

Interview with Mr. Michael Haldas, Greek immigrant and Wilmington businessman, April 1968 by Irene Long.

Q Daddy, where were you born?

A In Kefallinia, Greece.

Q Greece. Is that a large area? Were you born in a smaller town?

A No, it's a large area there . . . the island itself is a large area; it consists of 80,000 population and oh, I don't know how many square miles.

Q But it's a larger island than the ones that are in the . . .

A They're larger than the [sounds like "Tanusus"], that's the seven islands that consists the Ionian Islands, they call it. And that's one of the largest. Zante is across of it, and then the Corfu and Ithaca . . .

Q Oh, is Corfu in one of those?

A Yeah, Ithaca, both ways the [inaudible] . . . and that's right across from Kefallinia.

Q What small village were you . . . what was the name of the small village you were born in?

A The name of the village is Colavalariano [sp] but it consists of ten villages, it's in a place in a swoop of a mountain . . .

Q Oh, in a valley, like.

A Yeah, in a valley, like, with the sea on one side and the mountain Ainos on the other side. And it's really the most beautiful valley . . . Asquith, the Prime Minister of England happened to visit over there and he stopped in [inaudible] . . . he says, "With no doubt,"-- he was up on a hill when he say this, that was the most beautiful spot in the world that he ever visit.

Q Then you were born right on the coast. Could you see the sea from your village?

A No, because it was very low.

Q Oh, you were below sea level.

A Yeah, below sea level. And we . . . when we were kids, why we took about an hour every morning to go swimming in the Ionian Sea, that's between Zante and Kefallinia, it's a place . . .

Q Um hmm. What year were you born?

A 1900.

Q 1900. Did you go to school in Greece?

A Oh, yes.

Q How long?

A I went to [inaudible] . . . days that I went to school, we had a wonderful school. We have schools mostly like they are here now, with the teachers . . . and the schools that I went to, it was newly built. Oh, it was mostly like the P. S. DuPont is now.

Q Was it a large school?

A A large school, with, oh, I'd say about six rooms in it, six teaching rooms with the walls around it and the playground all around it.

Q Did this serve several villages?

A All of 'em, all the ten villages that we . . . in the area. And the churches, they were . . . everybody had his own church and then we have the [sounds like "cabanario"], I mean the bells, and on a Sunday morning when everybody was going to church and they was startin' to ring the bells, it's just like you hear in The Bells of St. Mary's, you might as say that, they were . . . it was beautiful.

Q All ten villages would ring the bells and they would echo through the valley?

A People, yeah, they echo through the valley and the people would go . . . you know, say time to go to church. That would be about ten, say 10:00, to 12:00 and everybody was going to church at that time, everybody. And that's really where I did some of my religious education in the . . .

Q In the school . . . did the schools teach religion?

A No, no. Not so much . . . I didn't take any religion in school because I went to the seventh grade.

Q You did go seven years? How old were you when you started school, do you remember?

A Well, six . . . yeah, six, yeah.

Q You were six. Was education compulsory then?

A Yes.

Q Even in these smaller farm villages?

A Yes.

Q Did women go to school with you?

A At the beginning when I was going to school, yes, the girls started to . . . they had separate schools, they had their own.

Q Did they?

A Yeah, they had separate schools, they weren't together. When I went to first grade, I was going to the girls' school. My sister used to take me to it. And by the way, it happened to be . . . the teacher, it happened to be [sounds like "Minosa"] . . .

Q Your sister.

A Uncle James' wife . . . or sister.

Q Your sister-in-law's sister. You didn't know this then, of course.

A Well, naturally, no, I didn't know that then. But . . .

Q That's who it was.

A That's who it was.

Q What did your parents do?

A Well, my parents were . . . my father, you might as well say he was a meat man, too, but my grandfather . . . my grandfather was a shepherd.

Q A shepherd.

A Yeah. And he was really the one that mostly took care of us. I come from a big family.

Q How many were in your family?

A Well, there was six . . . but we had two more, but they died from . . .

Q Five boys, right?

A Five boys, and . . .

Q Three girls . . .

A Three girls . . .

Q Two of which died. Was your father considered a lucky man to have so many sons?

A Yes. Yes, he was very proud of it.

Q Was he?

A Oh, he was very proud of 'em. He was going other places that he was . . . he was a kind of . . . you might as well say a butcher that he

would buy livestock, live lambs, and take 'em from the farms to the city to sell in [inaudible] . . . or some of them he slaughtered and would sell 'em in our own village there and sell 'em to the different people there. Especially like today, like Eastertime, they would kill the little baby lambs and there were a very favorite dish for the Greek people there.

Q Were there more than one family of Haldases in your village?

A Yes. There were . . . I'd say about a half a dozen, no more than a half a dozen families there.

Q In that village alone.

A Yeah, there was another family that consist of four more brothers, cousins of my father.

Q And all these young Haldas men were in . . .

A And all they have families, all . . . we have cousins over there, and all the families have three or four boys and two girls and they were . . .

Q Was it all congenial, was there any rivalry?

A Very nice, the best people that . . . it's really, in my memory, it's . . . I can't forget it . . . I can't forget it, because they were all so nice and so congenial and they all had a trade. Others were carpenters, others were oh, farmers, others were produce raisers and . . .

Q Was your city self-sufficient, then, I mean, did you have to go out very far to buy any supplies?

