s and 1800s had a picture of Capen Lopen Lighthouse and it shows on its top a chimney where the smoke can come out from the stove. These chimneys in the shape of a man's head which has a weather vane on top.

The specifications for the Capen Lopen Lighthouse which was built in 1960s call for a weather vane of this description. The pilots indentured still use the almost Elizabethan Language that the apprentices are indentured to another pilot and that the senior pilot would be responsible for his education. He said upon his death and covenant and promise he will serve his master faithfully, keep his secrets and obey his lawful commands. That he will not absent himself day or night from his master's service without his leave nor [inaudible] [0:48:30] nor playhouses. But in all things behave faithful apprentice should do during his term. The period of apprenticeship is three years.

I have been asked why I am interested in things having to do with ships. My earliest recollections are of spending summers, when I was a small child with my grandparents at my grandfather's house next to the Bethel Shipyard and I was always interested in seeing how the ships were built and I was on the ships, several of them when they were launched.

I have always been interested in having a boat of my own. I've had sailboats and motorboats and always enjoy a trip on the sea or being around the sea. My two maternal great grandfathers were sea captains. I had an uncle who was a sea captain, grandfather who was a ship builder and my one great grandfather was a sea captain and another was also a sea captain.

**[00:50:03]**

**End of Audio**