A Well, supplies, there wasn't very much supplies to buy . . . vegetables we was always gettin' 'em like you do here, from other cities according to the location that they were. Other people were as they say tomatoes, and others . . . you know, other produce, or . . . to buy anything, building materials, things like that, it wasn't . . . there wasn't very much.

Q There wasn't that much of that. Did you begin any kind of a trade? You had gone seven years to school, you began when you were six, so you were around 13 when you were at loose ends, as we . . .

A Well, yes. At that time, it was a time where lookin' like any other boy, lookin' far out to sea to see which direction I was goin'. And naturally I was waitin' for a time, too, here. I done some farm work over there. I raised some wheat and I was workin' on the fields of the [inaudible] . . . mostly things that other boys were doin' at my age.

Q Did you ever butcher anything yourself?

A No. No. Even so now, when I am a meat man, I never done it. I never done anything like that. I own a slaughter house and I never would kill

anything, I wouldn't . . . I didn't . . . I remember my man, slaughter-house man, he tried to get me to do it and I was chicken-hearted.

Q Why didn't you continue in school at that point?

A At that point the war would come on.

Q Oh, the First World War?

A The First World War. It would come on and naturally at that time the schools started going back because . . . there was more than one reason. We had the earthquakes and they destroyed the schools.

Q Oh, did you suffer from that? Oh, really?

A Yeah. We had the earthquakes and they destroyed the schools to begin with. And then they took the teachers to the army.

Q For war, um hmm.

A And of course I had . . . naturally I was lookin' get away from it myself, and come to America because my father already had come to America.

Q He had gone before you. What year did he come?

A In 1911.

Q In 1911.

A But the reason why he come to this country isn't because he wanted to but we had such a big family and young as we are, he didn't want to leave us. But we had a brother, our first brother had come over here in 1909. And he done very well at the beginning and then he . . .

Q Oh, then there were six boys, initially.

A Yeah, six, yeah.

Q There were six boys, he was . . . I'd forgotten that.

A And he come over after him to get him back.

Q Why did he want to bring him back?

A Because there were rumors over there, the boy wasn't right because it's a custom that a boy over here to send money back to the family and letters every week. Well, we didn't hear from him for almost a year and through other people we find out that he was sick. And then my father, when he heard that, my father come over here to get him back. But when he come over, why . . .

Q He saw things were too good.

A It was too good and the boy was doin' very well . . .

Q Where was he?

A He was in Philadelphia . . . he was in Philadelphia.

Q Did he have any special reason to go to Philadelphia, or did he just . . .

A No, he was with [inaudible] . . . I think we had an uncle here, too, that he was in Philadelphia and . . .

Q Well, did your father begin to send money over slowly for the rest of the family to come?

A Oh, yeah. He sent money over there to live on for several years.

Q Supported you . . . naturally he'd have to support you.

A But talk about the place over there, the island, people over there, they immigrated to Russia.

Q Many of them instead of going to America went to Russia? Why?

A Because in those days Russia was a place . . . there was millions . . . we had a lot of millionaires from that island to over in Russia, and naturally they would bring . . . it's just like they do here in the '30s and '40s, they bring in, you know, these people over here, business people over here would bring workers from over here, they're doin' the same thing in Russia.

Q The Greek people would sail to . . .

A Yeah, the Greek millionaires over there, the Greek millionaires over there, I mean the . . . from our island, we had a lot of them that they owned a lot of ocean freighters, and they were . . .

Q Uh huh. And they would franchise labor from your island to go to help them in Russia.

A In Russia, yeah.

Q But your decision was not toward Russia.

A No, it wasn't. No, it was towards America. Yeah, because the Russians are beginning to hear about the Communist movement and the czars was goin' down and naturally the trouble had already started, especially in the days of the first . . . in the Balkan War, it wasn't that, it was the Balkan War, it wasn't the world war, the First World War, it was the Balkan War in 1912 and '13.

Q Were any of your brothers affected by that?

A Yes. The brother that was over here, he went back.

Q Danny came . . .

- A Came here, and in 1913, he came back, and he fought in there, Macedonia. And of course he contacted a cold there and he was in a hospital for several months. He finally got discharged from the army and he come back to the island and he come back to . . .
- Q Did he tell you, then, stories of America that might have convinced you to come?
- A Oh, yeah, oh, yes indeed, yeah. That's . . .
- Q But you were wealthy enough to all of you to get up and leave, then.
- A No.
- Q Was passage expensive then?
- A Yes.
- Q It was expensive by 1916?
- A But we worked . . . our estate was so big and see my grandmother was very wealthy. She had an estate on it and my grandfather [inaudible] . . . you know, very fond of him, and he had that sheep herd and he was makin' a lot of money there, he was selling a lot of lambs and our estate . . .
- Q You were fortunate, then.
- A Yeah, our estate was [inaudible] . . . this herd that we had and the olive oil and our wheat fields were good, and they took care of us, we all become teenagers and we took care of ourselves little by little to immigrate to, you know, when I come over here later on and we helped bring the rest of 'em over.
- Q Well, what were the exact circumstances, now, of your coming? You've told me the story of getting money from an uncle . . .
- A Well, yeah, well that was . . . he was supposed to . . . my sister, they wanted to bring her over, naturally, to . . .
- Q To avoid the dowry for her?
- A Well, yeah, a dowry and marry too, I mean marry to somebody with better circumstances than she could get anybody over there. And an uncle of mine was supposed to come with her. But at the last minute he back out of it and that was my opportunity, then, I [inaudible] . . . when I found out that he backed out, I . . .
- Q Did you get the money and then buy the ticket?
- A Yeah. The checks were come through and my uncle didn't even know how to get to the city, because you couldn't cash those checks in the city, you have to go to the . . . I mean to the village, you have to go to the city. Well, at that time I was good because I was always--

I had a horse and wagon, I used to deliver raisins from the village to the city, so to me it was nothing new. I went to the bank because I used to cash the checks from the . . . my father used to send the checks over then I used to go to the bank in the city, the Ionian Bank of Greece, I remember the name. There was two of 'em, The Bank of Greece and the Ionian, see, which belonged to England, Ionian Bank, which belonged to England.

Q Oh, I see.

A And I got the check . . .

Q And bought the ticket.

A Bought the ticket, yeah . . .

Q Could you buy the tickets right there in that city?

A Yes. Yes, 'cause they have an agency over there, the steamship company had an agency over there and I bought the ticket.

Q Now, you were 16 and the world war was on . . .

A Beginning . . . yeah, they was on it, they was on it and . . .

Q Did you have any difficulty in trying to leave the country?

A Well, I beat their . . . I think within 30 days, if I was to stay there another 30 days, I would be in the army, they would have called me in, because see over there the army calls 'em by classes, 19, 20, 21, 22, and all boys of 21 years of age, they have to report. Only they . . . well, see, when you go for examination and you're not fit to serve in the army, you go back home.

Q Everyone then.

A But everybody. That's what they call universal service. They were called by . . .

Q Um hmm. Did you have birth certificates then?

A Yes.

Q You had yours?

A Well, I . . . no, I didn't have the birth certificate, but I had a passport that we had make over there . . . the steamship company and the lawyer would . . .

Q Drew up.

A Make me a . . . yeah . . . drew up and [inaudible] . . .

Q But they took your word for how old you were.



- A Yes. I don't think my mother and . . . it might be at the church then, but I was young and I really don't know about records. There might be some records there, but if they were, the earthquakes and . . . they destroyed them.
- Q So you . . .
- A Talking about the ticket, the funny part was that we were expected to take the steamship from the city [inaudible] . . . to go to Patras. But somehow or other it didn't show up and we had to take the . . . from one of these small places, a seaport not very far from us, the name was [sounds like "Catalyos" (sp)] and we had to take the caichi [sp] . . . that's a . . . it's a . . .
- Q It's not a kayak, I hope.
- A Well, something like that.
- Q How many people could sit on it?
- A Well, about 30 or 40.
- Q Oh. Like a barge.
- A Yeah, like a barge, but it has the [inaudible], you know what I mean, the . . . it's not a gasoline motor, they have the air . . .
- Q A sail?
- A A sailboat, yeah, that's right, a sailboat to go across. And we went to Patras.
- Q For heaven's sakes.
- A And from Patras why we took a train then and went to Athens.
- Q To get the large . . .
- A To get the large boat.
- Q From Patras you took the train.
- A Um hmm. Now, you can go through the canal by boat, but at that time we took the train.
- Q Um hmm. Did you catch the ship immediately when you got to Athens, or did you have to . . .
- A No, we stayed there about a week.
- Q Oh, you did? Did you have money to do this?
- A Oh, yeah, we had . . . we had our ticket and we had some money besides. And it was the custom then that when you landed in New York, you should

have at least \$25.00.

Q Oh, that's right, they did. Did you have to go through any physical examination?

A Yeah, eyes.

Q Eyes, um hmm.

A Especially in Ellis Island you have to go and . . .

Q Well, when you left Greece, did you have to have an examination?

A Yes, at the American Embassy, we had . . . they had a doctor there.

Q And you had then . . . you got the boat within a week and had no difficulty with papers after that.

A Well, there were rumors then about the war breaking, you know, about Greece joining the Allies . . .

Q It must have been a nerve-racking time, really.

A Yes, it was. And we were advised . . . in fact, there was 30 of us started from the same to . . .

Q Same village?

A Same village to come, you know. And we were the only ones, my sister and I were the only ones that . . . brave . . . we said we gonna go through with it, that's all, because at that time they were stopping the ships . . . the German submarines were stopping the ships and some of them, you know, were sunk. But it wasn't applied to the Greek ships then because Greece wasn't . . .

Q It was neutral?

A It was neutral all the time. When King Constantine was in power, and naturally then he's supposed to be pro-German because his wife was a German. It was Kaiser's daughter.

Q Oh, I didn't realize that.

A Yeah, Queen Sophia, I believe her name was.

Q Well, when you . . . the boat that you came over in, can you give me some description of that? Was it a liner or was it a freight . . .

A Yeah, it was an ocean liner, the name was [sounds like "Mirayela"], [inaudible] . . . big Greece, because we was fighting the war by then . . . the Balkan War was over and and we'd won all the territories from the Turks. We added the Macedonia and Thrace and all the islands of the Aegean Islands and naturally, why . . .

- Q You were quite proud of yourselves.
- A Yeah, we were proud of ourselves and we called 'em "Big Greece" then. And then name of the ship was called Malayela [sp], which means a big, great Greece.
- Q Great Greece. Then were your accomodations comfortable?
- A Not very. No, the accomodations were very poor. Very poor and there was people there from the . . . from the Albanians and from Macedonia, which is . . . those days it wasn't very intelligent and clean in their . . .
- Q Was it crowded? Was it overcrowded?
- A Oh, yeah, yeah, overcrowded. We had to sleep in the open . . .
- Q Bunks?
- A Bunks, yeah . . .
- Q Did they have mattresses on 'em, the bunks?
- A Yeah, but very thin mattresses, yeah, very thin.
- Q How long did it take you to cross?
- A It was 20 days.
- Q 20 days. Did you make any other stops?
- A We stopped at the Gibraltar and that's about all, I believe, we stopped at Gibraltar.
- Q Well, then, were most of the immigrants on board Greek?
- A Yes. Well, there was other nationalities, these were . . .
- Q Southerners?
- A Some were from Israel and some from . . . those days from the Near East, they had . . . there wasn't any Israel, it wasn't there.
- Q Did you meet with any incidents on the crossing?
- A Oh, yeah . . . oh, yeah. We were stopped by German submarine and it was at night. Everybody was asleep. I didn't even see anything, but the next morning they told us we were stopped. Everybody was rumoring on the boat why the ship was stopped.
- Q This was 1916, right?
- A That's right. And the captain come over on board and examined the

papers and he saw that there was nothing commercial or nothing outside of women and children and it was just a crossing of immigrants over to . . . and they let us go.

Q Did you hear later it was one of the last boats through or something of that nature?

A No, I didn't hear about anything like that but after that, well, Greece joined the Allies and . . .

Q There wasn't any leaving, huh?

A There wasn't any leavin' then and there was a lot of ships, lot of Greek ships bombed . . . I mean sunk.

Q Had any of your brothers preceded you now except your father and your oldest brother?

A Well, Tom . . .

Q Had Jim come over?

A Tom, our cousin was . . . and Jimmy come over together, they come over in '14.

Q Oh, they had.

A Yeah, they already were over here.

Q So that left your mother and how many smaller ones?

A That left my mother and . . . three . . .

Q Quimon [sp] and Joe and Bob . . . no, Quimon, Bob and Gus, right?

A Yeah, that's right and the sister.

Q Oh, your sister was still alive?

A She was still alive, yes. And she developed a bad cold and didn't like to go to a doctor, a young girl like her, and doctor used to chest to examine and she let that go bad and she developed T.B., and when my father heard that, he went back.

Q Again.

A Yeah, he went back to see if he can save her. And nothing could be done about it. She was too far gone.

Q When you arrived at Ellis Island, then, did you have any difficulty with the . . .

A Well, it was . . . my brother was supposed to meet us there, but somehow or other, they was forced to go from one station to another. Instead

of him be at the station that we are, we're at the Pennsylvania station, I think they went to Reading station. Therefore we had tag on our lapel directs us to Philadelphia.

Q You mean someone wrote a note on you . . .

A Yeah, the immigration . . . yeah, the immigration, they did. And I was . . . everybody that didn't have anybody to meet them there, they would put tags on 'em and they would say the directions of the address that we were supposed to come to Philadelphia. He took the . . . when he find out that we were at the Pennsylvania station, my brother find out at there we were at the Pennsylvania station instead of the Reading, he took a train back again and he meet us at the Pennsylvania station in Philadelphia. He come over and he didn't recognize us, he didn't see us for several years, and so he was standing at the gate and he saw a boy, haggard, with his pants half-way down, he says, "That must be my brother."

Q Did you come in the clothes that your mother had sewn for you, or did you have . . .

A She make my clothes, she make . . . my mother make all our clothes.

Q And you came over in those clothes?

A Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q You didn't buy others in Athens or . . .

A No, no, no. We didn't have that much . . .

Q Had you ever traveled before? Had you been out of your . . .

A Yes, yes, I'd been to Patras once and I'd been across from the island to the mainland. That was customary that the islanders go to the mainland to do farm work for these landowners over there to make money. And most of those workers, they contacted fever.

Q Malaria, maybe?

A Yeah, malaria, yeah, that was malaria . . . they contacted fever and some of 'em would go as far as die from it. Others would have it, took 'em two or three months . . . see, they changed the water.

Q Did you ever have something serious?

A Yeah, I had the typhoid fever.

Q Did you?

A Yeah. I contacted that because I went swimming one morning and after I come out of the water I eat raisins, you know what I mean, they're . . . and those raisins had this disinfectant things that they put in there and . . .

Q Insecticides.

A Insecticide, it was, and I contacted the typhoid and oh, I was that way for I'd say ninety days.

Q Really.

A And they didn't know . . . we had a good doctor over there and that doctor he was . . . married that schoolteacher.

Q Oh, he married that same schoolteacher.

A He was one of these doctors that they . . . he was the father of the village, [inaudible] . . . over there. If you had money, you could pay him, and if you didn't have no money, well, it's just the same with him. He would take care of you just like a big daddy.

Q Um hmm. Well, now you're 16 and you've arrived in the New World. Do you remember your first impression?

A Loved it.

Q There wasn't anything bad about it.

A Nothing. I loved every minute of it.

Q Even when you first stepped onto the land . . . do you remember what amazed you the most or . . .

A Yes, it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I went . . . I adapt myself, I went to work the next day; my father had a store in Philadelphia.

Q Whereabouts?

A 12th and Locust . . . 11th and Locust.

Q And how did he come about getting a store?

A Oh, he . . . when he come over here, my brother know all the Greeks around in Philadelphia and they had candy stores. They had candy stores in every corner. And he thought . . . he said well he was doin' that type of work over there, why can't he do it here? So he contacted these people and he asked him if his father could deliver supplies to them like meat.

Q This was Danny who asked.

A Yeah, Danny was contacting . . . and my father used to go to the Italians on South Street to buy the meat and deliver it to the Greek people over there because they had a lot of workers over there, candy makers.

Q Oh, to feed them, they had to feed the candy makers.

A Yeah, to feed 'em. They had to feed 'em because they . . . that's what I mean when I say these Greek businessmen would bring workers over there to work for them . . .

Q I see, as their laborers.

A Of course like that, they have ten or fifteen or twenty. Some of the candy stores that they had in those days, that was the most beautiful stores, you know . . .

Q I can remember pictures of the marble floors and counters.

A Yeah, yeah, beautiful. Good candy makers.

Q But your father was still . . .

A But my father a . . . you know, a . . .

Q What did your brother do when he came here?

A Well, my brother was a waiter in Belleview Stafford. He was a handsome boy and people over there, they had parties, they would refer for him to wait on 'em and he was makin' good tips then. He was very well-liked in there. He worked over there for a year or two. After that when they opened up the store, he was a great businessman, he . . .

Q Did he come into the store then and leave the Belleview Stafford?

A Yeah, he left there, yeah, the hotel.

Q Um hmm. Where did you all live? Your mother wasn't here . . .

A We live upstairs, we live upstairs, upstairs from the store.

Q Did you?

A Yeah, but I didn't stay there very long.

Q Well, when did you . . .

A But I want to tell you about this Philadelphia store. We all worked there but my brother was so aggressive that he contacted a Greek captain over in an ocean liner, and so he started supplying the boats. And that was a great thing. We started making big money then.

Q Did you serve the boat yourself?

A Oh, yeah.

Q Did you have to climb those ladders up onto the boat?

A Yeah, we done . . . well, we had to do it and they would say they would . . . if the ship would come into breakwater in Philadelphia, we used to get telephone calls from the breakwater and then from Reedy [sp]

Island, and they would tell us the ship movement, and if they would dock right away, we'd go up from the dock, but if they would stay astream, we'd have to take . . .

Q The supplies to them.

A Yeah, we had to take the supplies to them. And by the way, once I was a little late goin' in and I had about 25 live lambs to take on board. And . . .

Q Oh, they took livestock on board?

A Oh, yeah, yeah. They took livestock and hay . . . I used to buy the hay from him and he used to buy the livestock . . .

Q How did you get the livestock on board?

A Well, if they would dock, naturally you can drive 'em up. But that time I was a little late going on and the ship was in the stream. And I had to get the lambs on, I had to wrestle every one of them and tie them up and put 'em on a small boat and take 'em over there and then they hoist 'em up by hoist.

Q Oh, for heaven's sakes.

A That's when I quit the business. I says . . . they were talking about another store and I . . . they opened up another store, my brothers, my brother was still around, and when I come over to Wilmington, I fell in love with Wilmington and I . . .

Q You liked Wilmington.

A Yeah, I . . .

Q You didn't like Philly?

A No, I . . .

Q You didn't.

A No, no, I . . . I was very familiar with Philly, I know more about Philly then, it was very . . . streets and all that, but I didn't . . . I didn't want to stay.

Q Was there a large Greek community where you first [inaudible] . . .

A Yeah, the Locust Street, that's the Greek village there, the Greek restaurants there and barbershops and everything. It was just like little Greektown there.

Q Then who opened the shop in Wilmington?

A Well, my brother Jim and Danny, they opened up there together. But naturally one had to take care of Philadelphia store, so Jimmy went



back to Philadelphia and I come over to take Jimmy's place.

Q Because they were the two oldest, is that why one had to be one place and one the other?

A Yeah, yeah, that's right. That's right. Well, Jimmy was more familiar with the Philadelphia store. We had a wonderful business goin' there in Philadelphia.

Q Did you. Were the Greeks in Philly then from all parts of Greece? Was there any tendency for . . .

A Well, most of them was from Macedonia.

Q They were mostly Macedonians.

A Yeah, Macedonians.

Q And they had the candy making? Was that the largest . . .

A Well, they workin' at . . . people by the name of Stefano, they used to make the [sounds like "Rameses"] cigarettes, they had a big factory there and they employed several hundred of the Greeks around. And that's the reason why the community was so big.

Q Oh, I see. They had ready-work there in that industry.

A They already had a church there on South 12th Street . . . it was a beautiful church.

Q Did they all maintain customs? Was there a continuance of the celebration of the holidays and . . .

A Oh, yeah, yeah, [inaudible] . . . the religion meant everything to them.

Q Well, then when you came to Wilmington, where did you stay?

A Oh, I stayed in the . . . we had a rooms there, we used to rent rooms. Sometimes we couldn't get one, but most of the time . . .

Q This was 1917, was it?

A 1917.

Q You came to Wilmington with your . . . your brother Danny stayed here, is that right?

A Stayed in Wilmington, yeah.

Q Yeah, and where was the store?

A The store was on 505 King Street, 505.

Q 505.

- A Yeah, that was under the Queen building, it used to be the Clayton House, it was a hotel and they called it the Clayton House. And we run a small store, very small store. You had to go down in it, uh . . .
- Q You had to walk down to get in it?
- A Walk down to get in it.
- Q It wasn't under something, was it?
- A No, no, you have to, you know, it was I'd say about two foot below the street level.
- Q For heaven's sakes. And the Clayton House, was it a hotel?
- A Well, before . . . it was a dry goods store, that was before there was . . . before the Queen, before the theater took over, there was a hotel there.
- Q So you were up in the block a bit.
- A Yeah, just about . . .
- Q About the middle . . .
- A Yeah . . . no . . .
- Q About a third up.
- A No, just about . . . well, 501, 503 and 505.
- Q Oh, I see, all right. Yeah, just a few . . . and it was 1917 then. Did you ever feel any bias or prejudice emanating from the aftereffects of World War I?
- A No, no.
- Q Never encountered any.
- A No, no, no difficulty because I adapt myself . . . I might as well say I was an American.
- Q Did you know the language by then?
- A By then, yes, I was pretty well adapted to . . . I went to movies . . .
- Q How did that help you?
- A That's where I got my education. What I know then I know today.
- Q Were they silent films?
- A Yeah, yeah, because you could read the words and then be able to write

'em, too, afterwards.

Q So that was your school.

A After I go home from the movies, I used to start to write and put words together.

Q For heaven's sakes.

A Yeah, you know, my spelling and try to read the newspapers after that.

Q Then where was the room that you stayed in?

A Well, the room where I stayed in . . . it was at several different places, but the one I was steady it was right across the street.

Q Across the street. Did Danny stay with you?

A Yes, yes. And then in 1919, the flu epidemic, well that's when . . . I got sick first and I went to Philadelphia with the flu and two days afterwards they told me in the fever that I roomed in the house I was that Danny contacted, too. And they took him to the hospital.

Q Oh, he was in the hospital, then.

A Yeah, he went to the hospital, he went to the North Broom Street hospital, they called it the Samaritan Hospital then, and he died, and [inaudible].

Q Was your mother there then?

A No. My mother wasn't here then.

Q She hadn't come yet.

A No, not yet.

Q Did they have difficulty during the war, is that why they couldn't bring her?

A No, no, that was when we worked . . . we intend to bring her here on account of my sister being sick over there, but we intend to send the father over there to bring 'em. But you know, after things were quieted down.

Q But your brother's death was quite a blow to the whole family, was it not?

A Yeah, that's right. That's why I couldn't recover . . . I was only weighed 95 pounds and I didn't come back 'til I was 28. I was 28 or 30 years old before I regained my health. But I would never want to give up the store. Then, when my brother died, Jimmy and my father wanted to close the store in Wilmington, take me back to Philadelphia. But I couldn't see that. I said nothing doin'. I said if you do . . . I said, "You have to give me a chance." Well, he says, "You're young and you don't know the business." I said, "I'll learn it if I don't know it."

Q So in 19 . . .

A Of course I had a little trouble at the beginning, but the . . .

Q What trouble was that?

A Well, in business, you know what I mean, but afterwards when I . . . time go by, I owe some rent to these . . . to the owners over there, but they helped me out a lot. They did. They told me to stay there and make the money . . .

Q Is this the Gheens [sp]? The people who owned the place for years and years?

A And I stayed there . . . yeah, yeah, wonderful place, yeah.

Q They were Jewish people.

A Yeah, they saw in me that I was honest and I would make it eventually and we would become great friends.

Q So you returned to Wilmington after you recuperated and ran this business by yourself.

A That's right.

Q And you still lived across the street.

A Yeah, across the street, yeah.

Q Let's see, this is 1919, you didn't marry until '34, right?

A Oh, yeah.

Q So for 15 years you lived in this rooming house and ran your business.

A That's right, that's right. Well, in the later years, in '33 and '34, I had my own apartment. Of course my business was so good, I had my own car then, I was a prosperous prominent little businessman.

Q When did you begin to enlarge?

A It was in '26 and '27 and '29, we . . . my brother . . . we bought the corner store . . . the corner store went out of business and we took that over, that was 501 and 503 and we took the 507 afterwards and make it one big store out of it. Rented a slaughterhouse; one of my butchers there, his father was in the slaughterhouse business and he talked it into me to open up the slaughterhouse and . . .

Q Was this Clarence [inaudible, sounds like "Guest"]?

A That's right.

Q What were . . . did you have any time for recreation at all?

- A Well, in those days I mostly went to a few dances around town and I had my own car and I used to go to Atlantic City and the other seashores in there. The only place I didn't go, I didn't go to Wildwood then.
- Q Didn't you tell me something, as we were children, about a bicycle? Didn't you learn to ride a . . .
- A Well, I rode a bicycle . . . of course I had some difficulties with the bicycle when I used to deliver with 'em and the boys from South Wilmington they wanted to take it away from me and . . . of course there was a little fight goin' on and no use to repeat it on there
- Q Didn't Clarence take you places, Clarence Guest?
- A Yes, he . . . we even went . . . we went to a ball game . . . we haven't missed a ball game from 1929 to 1932, all these championship games that the Philadelphia Athletics played, we wouldn't miss any one of them. All the guys that were on . . . Jimmy Fox and Lou Gehrig and . . . what's his name?
- Q Babe Ruth?
- A Babe Ruth and . . . yeah, I wouldn't have never missed one of 'em, that's why I learn and know so much about ball games.
- Q That was one of your first loves, from this land.
- A Yeah, it was one, yeah.
- Q Well then you didn't return to Greece, did you?
- A No . . . no. I love to go back, though.
- Q Well, now, many men . . .
- A Well, the reason why I didn't get back is because we brought the family over, brought the family over and then the rest of the relatives mostly die and if I do go back over, I might as well be totally stranger.
- Q Um hmm. What happened to the estate over there?
- A Some of the relatives got it . . . but, it's just like everything, you know, the olive is very poor and . . . of course, I really don't know too much about it.
- Q What made you decide to get married after 34 years of bachelorhood?
- A Well, people used to come after me so much and of course my brothers, all of 'em were married and their wives and their customers they'd be sayin' . . . I was gettin' at the age now where I didn't want to be seen in places . . .
- Q The matchmakers were very busy after you.

A Very busy after me so I wanted to settle down, of course, and I saw your mother there and . . .

Q Was your mother here in Wilmington?

A Yeah.

Q Did she come down?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q Did the whole family come from Philly?

A Yes.

Q What made them do . . . when and why?

A Of course, the business in Philadelphia started to . . . going down and the Greek ships start not to . . . see it wasn't consistent. They stopped comin' in and the store started to . . . the neighborhood started to run down and some of the Greek trade started to drift away and Wilmington become the flower of the East, the King Street was so good and when you go to buy anything in Philly and you give your address as a King Street merchant, your credit was established right away. You didn't have to worry about it and . . .

Q So consequently . . .

A And I brought Jimmy back and I brought Jimmy over and we bought another store on 6th Street.

Q Oh, at one time you were together, then. The businesses were together?

A Yeah, we used to have the store there on 5th and he had the store . . .

Q A block away.

A A block away.

Q Well, this is getting into an involved history, but at one time there were five Maldases on King Street, right? Each in a separate store?

A Well, I guess you're right. And of course the others . . .

Q Uncle Joe down on 4th, and there was you on 5th and Uncle Gus up a bit on 5th, Uncle Jim on 6th or 7th, and Uncle Bob up on 7th. Right?

A That's right.

Q And now there are just two of you left. When did you take out citizenship papers? Did you have any difficulty then?

A No, I went to school . . . I went to the post office there, I took 40

days . . .

Q At the post office? Is that where they held the . . . you had to go to classes.

A Yeah. But I didn't have any trouble . . .

Q You had to pass the test.

A Oh, you had to pass the test, yeah. But that was in 1928.

Q Um hmm. So by that time you were pretty well settled. Your . . . you never . . . did you ever know exactly your birthdate? You celebrate your name's day, is that right?

A That's right. It's not exactly, but it had to be anywhere near that, but it's almost accurate, I think . . .

Q That date.

A Because after my name . . . they used to name people at the closest holiday that they were born, they would name the . . .

Q The son after that saint.

A Yeah, after that saint.

Q But your name in Greek is not Michael, is it?

A Yeah, it was . . . I changed my name when I took the citizen . . . at the advice of John [inaudible] and Chief Black, the chief of the police, they were great friends of mine. They had me almost like a son, because they used to come over at the store and . . .

Q Well, what was your name in Greek? Your first name.

A Yerasamus [sp].

Q But you do keep it in church to this day, don't you?

A Yes, I do keep it in there, but in the Greek . . . and in New York . . . it's Yerasamus.

Q Um hmm. In those early days, where were the coffee houses? Were they popular among the Greeks then?

A Yes, yes. I spent quite a bit over there in the ones that I used to go in for Greek food. And at those days they were very, very nice, although they had the ups and downs, some of them would be very nice and others that were turned into gambling houses, but they didn't last long. Those kind of places . . . just like everything else, if you were right, why you would go along and nobody'd bother you. But if you would get out of line, why Chief Black would come after you.

Q Was Chief Black maybe perhaps a friend of the Greeks or the immigrants?

A Yeah, very . . . yes, he was a friend of the Greeks and the immigrants. But many, many times he would tell me that as long as he was chief of the police all these years, he hadn't had any trouble with the Greek in . . . he only had two or three arrests in the whole . . . his career from the Greek [inaudible].

Q You said you still have never felt any prejudice or bias as a Greek. Have you ever had an advantage from being a Greek?

A Yes, yes, I was proud to be a Greek. Yeah, I think it's an advantage that is to say that you know another language, or to be able to speak another language. And I think it's a great advantage.

Q How did the match come up with mother?

A Well, it was through a cousin of ours. See, he used to come to the store and he used to tell me, he said, "The last thing I'll ever do," he said, "will be get you a wife." So he . . . she had several of 'em.

Q Oh, she had a list for you.

A Yeah, she had . . . especially two cousins of your mother.

Q Mother was from Pottsville, right?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q How did you . . . did you meet her in Pottsville?

A No, I met her here in Wilmington at a dance.

Q They had come from Pottsville.

A No, I mean, she was down here on a visit to her cousin Margaret, you know . . .

Q Geanopoulos.

A Yeah, Geanopoulos, on Maryland Avenue and naturally Mr. Geanopoulos invited me to the . . . for dinner, and I went to it and we met at the dances afterwards several times and that's it.

Q When your mother moved down here, did you buy her this house on 30th Street, or did you live someplace else?

A No, before we were married we bought the . . . when we were married we . . . the house was gettin' built and that would be only a few . . . or another month before the house was finished, and I bought the house and we went for a honeymoon to Atlantic City. And we stayed there three months.



Q Oh, that was a nice honeymoon. Did you stay there?

A Yeah, yeah, I didn't want to come back. Well, I was workin' all those years and the first time I had a vacation, and I said I'm gonna take it and take a good long vacation 'til the house gets ready, too. In the meantime, why we were going from Atlantic City to Wildwood because her father and mother had properties in Wildwood and that's . . .

Q His father was a candy maker, is that right?

A Yeah, he was a candy maker, all right, had a beautiful store in Pottsville and he had the properties there in Wildwood.

Q How did you fare with your brothers in competition on King Street?

A We worked along good. We didn't bother . . . King Street business was so great that there was no competition for each other. Because Friday and Saturday, everybody from the surrounding towns or far as Ocean City, Maryland or Salisbury or West Chester, Pennsylvania, they all come in to King Street. It was the greatest market in there and the farmers they would bring all these . . .

Q Did the farmers . . . had they started to come into King Street as a market before you came to Wilmington?

A Oh, yes.

Q They had always been there. Um hmm. How did you get along with farmers?

A Wonderful. Great friends.

Q And yet there was again some competition, but . . .

A There was competition but if you were broadminded and that didn't bother anybody. The more . . . we had a lot more people come to King Street. Now, why, as you can see, we don't have the farmers and we don't have the transient trade like we used to have.

Q Um hmm. The days . . . you lived through the height of the days before the supermarket.

A Yes. I always used to say that if these chain stores would get away from these little places that they had in corners and they go to a . . . see, we were the biggest meat dealers, retail meat dealers, in Wilmington. Haldas Brothers and Hamm Brothers, they were really the only ones in Wilmington. That's when we [inaudible] . . . meat was fresh, we'd move it faster and we were able to carry supplies more than these little chain stores that were around . . . they didn't have any meat to sell, and if they do have any meat, why it would go bad on 'em.

Q That was before the days of the freezer and that's really . . .

A Well, I was the first one to put commercial refrigeration in Wilmington.

Q Really?

A Yeah, to put meat in.

Q You mean like an icebox?

A Yeah, the icebox and I put a machine instead of the ice. We used to use cakes of ice.

Q Oh, you used to use cakes . . . well, naturally . . .

A Yeah, cakes of ice to keep the meat. And Wilmington Automobile then had a division of . . . Frigidaire division and they asked me if they would let me . . . let them put the refrigerator in there without any cost to me, if it was all right, I would keep it and if it wasn't, I didn't have to pay for it. And I took 'em up, naturally I took 'em up and they put the machinery in, it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. My meat was fresher, there was less waste on it, and I had an advantage there for several years because other butchers didn't believe in 'em. And we were growin' fast and our business was gettin' so great that everybody else started to put the same thing. I was the first one to install windows in the store. Everybody had open stores, open stores and laid the meat out on the counters and sell it, you know, in the front. We used to have a cow tail to chase the flies away, to shoo the flies away. And naturally when people closed the store up and put screens at the doors and put the meat cases in there, that was a step forward. And it caught on fast and naturally Haldas Brothers become famous. And people from all over the state talk about Haldas Brothers' big butcher shop.

Q Did you through these years feel that you dealt with Greeks mostly or . . .

A We dealt with everybody, Greeks, Italians . . . but we had the best class of Wilmington, but we . . . I for myself, even today, I supply some of the DuPonts and . . .

Q Do you feel that your art is dying, though? I mean the butcher, the true butcher trade?

A No. The chain store's taken over and they're doin' a good job. The butcher shops, the old time butcher shops, are becomin' obsolete and they are going into the chain stores, the self-service. It's not exactly as you like to be, the self-service store, because the meats that you buy there, you may want . . . maybe you think that's what you want and after you take it home, it wasn't what you wanted. Personal service is a great thing, but it's disappearing.

Q But you think there will always be a place for it.

A There'll always be because personalized service, I think it's the greatest thing to satisfy a customer and be able to . . . people, to give exactly what they want, to please somebody.

Q Do you remember with any fondness the days of the [sounds like "O.P.A."]?

A Any what?

Q Fondness.

A Well, it wasn't very pleasant. I have to . . . I hope we'll never have to go through anything like that again, although we done the best job we could out of it, but it wasn't . . . it wasn't a pleasant memory, I still remember.

Q Is there anything else that you can think of?

A No, only thing about Wilmington, when I come over it was the greatest days of . . . Wilmington was so beautiful then from what it is today. Of course that's only on account of these rebuilding that's goin' on and naturally, why the town has gone down and let's hope that they will [inaudible] . . .

Q Do you have faith in Wilmington? Do you think it will return?

A Oh, yeah, yeah, Wilmington will return. Yeah, it will return after this thing is all over with, clean up all these ghettos that they got over here, east and west side and rebuild them.

Q And do you hope that Haldas Brothers will be there for another 50 years?

A Well, let's hope so.

Q Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]